5-1-2024

Using Student Voices to Inform Educational Reform: Exploring High School Educational Desires to Improve Curricular Decisions

Anna Colquitt

USING STUDENT VOICES TO INFORM EDUCATIONAL REFORM: EXPLORING HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATIONAL DESIRES TO IMPROVE CURRICULAR DECISIONS

By

Anna Colquitt

Bachelor of Science- Family, Youth, and Community Sciences
University of Florida
2019

Juris Doctor
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
2023

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Doctor of Philosophy- Educational Psychology

Department of Educational Psychology, Leadership, and Higher Education
College of Education
The Graduate College

University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May 2024

UNLV | GRADUATE COLLEGE

Dissertation Approval

The Graduate College
The University of Nevada, Las Vegas

March 27, 2024

This dissertation prepared by

Anna Colquitt

entitled

Using Student Voices to Inform Educational Reform: Exploring High School Educational Desires to Improve Curricular Decisions

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy- Educational Psychology
Department of Educational Psychology, Leadership, and Higher Education

Rebecca Nathanson, Ph.D.
Examination Committee Chair

Jonathan Hilpert, Ph.D.
Examination Committee Member

Stefani Relles, Ph.D.
Examination Committee Member

Heather Dahl-Jacinto, Ph.D.
Graduate College Faculty Representative

Alyssa Crittenden, Ph.D.
Vice Provost for Graduate Education & Dean of the Graduate College

Abstract

In the education system, the integration of student perspectives into effective pedagogical strategies is gaining momentum. This dissertation delves into the concept of 'Student Voice' and its role in shaping educational frameworks. Recognizing the growing gap in soft skill proficiency among newly recruited employees, contrasted with the emphasis on hard skills within current educational standards, this study analyzes what those skill gaps are in the education and what skills students perceive are necessary to integrate into a high school education to better prepare students for life, the workforce, and higher education. Focused on recent high school graduates in Nevada, the research explores their educational experiences with a specific emphasis on soft skill cultivation. By amplifying student voices, the study aims to understand how students perceive their high school education in terms of soft skill development. Through mixed methods, the research seeks to identify the skills students consider essential for personal and professional growth, aligning these aspirations with broader educational objectives.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the contemporary landscape of education, the significance of integrating student perspectives into the framework of effective pedagogical strategies is garnering increasing recognition. The concept of 'Student Voice' has emerged as a potent catalyst, accentuating the imperative need for the active involvement of students in the decision-making processes that fundamentally shape their learning trajectory. As the demand for proficient soft skills in the workforce intensifies, it has become evident that there exists a discernible gap in soft skill proficiency among newly recruited employees, a gap that persists while the emphasis is placed on hard skills within educational content standards and curricula.

Rather than leaving the task of identifying the root causes of this disparity and devising remedial measures solely to policy makers, it is crucial to involve the most significant stakeholders in the educational realm: the students themselves. By incorporating the perspectives and insights of students, education policymakers can achieve a more holistic understanding of the challenges and deficiencies within the current education system from the students' perspectives. Through an exploration of the aspirations and experiences of recent high school graduates in Nevada, this research seeks to understand their high school education, with a specific focus on the cultivation and enhancement of soft skills. By amplifying student voices, this study aims to understand how high school student experiences within the soft skill realm are perceived.

This study seeks to explore the aspirations of recent high school graduates in Nevada, shedding light on the specific skills they consider essential for their personal and professional growth. Specifically, this research seeks to identify what students desire to learn in high school. By honing in on the realm of soft skills including dependability, problem-solving and critical

thinking, teamwork and collaboration, flexibility and adaptability, and communication, this research strives to reveal not only what these students wish to learn but also how their desired skills align with the broader goals of education. Drawing from the foundational principles of Student Voice theory, this study recognizes that students possess unique insights into their own learning needs. By actively involving college students in the research process, this study aims to amplify their voices, valuing their perspectives as vital contributions to the ongoing dialogue on education reform. Through a mixed methods study, this research aims to understand what recent high school graduates wish they would have learned in high school that would help them with their future academics, career, and personal development.

Students perform better when they are interested in their education, and value the education they receive (Fullan, 2016; Lukes, 2015; Noguera, 2002). Since there is a disconnect between what students are learning within the classroom and what is needed for their life and professional journey, this research aims to provide insight as to how to bridge that gap to help students increase the value they hold in their education. An Adecco survey encompassing 1,500 global companies disclosed that 92% of surveyed executives observed a deficiency in the skills of American workers, with around 44% of this deficit attributed to lacking soft skills (Adecco, 2020). This new generation of workers exhibits distinct traits and competencies from their predecessors, often characterized by tech-centric thinking, necessitating innovative approaches to harness their capacities (Beard, Schwieger, & Surendran, 2008). The significance of soft skills is underscored by a study involving Fortune 500 CEOs, conducted by Stanford Research Institute and the Carnegie Mellon Foundation, which revealed that 75% of career success relies on soft skills and the ability to collaborate, while a mere 25% hinges on technical acumen (Mann, 1918). This growing requirement for employees proficient in robust soft skills, rather than an exclusive

emphasis on hard skills, finds resonance across diverse employment domains. Fields like engineering, traditionally reliant on hard skills, have witnessed considerable discourse on the urgent necessity for enhanced soft skill development among aspiring engineers. This transition could be attributed, in part, to technological advancements. As the cost of smart machines diminishes and their capabilities surge, the job landscape is undergoing transformation. Automation has usurped roles previously occupied by humans, particularly those involving physical tasks, redirecting the workforce towards jobs necessitating human interaction (Brungardt, 2011). Although soft skills are not the sole focus of this research, identifying the known disconnect between what skills students need for the workforce and their lack of development of these skills in the education system forms a foundation as to what students may deem important to learn prior to graduating from high school.

This study acknowledges the pivotal role of soft skills in preparing students for success in an ever-evolving job market and an increasingly interconnected world. As such, it seeks to contextualize the identified skill aspirations within the broader framework of skill development needed for future career prospects and personal growth. In illuminating the desired skills and aspirations of recent high school graduates in Nevada, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on student-centered education and equity in learning. By aligning these aspirations with the overarching objectives of education, policymakers, educators, and stakeholders can gain valuable insights to refine curricular offerings, teaching methodologies, and support systems. Ultimately, the findings of this research endeavor to empower these students, fostering a more inclusive, relevant, and responsive high school educational experience that is reflective of their unique needs and aspirations, as well as the shifts in the workforce that have become more prominent through the rise of technology.

Research Questions

This research addressed three research questions: To what degree do students perceive their high school education to have emphasized the key skills desired by employers; How are the key skills desired by employers primarily taught within a high school setting; and What specific knowledge, skills, and/or competencies do recent high school graduates wish they acquired within their high school education to foster both personal growth and professional development?

These questions all refer to the 'key skills' evaluated by the Perkins Collaborative Resource Network (described in the literature review below) including: dependability, problem solving and critical thinking, teamwork and collaboration, flexibility and adaptability, and communication.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Student Voice Theory

Employers note a deficit in soft skills among new employees, while the education system prioritizes hard skills. Rather than policymakers addressing these issues alone, students, as key education stakeholders, should actively participate in decision-making. This research utilizes Student Voice Theory to understand the perspectives of Nevada's recent high school graduates, particularly focusing on the cultivation of soft skills, aiming to drive educational reform.

Student Voice Theory is premised on the idea that students are the direct beneficiaries of educational decisions, and have the closest relationship to what may or may not be working within the classroom setting to increase learning opportunities. Therefore, in order to improve students' educational experience, it is necessary to solicit students' ideas and genuinely consider their perspectives. Findings from research on student voice initiatives and youth involvement in school and after-school programs reveal that the input of young individuals can enhance the process of envisioning and strategically planning for organizational change (Brasof and Spector, 2016; Kirshner et al., 2003; Eccles and Gootman, 2002; Zeldin, 2004; Zeldin et al., 2005). Notably, young people often bring forth issues that may elude adults or that adults might deliberately avoid. This is particularly valuable when considering students who are struggling within the current educational system, including those who are falling behind in their studies or at risk of leaving school prematurely. Such students can provide valuable insights into problems related to school structure and culture (Smyth, 2007). Typically, struggling students pinpoint issues such as obstructive structural and classroom procedures, limited opportunities to establish meaningful relationships with adults, and overt discrimination as the underlying problems (Colatos and Morrell, 2003; Nieto, 1994; Soohoo, 1993).

Efforts to amplify student voices can stimulate a growing interest in integrating student input into the decision-making processes within educational institutions. This may involve establishing permanent committees focused on curriculum development, staff training, and disciplinary matters (Fielding, 2001; Mitra, 2004). An illustrative example at the state level in the United States is the work of the Pritchard Committee in Kentucky, where a student-led organization consistently played a pivotal role in mobilizing young individuals to assess and influence educational policies in the state (Student Voice Team, 2012). Recent research has demonstrated various forms of organizational change resulting from involving young people as partners, such as teacher assessments in New York City (Sussman, 2013), youth councils and youth activism in Philadelphia (Conner and Cosner, 2016), participatory budgeting in Boston (Augsberger et al., 2017), school redesign efforts in the Netherlands (Burke and Könings, 2016), municipal councils in Israel (Nir and Perry-Hazan, 2016), youth advisory boards in United States child welfare systems (Havlicek et al., 2016), and community art hubs in Canada (Hauseman, 2016).

Viewed as the means through which young individuals express their perspectives regarding their experiences as students, with the aim of catalyzing meaningful transformations in educational practices or policies, the concept of student voice has emerged as a vigorous catalyst for achieving desired student outcomes (Conner, 2015; Conner et al., 2015). By sharing their insights on the strengths and challenges within their schools and classroom environments, students enable educators to gain deeper insights into their learning processes and needs, thereby facilitating more effective and tailored approaches to teaching (Conner, 2021). Such comprehension stands as a cornerstone of adaptive pedagogy.

An expanding body of qualitative research has revealed that student voice initiatives yield enhancements in instructional methodologies and curriculum formulation (Cook-Sather, 2009; Mitra, 2008; Rudduck, 2007). For example, a study by Felten, Bovill, and Cook-Sather, focuses on the significance of student-faculty partnerships in higher education, shedding light on the challenges and benefits associated with this collaborative approach (Cook-Sather, Bovill, Felten, 2014). While traditional research underscores the importance of close faculty-student interaction, this study underscores the transformative power of partnerships, which allows for collaborative, reciprocal processes where all participants can contribute equally, albeit in diverse ways. The study identifies three primary clusters of outcomes resulting from student-faculty partnerships. Firstly, partnerships foster engagement, motivating students and faculty and shifting the focus from learning outcomes to the learning process itself. Secondly, they promote awareness, encouraging metacognitive reflection in both students and faculty, leading to a reevaluation of their roles and identities in the educational context. Finally, the partnerships result in enhancement, making students more proactive in their learning and giving faculty a deeper understanding of their students' experiences and needs.

The impact of student voice often translates into modifications in both practice and policy, aligning them more closely with student requirements, ultimately leading to more captivating and efficient learning experiences. More specifically, heightened school engagement has emerged as an outcome attributed to student voice endeavors (Baroutsis et al., 2016; Fielding, 2001, 2004; Levin, 2000; Smyth, 2006; Taines, 2012). Even the seemingly simple acts of affording students a sense of being acknowledged and taken seriously within the classroom can significantly contribute to bolstering student engagement (Wallace & Chhuon, 2014). Dunleavy and Milton (2009) have outlined a set of prerequisites conducive to fostering

students' intellectual involvement, including the directive: "encourage students to co-create their learning experiences in the classroom; champion student voice and autonomy" (p. 14).

The concept of student voice has gained significant attention in the field of education over the past two decades. Researchers utilize Student Voice Theory to demonstrate that educational research often emphasizes the viewpoints of researchers and educators, sidelining the perspectives of students. Consequently, research tends to present a skewed representation that leaves out student viewpoints. This raises an ethical concern about the authenticity of voices in research findings, prompting a deeper analysis of the notion of "voice." Student voice is often viewed as a symbol of inclusivity, compelling researchers to incorporate diverse standpoints into knowledge creation. This approach aligns with democratic ideals, aiming to amplify the voices of marginalized groups and expose power imbalances. However, it's important to note that silence and voice are not necessarily oppositional; voice doesn't solely represent inclusion and is not confined to congruent identities.

Student Voice

The predominant goal of public education in the United States has been the preparation and empowerment of learners with the requisite knowledge, skills, and insights to actively participate in society (Goodlad & McMannon, 1997). Nevertheless, the culture within the realm of schooling, which has evolved over the course of the last two centuries, has grown to favor the values and voices of adults (Bragg, 2007). This culture has been further fortified by the escalating emphasis on "results-based" accountability that has permeated the educational landscape since the 1980s (Corbett & Wilson, 1995; Mitra & Gross, 2009; Malen & Vincent Cochran, 2015). Students, during this period, have predominantly been perceived as passive subjects of educational reform initiatives, with their own voices and perspectives largely excluded from the decision-making processes governing education (Levin, 2000).

To address the issue of young people feeling disconnected and to enhance overall school improvement endeavors, there is a growing movement dedicated to amplifying student input within schools. This shift is crucial because adolescents frequently describe their experiences in schools as impersonal, where they lack a voice and feel ignored (Cook-Sather et al., 2015; Earls, 2003; Heath and McLaughlin, 1993; Galloway, Conner, & Pope, 2013). In fact, this alienation contributes to a number of students becoming disengaged from high school (Cothran and Ennis, 2000). Disengaged students tend to attend school less frequently, have lower self-esteem, achieve less academically, and are more likely to drop out or be expelled (Fullan, 2016; Lukes, 2015; Noguera, 2002). While many school reforms aim to change students, the concept of student voice positions students as active participants in the reform process. By actively engaging in change, students come to realize that they can contribute knowledge rather than merely receiving it.

In European nations, formal policies and national educational structures have given significant weight to the concept of student voice. This is often referred to as "youth participation" in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which outlined various rights related to accessing information, expression of views, and the freedom to form collective organizations (The United Nations, 1989). The CRC placed emphasis on enhancing the capacity of both young people and adults to facilitate youth participation, and it stresses the importance of clear standards and accountability in this process. European educational policies have largely aligned with these principles.

In many European nations, student participation in matters such as curriculum design, testing, and other educational policies has become a mandated requirement (Lundy, 2007; Quinn and Owen, 2014; Rose and Shevlin, 2008). UNESCO also actively addressed youth participation

in educational development and reform (UNESCO, 2016). For instance, New Zealand's Ministry of Education has articulated a vision for student voice, particularly in the context of involving students in assessment and educational change (Cook-Sather, 2014). Ontario's Ministry of Education has established a comprehensive program for youth voice, including the Ministry Student Advisory Council and related projects that prioritize the student experience in provincial government decision-making (Courtney, 2014). Sweden's national curriculum even formalizes standards for children to express their views on matters concerning their education (Sheridan and Samuelsson, 2001). Swedish educators are encouraged to collaborate with students to establish rules for participation in their own learning groups (Skolverket, 2011).

Countries like the UK and Australia have struggled with the effective implementation of youth participation, despite having formal structures in place to encourage and, in some cases, require it. Even in the UK, where examples of authentic youth participation are more prevalent compared to many other nations, instances of insincere or symbolic youth engagement are still common, falling short of genuine collaboration with young people (Fielding, 2006; Lundy, 2007). Ineffective implementation often stems from adults' inadequate knowledge of how to effectively partner with young people or a lack of shared understanding of the purpose of such activities. In cases where poor implementation occurs, superficial youth participation can be detrimental to young individuals, raising feelings of alienation and disconnection from their educational experiences (Fielding, 2004; Mitra, 2009).

In contrast to European nations, the United States currently lacks formal policies to encourage youth participation. While the fundamental principle of US democracy underscores the importance of participation as a basic right of citizenship (Ochoa-Becker et al., 2001), many US policies hinder the voices of young people. Notably, the US stands out as the sole nation not

to ratify the CRC, and several US states, such as Pennsylvania and Nevada, prohibit young people under 18 from serving on decision-making boards (Bates, 2013). Additionally, the focus on academic accountability in US schools has led to reduced emphasis on fostering democracy and civic engagement, particularly at the elementary level (VanFossen, 2005).

Despite these obstacles, the idea of student voice continues to be relevant in high school reform efforts in the United States. The prevailing framework for US student voice research centers on the concept of youth-adult partnership, characterized by relationships in which both young people and adults contribute to decision-making processes, mutual learning, and the promotion of change (Jones & Perkins, 2004; Mitra, 2009; Wu et al., 2014). Youth-adult partnerships entail a shared responsibility for the group's vision, planned activities, and the processes facilitating these activities. While these efforts in the US tend to focus on examining the impact of involving young people in shaping the organizations and schools designed to serve them (Mitra, 2009; Pittman et al., 2000), they are often more limited in scope compared to examples from the UK. Therefore, relatively few of these activities are initiated or led by young people themselves.

Student Voice: Levels Of Participation

Dana Mitra's pyramid of student voice typology (Mitra, 2005) categorizes student voice activities into three levels: listening, collaboration, and leadership. The higher a group climbs on this pyramid, the greater the extent of student leadership and the more youth benefit from it. As young people assume more agency in these initiatives, they have more opportunities for learning and personal growth. The narrowing of the pyramid symbolizes that greater youth agency and leadership within an organization become more challenging to sustain because these groups must continually challenge conventional norms that define the traditional roles of students and

teachers. The concept of student voice challenges traditional power dynamics and aims to create "radical collegiality" (Fielding, 2004) by establishing non-conventional relationships between young people and adults. The positioning of young people is a critical focus, and how young people perceive their roles affects the effectiveness of student voice efforts. Power dynamics in student voice initiatives have also been explored, emphasizing how power perceptions influence actions in this field (Mayes et al., 2016).

To explain the theoretical underpinnings of the various stages of student voice development, it is essential to examine the foundational work of Hart (1992, 2008). Hart constructed what he termed a "ladder of youth participation," a conceptual framework illustrating different levels of student power and collaboration between children and adults in youth engagement initiatives. This ladder consists of eight stages: (1) manipulation, (2) decoration, (3) tokenism, (4) assigned but uninformed, (5) consulted and informed, (6) adult-initiated, shared decisions with youth, (7) youth-initiated and directed, and (8) youth-initiated, shared decisions with adults (Hart, 1992). Roger Hart's Ladder of Children's Participation offers a comprehensive framework to understand the varying degrees of children's engagement in decision-making processes. The ladder serves as a metaphorical representation, with each rung representing a different level of child participation.

The first rung, 'Manipulation,' illustrates instances where children partake in activities without fully grasping the issues at hand or their role in the process. For instance, this may manifest when pre-school children are involved in political activities, yet lack an understanding of the underlying social policies or their involvement in the political process. Moving up the ladder, 'Decoration' characterizes situations where children participate in public events but remain oblivious to the significance or purpose of their involvement. An example of this is when

children receive T-shirts for a cause or perform at an event without comprehending the essence of the occasion. 'Tokenism' denotes scenarios where children seem to have a voice, yet have limited choice or the ability to express their genuine opinions. This often occurs when articulate children are chosen to represent their peers without proper consultation or substantive preparation on the subject matter.

The ladder also includes 'Assigned but Informed' participation, where children understand the project's intentions and willingly volunteer for meaningful roles. An example cited by Hart is the World Summit for Children, where children were assigned as pages to world leaders, understanding their roles as experts on the event. 'Consulted and Informed' participation involves children acting as consultants for adults, with their opinions regarded seriously in the decision-making process. An instance of this could be an adult-led survey of youth perceptions, where children are informed about the survey's purpose and consulted on the questions being developed. Further up, 'Adult-Initiated, Shared Decisions with Children' depicts instances where adults initiate projects but collaborate with children in decision-making processes. An example of this is a youth newspaper, where adults provide guidance and technical support while children manage aspects of the operation. 'Child-Initiated and Directed' participation occurs when children independently conceive and execute complex projects in cooperation with minimal adult interference. However, such instances are often scarce due to adults' difficulty in responding to children's initiatives without imposing their guidance.

The penultimate rung, 'Child-Initiated, Shared Decisions with Adults,' represents a scenario where children, typically teenagers, share decision-making authority with adult partners. This form of participation empowers young people to influence policies or decisions traditionally under the exclusive control of adults. However, such examples are rare due to the absence of

adults attuned to the particular interests and initiatives of young people. The ladder ultimately emphasizes the significance of recognizing children's capabilities as citizens and the need to foster their participation within communities and decision-making processes. Hart emphasized that stages one through three represent forms of non-participation, wherein adults engage with youth but do not genuinely seek their input in decision-making processes. In contrast, stages four through eight represent progressively increasing levels of participation, wherein youth become actively engaged in decision-making processes. Hart's central argument revolves around the idea that youth should have the agency to determine the stage at which they wish to participate in an initiative and decision-making processes. Furthermore, he advocated for optimizing conditions to enable every young person to participate "at the highest level of his or her competence, interest, and motivation" (Hart, 1992).

In contrast to Hart's ladder, Shier (2001) introduced an alternative model for youth participation in decision-making. Shier's model eliminated Hart's non-participation stages and focused more on elucidating the diverse ways adults engage with youth in decision-making processes. Shier's model encompasses five levels of participation: (1) youth are listened to; (2) youth are supported in expressing their views; (3) youth's views are taken into account; (4) youth are involved in decision-making processes but do not share power and responsibility with adults; and (5) youth share power and responsibility for decision-making (Shier, 2001). Shier also emphasized that individuals and organizations may exhibit varying degrees of commitment to the process of youth empowerment, which should be taken into account when engaging with young people (Shier, 2001).

Distributed Leadership

Within education, leadership has traditionally been associated with the roles and responsibilities of administrators, principals, and teachers. However, over the past few decades, a paradigm shift has occurred, challenging the conventional top-down model of leadership. Distributed leadership, a concept that emerged from organizational studies, has gained prominence in education as a more inclusive and dynamic approach to leadership (Brasof and Spector, 2016). Distributed leadership plays a significant role in education, and more specifically is integral in reshaping the dynamics of educational institutions through the context of student voices (Brasof and Spector, 2016).

Distributed leadership is grounded in the idea that leadership should not be concentrated in the hands of a few individuals at the top of the hierarchy. Instead, it should be distributed among various stakeholders within an organization. In the educational context, this means that leadership responsibilities are shared among teachers, students, parents, and even community members. This shift from a hierarchical leadership model to a collaborative and inclusive one has the potential to revolutionize the way schools are led and managed. One of the driving forces behind the adoption of distributed leadership in education is the recognition of the diverse talents, expertise, and perspectives that exist within a school community. Teachers, often on the front lines of education, possess valuable insights into classroom practices and student needs. Parents and community members bring unique perspectives on the local context and community engagement. However, one of the most significant contributors to this shift in educational leadership dynamics is the emergence of student voice theory.

Student voice theory centers on the idea that students should have a say in matters that affect their education. It emphasizes the importance of listening to and valuing the perspectives, opinions, and experiences of students. This theory not only recognizes students as active

participants in their learning but also as valuable contributors to the decision-making processes within schools. The integration of student voice theory into the distributed leadership model is transformative. It challenges the traditional view of students as passive recipients of knowledge and instead positions them as partners in the educational process. When students are given the opportunity to voice their thoughts, concerns, and ideas, it not only empowers them but also fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility for their education.

Distributed leadership in education, enriched by the emergence of student voice theory, represents a significant departure from traditional top-down leadership models. It empowers students, teachers, parents, and community members to collaborate, share responsibilities, and shape educational practices. By valuing and integrating the voices of students, educational institutions can foster more inclusive, equitable, and student-centered learning environments. Ultimately, the partnership between distributed leadership and student voice theory holds the potential to transform education for the better, making it a more democratic and responsive system that prioritizes the needs and aspirations of its most important stakeholders: the students.

The justification for researching student voice rests on several arguments: recognizing children and youth rights, acknowledging their developmental readiness for engaging in educational analyses and reforms, and acknowledging their role as central participants in educational processes that can perpetuate inequality. Four values underpin student voice work: viewing communication as dialogue, ensuring participation and democratic inclusivity, recognizing and addressing unequal power dynamics, and promoting the potential for change and transformation. Despite the ethical appeal of prioritizing student voices, it's essential to trace the historical evolution of the concept. The study of student voice has evolved over time. Early work was rooted in progressive and independent schools, emphasizing students' capabilities and social

development. However, critiques arose. Theoretical underpinnings have been questioned, as they often rest on inconsistent conceptions of personhood, social action, and communication potential. Tensions have also emerged regarding speaking for others or addressing problems related to being heard. Implicit assumptions about a single student voice have been challenged, recognizing the variability of youth perspectives. Scholarly critiques also extend to methodological choices. Some studies may focus excessively on spoken language to gauge voice, neglecting other modalities like visual or emotional expressions. Others might prioritize academic learning and standards, overlooking personal and social development or civic participation. Overall practical challenges include unintended consequences and limited action after obtaining student input.

Publications in the last decade have shown significant growth and development in the field of student voice research. Recent studies have delved into areas such as addressing power dynamics (Robinson and Taylor 2013), exploring the influence of student voice efforts on school leadership (Cheng 2012; Mitra, Serriere, & Stoicovy, 2012), and examining the political dimensions of student voice (Mockler & Groundwater-Smith, 2014). In a global landscape where increased student involvement is mandated by international contexts such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1990), and as student voice research experiences rapid growth within the United States, it becomes imperative to assess the extent of reliance on the empirical foundation of student voice. The principal aim of these endeavors has been to empower students, often conceptualized in terms of agency, identity, self-awareness, and social consciousness, combined with an agenda for school improvement. These constructs have been largely theorized within the context of civic engagement and democratic education. While some studies have drawn upon these theoretical foundations, such as the insightful work by Tan and Barton (2010), there remains ample room for further exploration and production of research

in this vein. The philosophical and sociological analyses of "practice" in the study of human activity (Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, & Savigny, 2001) could offer valuable insights into understanding student voice within specific sociocultural contexts. Additionally, scholars in the learning sciences have produced intriguing findings and theoretical frameworks for examining student learning in the context of everyday social practices, linking such learning to career success and civic engagement (Ito et al., 2013).

Soft Skills

Soft skills, often described as "character traits, attitudes, and behavior" as opposed to technical competencies (Robles, 2012), have emerged as highly prized attributes among employers (Dale, 2008; Hewitt, 2008; Moss & Tilly, 2001; Tobin, 2006). These interpersonal and life skills are widely acknowledged as essential for thriving in a professional context (Dale, 2008; Hewitt, 2008; Moss & Tilly, 2001; Tobin, 2006). There exists a growing necessity to instill in students not just academic knowledge but also proficiencies conducive to encourage success beyond the classroom confines. These proficiencies encompass skills such as innovation, problem-solving, creative thinking, decision-making, communication, teamwork, and curiosity (Voogt & Roblin, 2010).

A mere college degree no longer suffices to fulfill the entirety of the contemporary job market requisites (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006). Across the nation, employers are increasingly demanding not only vocational hard skills but also non-cognitive soft skills from the workforce (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006; Robles, 2012; Rothwell, 2015). In fact, a 2019 Global Talent Trends survey by LinkedIn reported 92% of hiring managers value soft skills as much or more than hard skills (Global Talen Trends, n.d.). This shift towards an inflection of soft skills prompts a need to scrutinize their integration within high school education. The pivotal

role of curricula as the bridge between societal demands and the education system is widely acknowledged (Welch, 1969). Policymakers have underscored the significance of high school graduates being equipped for careers (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, National Conference of State Legislatures, National Association of State Boards of Education, and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). However, the measures for 'career-readiness' often gravitate toward proficiency in reading, mathematics, and science (ACT, 2012). Interestingly, the persistent emphasis on hard skills for career preparation, driven by educational entities such as ACT and common core, contradicts the prevailing employer perspective that soft skills significantly outweigh hard skills in terms of career readiness.

Soft skills are not only essential for the workforce, but are also indispensable for success in higher education. Data collected from the ACT indicated that the majority of students who graduate from high school are not deemed college or career ready, and those statistics are worse for low-income and minority students (ACT, 2012). High school students often do not know what skills are necessary for college. Even though approximately 90% of high school freshman expect to complete some degree of college, the majority of them are completely unprepared to do so (Kirst, 2004). Specifically among students in low-performing high schools and first generation college students, they are not aware of how the skills necessary to graduate high school significantly differ from the skills necessary to graduate college and be successful within a career after (Boser & Burd, 2009). There is a missing link between high school and college/career readiness. Colleges seek students who can contribute positively to the campus community and possess the necessary skills to succeed in their chosen field of study (Ellis & Hackworth, 2014). Soft skills such as effective communication, critical thinking, time management, teamwork, creativity, and leadership are highly valued by colleges during the admission process. These

attributes also help students develop better relationships with their peers and professors while pursuing their academic goals. Therefore, through the admissions process, it is desirable to admit students who have developed these skills that will help them success in the academic setting and beyond (Heckman & Kautz, 2012). Since the term 'college and career readiness' is commonly used in education, this research will primarily consider workforce readiness with the understanding that it captures the congruent lack of college readiness as well. There is extensive research on workforce readiness and the lack in soft skill development amongst new hires in the workforce, so that research will be used in relation to college and career readiness since this is congruent with the lack of preparedness for college, as demonstrated by the ACT results. Research in higher education indicates that although 88% of college freshman report that 'getting a good job' is their reason for attending college, only one third of college freshman agree that they are gaining the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in the workforce (Crisis of Confidence, n.d.). This research validates the idea that employers are reporting a lack of preparedness because students are not actually prepared, nor do they feel prepared. This is problematic. If students are attending school to prepare themselves for a successful professional future, they should receive an education that supports their skill development. As discussed in the following section, employers report the largest lack in preparedness with soft skills. Not only are soft skills the most difficult to teach an employee when they get a job (compared to technical skills which can more easily be improved through training), but they are also skills that can be developed from a younger age.

Students To Workforce: Lack Of Preparedness

The contemporary employment landscape has undergone a paradigm shift, where the emphasis on hiring no longer singularly revolves around academic prowess and technical

expertise, but extends to encompass robust soft skills (Kameg et al., 2010). This transformation in the workforce dynamic has consequently highlighted the necessity for individuals to possess well-developed soft skills to thrive in their professional pursuits (Tulgan, 2015). This transition underscores the realization that soft skills are not solely prerequisites for securing employment, but equally indispensable for retaining jobs (Evenson, 1999). This void in soft skills is substantiated by multiple business surveys (Adecco, 2020; Hewitt, 2008), encompassing a diverse spectrum of industries. Surprisingly, even in industries where 'people skills' might presumably appear less crucial, such as in business and accounting (Andrews & Higson, 2008), information technology (Zhang, 2012), engineering (Rocco, 2019; Schooley, 2017), and biotechnology (Hilton & Slotnick, 2008), these industries have expressed significant gaps in the development of soft skills among new entrants to the workforce. Despite the differences in the nature of these careers, characterized by a lack of interpersonal interaction, employers consistently express the scarcity of requisite soft skills among their employees in these domains (Adecco, 2020).

While machines currently contribute to around 30% of tech-driven tasks, projections suggest that by 2025, this balance is expected to shift to a more equal 50/50 division between machines and human labor (Kelly, 2020). As the capabilities of smart machines increase and their costs decrease, the dynamics of the job market are undergoing a profound alteration. Roles previously occupied by humans are being automated, particularly those involving physical labor. This surge in automation has propelled the incline of soft skills as pivotal components in shaping the emerging organizational structure (Brungardt, 2011). This recalibration is critical due to the fact that technology is increasingly replacing routine tasks, prompting a transformation in the skills demanded from the workforce. Given their inherent complexity and intricacy, soft skills

have garnered significance, leading employers to place a premium on prospective employees who have honed these skills (Guerra-Baez, 2019).

This predicament propels the confrontation of a pivotal inquiry: Why does this readiness gap persist? Although extensively examined, the answer remains multifaceted. However, a compelling solution arises in reforming curricula to better reflect the needs of the workforce and society. Frequent curriculum reviews and dynamic reforms, as advocated by Reis (2018), emerge as effective strategies to ensure congruence with contemporary demands. At the crux of this discussion lies the conception that curricula function as the connection between societal needs and educational systems (Welch, 1969). This intermediary role necessitates that curricula aptly encapsulate both developmental milestones and societal integration. In this light, Young (2014) delineates the dual facets of curricula – the normative and the critical. While the latter guides the acquisition of knowledge, the former orients education towards societal integration, an aspect acutely relevant to this study.

Soft skills, being pivotal for personal and professional growth, emerge as a focal point within this context. The shift towards Outcome-Based Education (OBE), proposed by Spady (1994), seeks to bridge this gap by aligning curricula with end goals. This recalibration demands a shift from educator-centered paradigms to student-centered approaches, thereby nurturing a learning continuum. The premise of this transition hinges on the notion that soft skills are not merely supplementary but integral for meaningful employment (Lowden et al., 2011). However, the current literature predominantly accentuates soft skill development in higher education contexts, largely overlooking their significance in high school settings. While collegiate studies have proven invaluable, they inadvertently perpetuate the notion that formal soft skill education is exclusive to higher education. This discrepancy is challenged by Positive Youth Development

Theory (PYD), championing the importance of cultivating these skills during formative years (Lerner et al., 2005). Bempechat et al.'s (2014) study, explaining the positive impact of explicit soft skill education within a network of schools, reinforces the prospect of similar endeavors within the public education framework.

Concurrently, the high school emphasis on hard skills, primarily driven by the quantitative evaluation of grades and standardized tests, underscores an incongruity between education and workforce demands. This dichotomy, as demonstrated by Gonsalves et al. (2019), can lead to identity conflicts for students maneuvering between distinct skill orientations. The educational system's discourse places hard skills at the forefront, leaving soft skills in the shadows despite their increasing importance. Hence, this study aims to explore and address these gaps, specifically focusing on the aspirations of recent high school graduates in Nevada concerning their education, and the pivotal role soft skills play in their career readiness. Through the lens of Student Voice theory, this research aims to amplify student perspectives, propose strategic curriculum adjustments, and ultimately pave the path for a more meaningful high school education.

Soft Skill Integration in Education

The Perkins Collaborative Resource Network evaluated top skills for high school students to acquire, and categorized them into three groups: Applied Knowledge (academic and critical thinking skills), Effective Relationships (interpersonal skills and personal qualities), and Workplace Skills (including resource management and communication) (Employability Skills, n.d.). The top five skills found through the conceptualization of these three categories consisted of: dependability, problem-solving and critical thinking, teamwork and collaboration, flexibility and adaptability, and communication.

Dependability

Dependability made its debut on Monster's "The Future of Work" survey, swiftly claiming a top spot for the most crucial skill sought by employers and concurrently emerging as the primary skills gap (The Future of Work, 2021). This prominence stems from the fact that employers aspire to recruit individuals whom they can rely on to proficiently complete tasks within stipulated timeframes. This, in turn, enables managers to divert their attention towards overarching strategic priorities rather than engaging in micromanagement. When a workforce comprises dependable employees, the entire organization experiences heightened productivity and success. From establishing clear attendance expectations to ensuring unwavering commitment follow-through, the classroom provides an ideal setting for nurturing and reinforcing dependability skills.

Incorporating dependability in high school curricula is of paramount importance as it equips students with essential life skills that surpass the classroom and prepare them for success in various aspects of their personal and professional lives. The development of dependability, characterized by traits such as responsibility, accountability, and reliability, is a critical component of character education (Pearson et al., 2009). These skills not only enable students to excel academically but also empower them to become responsible citizens and valuable contributors to their communities. Research has demonstrated that dependable individuals tend to have better mental health and higher levels of life satisfaction (Moeller & Seehuus, 2019). High school is a formative period in a student's life, and integrating lessons on dependability into the curriculum can foster the growth of these attributes at an early stage, setting a foundation for a successful and fulfilling future.

The demand for dependable employees is consistently high in the job market (Zhenjing et al., 2022). Employers highly value individuals who can meet deadlines, fulfill their

commitments, and work collaboratively in a team. Incorporating dependability education into high school curricula can give students a competitive edge when seeking employment or pursuing higher education opportunities. This aligns with the broader goals of education, which include preparing students for the challenges and responsibilities they will face in their careers and personal lives. Therefore, including dependability in a high school curriculum is not only academically beneficial but also essential for nurturing responsible, well-rounded citizens who can positively contribute to society.

Teamwork And Collaboration

Teamwork, as defined by the Oxford Dictionary, refers to "the combined action of a group of people, especially when effective and efficient." In most organizational structures, the presence of a single individual is a rarity (Loughry, Ohland, & Woehr, 2014). Therefore, it becomes imperative for students to cultivate teamwork skills to prepare for life beyond the classroom. Collaborating with individuals from diverse cultural, economic, and academic backgrounds has proven to be a multifaceted challenge in the professional world (Remedios, 2012). Remedios emphasized the significance of teamwork, highlighting that those with strong teamwork skills can effectively connect and interact with others, adapt their role as leaders or followers depending on the context, appreciate and embrace differences among team members, and communicate and listen effectively. The capacity to work harmoniously with others fosters opportunities for collaborative idea generation and paves the way for more innovative problem-solving.

Within an academic context, teamwork often manifests through participation in sports or group projects within the classroom. These activities aid students in developing critical teamwork skills such as distributing workloads, fostering healthy competition, engaging in different levels of interaction, and managing conflicts. However, explicit instruction in teamwork

is frequently lacking, leading to motivational, social, and cognitive factors exerting a negative influence on group dynamics (Sweet & Michaelsen, 2007). Social interdependence theory, as outlined by Johnson and Johnson (2009), sheds light on concepts like positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive interactions, and the judicious use of social skills. This theory elucidates the inner workings of group tasks that can sometimes hinder the development of robust teamwork skills. Nonetheless, Chang and Brickman have addressed some of these challenges by presenting strategies for instructors to facilitate effective collaborations, including role assignments, group contracts, peer evaluations, and the clear delineation of expectations for group participation (Chang & Brickman, 2018). Additionally, research by Troth and colleagues (2012) has shown that highly successful team players possess elevated levels of emotional intelligence. Consequently, a person's emotional intelligence serves as a strong predictor of their effectiveness within a team. If formal education were to address this aspect, it could significantly enhance the productivity of teamwork within classrooms.

Problem Solving And Critical Thinking

Critical thinking involves employing analytical skills to assimilate and assess information, subsequently formulating responses based on this information (Bloch & Spataro, 2014). It's important to note that critical thinking isn't an inherent skill for most individuals; rather, it necessitates gradual development over time (Bloch & Spataro, 2014). Fostering an environment conducive to the cultivation of critical thinking skills entails the examination of diverse viewpoints, perspectives, and opportunities (Bloch & Spataro, 2014). Typically, this skill is perceived as one that thrives within a formal educational setting, such as a classroom (Flores, Matkin, Burbach, Quinn, & Harding, 2012).

In an academic context, the encouragement of critical thinking and problem-solving skills can manifest in various forms. For instance, educators can facilitate the development of critical thinking skills by teaching strategies for organizing and interpreting data and information (Remedios, 2012). They may also prioritize instruction on techniques for formulating questions or approaches to tackling complex problems (Remedios, 2012). Well-developed critical thinking skills empower individuals to assess intricate situations effectively and derive sound solutions or make informed decisions (Flores et al., 2012).

Problem-solving operates on the same foundational principles as critical thinking but primarily focuses on the aspect of critical thinking that centers on finding solutions (Almeida & Morais, 2021). When an individual can generate a solution based on their analysis of a situation, they are essentially engaging in problem-solving. This necessitates the skill set to break down a problem, identify and define it, and explore potential solutions, even when the individual may initially believe they lack the capability to solve the task (Almeida & Morais, 2021). Whether these problems surface in a professional or academic setting, developing problem-solving skills involves using facts, knowledge, and data effectively to address challenges (U.S. Department of Labor). Crucially, both critical thinking and problem-solving do not demand immediate answers; rather, they require the capacity to formulate rational solutions based on presented facts and information.

Flexibility And Adaptability

Flexibility and adaptability have emerged as critical skills in education due to the rapidly changing dynamics of the modern world. As educational paradigms shift and new technologies continually reshape how information is accessed and utilized, the ability to adapt to change and embrace flexibility is paramount. Research by Hase and Kenyon (2000) underscores the importance of flexibility in learning, particularly in the context of self-directed and lifelong

learning. Their work highlights how students who are equipped with flexible learning skills tend to be more successful in navigating the complexities of modern education. Adaptability in education is closely linked to the capacity for problem-solving and critical thinking (Biesta, 2012). According to Biesta, adaptability implies an openness to different perspectives and approaches, which can enrich the learning experience. This aligns with the views of Martin and colleagues (2012), who emphasize the importance of nurturing adaptability in students to prepare them for a future characterized by uncertainty and change.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the significance of adaptability and flexibility in education became strikingly evident. Research by Hodges et al. (2020) highlights how educational institutions were compelled to swiftly adapt to remote learning environments, underscoring the need for educators and students alike to be flexible and adaptable in the face of unforeseen challenges. Fostering flexibility and adaptability in education is not merely a response to the evolving demands of the modern world but also an essential aspect of equipping students with the skills and mindset required to thrive in an ever-changing educational landscape. The works of Hase and Kenyon (2000), Biesta (2012), Martin and colleagues (2012), and Hodges et al. (2020) collectively emphasize the importance of these attributes in preparing students for the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

Communication

According to a survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (2010), communication emerged as the top-ranked essential skill and quality sought in job candidates. Success in various professional contexts hinges not solely on one's knowledge but also on their ability to effectively convey that knowledge (Robles, 2012). Proficiency in articulating intricate ideas verbally, in writing, and in interpersonal interactions stands as a cornerstone for achieving success in the workplace (Reinsch & Gardner, 2014). It's imperative to

recognize that communication encompasses more than just speaking; it encompasses active listening, responsive engagement, and the art of sustaining meaningful dialogues, necessitating a comprehensive skill set (Remedios, 2012).

Communication's significance transcends individual capabilities and extends to the collaborative dynamics within organizations, emphasizing its pivotal role in teamwork and the achievement of collective goals (DeKay, 2012). Furthermore, emotional intelligence emerges as a driving force behind robust communication skills (Troth, Jordan, Lawrence, & Tse, 2012). In collaborative endeavors, the ability to share ideas, express emotions, and navigate conflicts through effective communication becomes indispensable (Goleman, 1998). Conflict resolution and negotiation, vital components of workplace interactions, are inherently linked to adept communication (Schramm & Morais, 2013). However, these advanced skills rely on a foundation of basic communication abilities; without these fundamentals, mastering higher-level communication becomes challenging (Schramm & Morais, 2013). Additionally, in professional settings, there is a growing emphasis on proficient written communication skills (Moore & Morton, 2017). Employers frequently note that new hires often lack this skill, which is consistently nurtured in academic contexts (Moore & Morton, 2017).

While the study conducted by Kameg et al. (2010) focused on nursing students rather than high school students, it underscored the teachability of communication skills within an academic environment. The study employed high fidelity human simulation (HFHS) to expose students to a diverse array of patient scenarios, beyond what they would encounter in a typical clinical setting. By comparing the effectiveness of the HFHS approach with traditional lectures, the research revealed that students who engaged in HFHS experiences felt more self-assured in their communication abilities. This study serves as an illustration of the broader point that strong

communication skills are indispensable in a wide range of fields and can be cultivated and enhanced within an educational setting through various teaching methodologies.

Student Voice and Learning Theories

Self-Regulated Learning

Self-regulation entails an active and constructive procedure wherein learners establish objectives for their learning endeavors and then make efforts to oversee, govern, and direct their thinking, drive, and conduct, all within the framework of their objectives and the contextual factors in their surroundings (Pintrich, 2000). When it comes to the cultivation of academic proficiency, the strategies learners opt for and employ are pivotal in determining whether they can realize their intended outcomes. In the context of academic achievement, self-regulation necessitates a deliberate awareness and involves the selection and application of suitable strategies to attain explicit or implicit learning objectives (Jain and Dowson, 2009; Jansen et al., 2019). The development of agency evolves through a continuous process of introspection and assessment of progress in tasks.

Engaging in collaborative efforts with adults and actively participating in the teaching and learning process is believed to result in heightened empowerment, a key objective of numerous research projects. Additionally, the cultivation of self-confidence and self-esteem plays a pivotal role in amplifying the influence and constructive nature of student voices (Coll et al., 2018; Howley & Tannehill, 2014; Shilcutt et al., 2021, 2022). Teachers hold a critical role in enhancing students' perceived competencies and capabilities through the provision of guidance, support, encouragement, and valuable insights (Biddulph, 2011; Howley & Tannehill, 2014). They also bear the responsibility of openly acknowledging the significance of student voices and emphasizing their legitimacy. It is imperative for students to genuinely feel that their

contributions are valued and that their input will be effectively utilized (Bloemert et al., 2020; Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010, 2012; Howley & Tannehill, 2014).

Recent research in the realm of achievement motivation and self-determination has challenged the conventional division between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Self-determination theory acknowledges that many situations, especially in education, often involve external factors as catalysts for behavior. It posits that external expectations can be internalized, integrated, and ultimately lead to highly autonomous functioning (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008). Education serves the purpose of imparting subject knowledge and instilling societal norms, often imposed by external entities. Therefore, it's crucial for educators to comprehend how students can transition from mere compliance to forms of self-regulated cooperation that fulfill both individual and societal needs. According to the research conducted by Richard Ryan and Edward Deci (2000), students' motivation levels are often contingent on the extent to which they perceive their actions as self-determined. Feeling self-determined hinges on experiences related to competence, autonomy, and relatedness. When students believe they can perform a task with relative ease (competence), perceive a degree of control over how an activity is conducted (autonomy), and experience a meaningful connection with others while engaging in it (relatedness), they are considered to be self-determined. The more frequent these self-determined experiences occur, the more robust and enduring their motivation tends to be.

Self-regulation theory offers a distinctively student-centered perspective on the multifaceted aspects of engagement. While self-determination theory examines students' perceptions of their autonomy, competence, and relatedness within a particular activity, self-regulation theory focuses on the actions students take to initiate and sustain their engagement. It commences with the premise that students are active participants in their own learning, aligning

with the constructivist viewpoint that emphasizes knowledge construction rather than passive absorption. To be self-regulated implies being purpose-driven and demonstrating control over and accountability for one's concentration and effort during the learning process.

Cognitively, "self-regulated learners engage in planning, goal-setting, organization, self-monitoring, and self-assessment at various stages during their endeavor to acquire new knowledge or skills. These processes enable students to possess self-awareness, knowledge, and decisiveness in their approach to learning" (Zimmerman, 1990). From the teacher's standpoint, self-regulated learners tend to be self-initiators who display diligence and perseverance in their learning pursuits. They proactively "seek advice, information, and conducive learning environments" (Zimmerman, 1990). Self-regulated learners also possess the capability to assess the effectiveness of their learning strategies and, upon recognizing areas for improvement, adjust their approach accordingly.

Self-regulation extends beyond an individual's actions and influences collective engagement. Studies exploring children's and adolescents' capacity to build relationships have highlighted perspective-taking as a crucial skill for establishing and maintaining friendships (Selman, 1980; Selman, 2003; Selman, Levitt, & Schultz, 1997). In group settings, self-regulation can involve not only setting goals and monitoring time but also considering others' viewpoints and levels of engagement. It entails assuming responsibility for one's role in influencing these aspects. Effective groups often exhibit "metacognitive awareness that necessitates adjusting, closely monitoring group dynamics, and frequently revisiting instructions to ensure clarity and task structure for all members" (Boekaerts, 2011). Consequently, self-regulation serves as a means for individuals to collectively assess and contemplate their support for fostering healthy engagement within groups, classrooms, and the entire school community.

In this context, the intent behind directives issued by teachers, parents, administrators, or peers becomes secondary. Self-determination theory is primarily concerned with the degree to which individuals internalize and integrate external expectations. Students whose perceived "locus of causality" leans more towards the internal side exhibit greater psychological investment in activities, leading to a convergence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Given that adolescents are in the process of developing their identities and advanced cognitive abilities, it is logical that they are more motivated by activities that afford them some level of decision-making authority (Miller, 1989). To provide a framework for understanding the spectrum of self-determining experiences that students can encounter in the classroom, Deci and Ryan (2000) introduce a continuum. At one end of this continuum lies heteronomy, characterized by subordination, subjection, or coercion, while at the opposite end lies autonomy, marked by independence, self-sufficiency, and self-rule.

Incorporating Student Voice Theory into educational practices is not only a matter of providing students with a platform to express their needs but also aligns with well-established theories in cognitive development, human cognition and learning, as well as motivation and self-regulated learning. It recognizes students as active participants in their educational experiences, capable of contributing valuable insights. For example, Shepherd Zeldin (2004) conducted research on numerous community-based initiatives where both students and adults shared the duties of governance. The study revealed that when student leadership was incorporated into these programs, young individuals exhibited heightened dedication to their communities, increased self-assurance, greater capabilities in assuming governance roles and responsibilities, and a reinforced commitment to the organization. The competencies and community networks that young people developed through these experiences resulted in various opportunities,

including college recommendations, internships, job offers, advice on college applications, speaking engagements, employment references, and financial consultations. This led one young participant to express that "opportunities I wasn't even aware of are now accessible" (Zeldin, 2004). By empowering students to take an active role in shaping their own education, educators and institutions create more effective, engaging, and student-centered learning environments that benefit all stakeholders involved. This integration of theory and practice marks a promising path toward transformative education.

Cognition And Learning

Incorporating student voice into the educational process also resonates with human cognition and learning theories. Cognitive Load Theory, for instance, emphasizes the importance of managing the mental effort required for learning (Sweller, 2010). When students articulate their educational needs, they become more aware of their cognitive limitations and can better regulate their learning. This self-awareness can lead to more effective learning strategies, such as chunking information or utilizing spaced repetition, aligning with principles of cognitive load management. Beyond this, aligning student voices with agency increases student motivation and allows for effective engagement.

Agency, as defined by Bandura (2001), encapsulates the ability to initiate actions. Within social cognitive theory (SCT; Bandura, 1986), agency hinges on a person's capacity to manage and govern their thoughts, motivations, and conduct through the influence of their existing self-beliefs, particularly self-efficacy. SCT comprehends human functioning as a result of triadic reciprocal causation among internal personal factors, behavioral patterns, and environmental forces, all interplaying as mutually influential determinants impacting one another bidirectionally (Bandura, 2006, 2001). In SCT, this concept portrays an entity both shaped by determinants and influential in its own right. Agency emerges within social frameworks and contexts and, once

established, holds the potential to exert influence capable of reshaping social, cultural contexts, and structures (Bandura, 1986, 2001, 2006). In SCT, behavioral, cognitive, and other personal factors, along with environmental influences, serve as causal determinants influencing each other. The regulation of personal processes is fundamentally an individual endeavor; however, the individual does not operate in isolation and relies on the mediating contributions of others and elements within the sociocultural environment to develop and function in a purposeful manner. SCT delineates four core facets of human agency within the self-as-agent: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness (self-regulation), and self-reflectiveness (self-efficacy). Bandura (2001) defines agency as a complex interplay of personal attributes, belief systems, self-regulatory abilities, and the shared structures and functions that enable individuals to exert influence over their circumstances. This agency is not static but can be nurtured and developed (Rainio & Hilppö, 2017), and it emerges from social interactions and relationships (Kumpulainen, Lipponen, Hilppö, & Mikkola, 2014), suggesting its relational nature (Pineda-Báez, Manzuoli, & Sánchez, 2019).

Agency for Learning (AFL; Code, 2010) extends the foundations of social cognitive theory by positioning agentic abilities as intermediaries that mediate the influences of personal, behavioral, and socio-environmental factors on an individual's self. The expression or constraint of individual agency varies across contexts and for various reasons. Consequently, it is crucial to examine agency from the learner's standpoint in the context of learning. According to AFL, agency is "an emergent entity that is displayed through an individual's capacity to interact with personal, behavioral, environmental, and social elements within the learning context" (Code, 2010). Fundamentally, agency is an emergent capability characterized by intentionality, self-initiation, and external sources of influence. Emergence, in this context, signifies the

development of innovative and cohesive structures, patterns, and qualities during the process of self-organization (Goldstein, 1999). A capability is considered emergent when it consists of several constituent components but can't be reduced merely to these components (O'Connor and Wong, 2002; Martin, 2003). Since agency arises from self-generated intentional action, its explanation lies in the interplay among its constituent influences. These constituent influences are embodied by an individual's intentionality, forethought, self-regulation, and self-efficacy.

Agency plays a pivotal role in students' capacity to regulate, direct, and supervise their own learning. Students put agency into action by governing their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes as they engage with environmental factors. This involves not only possessing the behavioral competence to self-manage environmental contingencies but also possessing the knowledge and the sense of personal agency to apply this competence in pertinent contexts (Zimmerman, 2000). AFL introduces a more integrated approach to exploring learning processes within both individual and social settings. Situated within the framework of social cognitive theory, AFL broadens this perspective by incorporating elements of developmental, historical, and sociocultural theories that underscore the indispensable role of agency in the regulatory mechanisms requisite for learning. AFL furnishes a more holistic understanding of how students manage and wield their influence to attain personal and collective objectives. It also offers a structural foundation that facilitates further exploration of learning in formal and informal educational contexts.

The interpretation of situations by individuals is strongly influenced by the social practices they engage in (van Huizen, van Oers, & Wubbels, 2005). This concept, while initially referring to teacher training, can be extended to students. Both teachers and students are profoundly affected by the socio-cultural structures they are embedded in, shaping their

comprehension of situations and, subsequently, their agency (Kumpulainen et al., 2014). Furthermore, the transformation of structures and culture essential for fostering student agency aligns with the requirements for teacher agency, suggesting a mutually beneficial relationship (Priestley & Minty, 2013). To cultivate effective student voice systems, it is imperative that all segments of the community are engaged, rather than just those who readily participate (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006). Dialogues limited to individuals with existing rapport are unlikely to result in substantial improvements (Chopra, 2016), and school staff must be prepared for student voice initiatives (Raymond, 2001). Inclusive decision-making processes involving all stakeholders contribute to successful schools (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Day (2011) emphasizes the connection between agency and leadership in successful school heads, suggesting that fostering student agency can also nurture student leadership. The distribution of leadership, including students, fosters collective agency among all stakeholders (Harris, 2004). Mitra (2004) suggests that student voice enhances agency by enabling students to articulate their thoughts, cultivating their identities as change-makers, and nurturing their leadership potential.

Student agency manifests through students' actions and interactions within their environment (Klemencic, 2015). It represents the dynamic capacity to exert influence in specific situations (Mitra, 2004), although some perspectives view it as the 'capacity' for acting in one's best interest (Podolefsky, Rehn, & Perkins, 2013). This research underscores the idea of agency as a temporally adaptable mechanism shaped by an individual's circumstances and intricate interactions. In essence, while the concept of 'capacity' acknowledges the importance of situational factors, it also recognizes that the ability to exercise agency in a given context can be developed (Rainio & Hilppö, 2017).

Engagement has long been a focal point for researchers due to its pivotal role in the learner's transition from motivation to learning, prompting extensive analysis of its effects, mechanisms, and methods of cultivation within educational settings. The significance of engagement in education is underscored by its consistent identification as a robust predictor of student performance and conduct in the classroom (Klem & Connell, 2004). It serves as an antidote to student alienation (Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004) and a precursor to enduring academic achievement and eventual school completion (Connell, Spencer, & Aber, 1994). Engaged students are more likely to attain higher grades (Goodenow, 1993) and test scores (Willingham, Pollack, & Lewis, 2002), exhibit improved attendance (Klem & Connell, 2004), and experience lower dropout rates (Ekstrom et al., 1986). Conversely, students with low engagement levels face adverse long-term consequences, including disruptive classroom behavior, absenteeism, and withdrawal from school (Archambault, Janosz, & Pagani, 2009; Rodríguez & Conchas, 2009; Rumberger, 2010). Consequently, engagement is regarded as the primary predictor and key phenomenon for comprehending dropout rates (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008).

An examination of in-class behaviors conducted by Adena Klem and James Connell (2004) revealed that engaged students exhibit heightened attentiveness, appear more interested, and demonstrate greater persistence when confronting challenges compared to their less engaged peers. Additionally, Appleton and colleagues (2008) observed a cyclical pattern in engagement research: students who choose to engage in one context tend to find subsequent engagement in the same or different contexts more straightforward, enjoyable, and desirable. This suggests that with appropriate encouragement, initial engagement behaviors can gain momentum and lead to progressively higher levels of achievement. Engagement may function as a significant social

signal within the classroom. Teachers, striving to assess the impact of their instructional efforts on students, actively monitor for signs of engagement in the activities they design. When students display engagement through on-task behaviors, inquiries, or completed assignments, they often trigger reciprocal engaging responses from teachers. Research affirms that engaged students typically receive more motivational support and assistance from their teachers (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Skinner, Kindermann, & Furrer, 2009).

Scholars have long emphasized the positive link between noncognitive skills and educational achievement. Binet and Simon (1916) recognized over a century ago that success in school depends on qualities beyond mere intelligence, including attention, willpower, and character. More recently, Olson (2012) provided a detailed explanation of how noncognitive skills are connected to academic performance, highlighting the significance of social skills and the absence of aggressive or disruptive behavior as predictors and facilitators of learning (Olson 2012). Heckman (2008) underscores a similar point in favor of early investments in education, stating that "skills beget skills." Numerous meta-analyses and comprehensive literature reviews further corroborate the positive relationship between noncognitive skills and academic success. Farrington et al. (2012) conducted a literature review that considers academic performance as not only a measure of academic knowledge but also a reflection of various essential student attributes or noncognitive factors. These encompass a range of academic behaviors, attitudes, and strategies crucial for success in school and later life. This includes study skills, attendance, work habits, time management, help-seeking behaviors, metacognitive strategies, and social and academic problem-solving.

Durlak et al. (2011) conducted an extensive meta-analysis of over 200 interventions aimed at enhancing the social and emotional learning of students from kindergarten through high

school. Their findings indicate that participants benefited from these interventions, with improved social and behavioral skills. Importantly, these interventions also correlated with higher academic achievement, leading to an estimated gain in performance equivalent to 11 percentile points, a consistent effect across different grade levels. Levin (2012) translated this gain into a measure equivalent to one-third of a standard deviation, signifying a significant increase in educational outcomes. Shriver and Weissberg (1996) highlighted the policy implications of these findings, emphasizing that educational policies can effectively target both cognitive and noncognitive aspects simultaneously, striking an appropriate balance between the two domains. This underscores the interdependence of noncognitive skills and their vital role in supporting cognitive development. Specific noncognitive skills, such as executive function skills encompassing self-regulation and self-control, have been identified as critical predictors of academic achievement. Research shows that self-control and self-discipline correlate with better classroom behavior, which, in turn, is associated with improved report card grades and other measures of academic performance (Duckworth, Quinn, and Tsukayama 2012; Duckworth and Seligman 2005). Research findings affirm that student voice initiatives yield a range of positive outcomes for both students and teachers. These initiatives empower students, enhance their skills and self-esteem, foster healthier school environments, and equip teachers with valuable insights and motivation for educational improvement (Mager & Nowak, 2012; Rudduck & Flutter, 2014).

Mager and Nowak (2012) found compelling evidence for the positive impact of student voice on the development of critical life skills, communication abilities, responsibility, self-esteem, and social status among students. Additionally, they noted that student voice initiatives contribute to nurturing students' sense of agency, enhancing their democratic skills, and fostering a sense of citizenship. These efforts were found to have a positive influence on student-adult

relationships and contribute to shaping the overall spirit of the school. Mager and Nowak also identified positive effects in other areas. These included improvements in peer relationships, student health, academic achievement, and changes to school facilities, rules, and policies. Concerning the impact on teachers, Rudduck and Flutter (2014) found that student voice initiatives offer educators several valuable benefits. Teachers involved in these efforts tend to develop a more open perception of students' capabilities, gain fresh perspectives on curriculum design, exhibit a greater willingness to adapt their thinking and teaching practices, experience renewed excitement in their teaching roles, and are provided with a practical agenda for continuous improvement.

Relating the findings on noncognitive skills and their impact on educational achievement to Student Voice Theory, it becomes evident that student voice initiatives and policies should not solely focus on cognitive development but also prioritize the cultivation of noncognitive skills. Student Voice Theory emphasizes the importance of students actively participating in shaping their educational experiences and voicing their needs. In light of the evidence presented, it becomes clear that encouraging students to express their thoughts, concerns, and preferences within the educational context can play a crucial role in nurturing their noncognitive skills, such as self-regulation, motivation, and social skills. When students are given the opportunity to voice their opinions and take ownership of their learning environments, they can develop these skills, ultimately contributing to their academic success and holistic development. Therefore, Student Voice Theory aligns not only with cognitive development theories but also with the broader perspective that encompasses the significance of noncognitive skills in the educational journey, reinforcing the idea that both cognitive and noncognitive aspects are intertwined in student development.

Programmatic Support: CTE and WBL

The need for a comprehensive and adaptable high school education has become increasingly evident. Although this research is not specifically advocating for the expansion of Career and Technical Education programs or Work-Based Learning, both of these approaches to education demonstrate incorporating the development of soft skills into the students' education so that the full gamut of their educational needs are met. Whereas traditional education programs typically target hard skills, as seen by the emphasis on the subjects tested on the ACT, grades, and various standardized tests, these programs attempt to deepen skill development so that students are better equipped for college and/or the workforce upon graduation. The American College Testing (2006a) survey emphasized the importance of a comparable education for all high school students, regardless of their college or work-bound aspirations. This education should equip students with essential skills and readiness for both higher education and the workforce. The Conference Board et al. (2006) highlighted the deficiency of high school graduates in fundamental skills desired by employers, such as written communication, math, and professionalism. A Nation at Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) similarly underscored the lack of these skills and prompted a focus on academic skill development.

However, the William T. Grant Foundation (1988) provided a counter-narrative with "The Forgotten Half," emphasizing that not all students would pursue higher education and urging educators to prepare those not college-bound. Subsequent initiatives, including the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994, aimed to bridge the gap between education and employment by fostering partnerships between educators and employers (Gordon, 2008). The Act emphasized collaboration, integrated curriculum, and work-based learning, reflecting the

importance of preparing students for both academic and career success. Despite these efforts, career and technical education (CTE) was often seen as secondary to college-focused education (Hoachlander, 2006). Recent years have seen a resurgence of interest in CTE's potential to enhance students' transitions from secondary to postsecondary education and the workforce. Work readiness, a key aspect of CTE, encompasses skills required for employment and includes soft and hard skills (U.S. Department of Labor, 2000). Many states, including Georgia, have implemented work readiness credentialing processes to validate students' possession of these skills (Hyslop, 2008). In a rapidly evolving, technology-driven economy, CTE has gained prominence as a means for students to gain career preparation across a wide spectrum of occupations. It offers opportunities for students to explore their career preferences while acquiring fundamental work readiness skills. Regardless of the path students choose, there is a growing consensus among CTE experts that high school programs must integrate academic skills essential for success in contemporary workplaces (Lynch, 2000).

There exists a tangible correlation between education and the development of soft skills, specifically through educational programs. This is evident in numerous high school programs, such as Career and Technical Education (CTE), which deliberately integrates soft skill cultivation into their curriculum. Whether integrated into a comprehensive high school curriculum or offered through specialized career academies, Career and Technical Education (CTE) plays a vital role in guiding students towards various career options while imparting essential foundational skills essential for any job (Rosenbaum, 2001). These skills are critical for students, regardless of whether they plan to directly enter the workforce or pursue higher education after high school. Ensuring that students possess these skills is not only crucial for their success in college-level courses but also for their readiness to participate in workforce-

training programs. While research has extensively explored the advantages of CTE, including its impact on high school completion, attendance, grades, postsecondary enrollment, and future earnings, there remains a gap in our understanding of the extent to which CTE programs equip students with work readiness skills. Despite these efforts, an alarming trend emerges from data collected by the ACT – a significant portion of high school graduates, particularly those from low-income and minority backgrounds, are deemed inadequately prepared for college or career pursuits (ACT, 2012). Therefore, if CTE programs are adequately equipping students with the work readiness skills they need, the programs should be expanded to provide that skill development for all students. However, since it is established that many students who graduate high school are not prepared for college or the workforce, that is where the focus needs to remain. There is a gap to fill on ensuring students who graduate high school are adequately prepared for college and/or the workforce.

Work-Based Learning (WBL) is a time-tested educational approach found in many industrialized nations, integrating technical, academic, and employability skills development within real work settings. It often complements classroom learning by emphasizing practical, problem-focused education. The objectives of WBL can be categorized into three areas: cognitive development, social/emotional development, and career development (Darche, Nayar, & Bracco, 2009a). Various forms of WBL exist, from job shadowing to cooperative education and apprenticeships. About 72% of public high schools in the United States offered WBL opportunities in 2007-08 (NCES, 2011). In recent years, WBL has regained prominence in the U.S. as part of the effort to prepare "career and college-ready" graduates, drawing lessons from successful systems in other countries (Hoffman, 2011). Strong vocational education and training (VET) systems abroad emphasize public-private partnerships, employer-led curriculum

development, and national quality control agencies. In contrast, US students spend the least amount of time in work settings compared to their counterparts in 12 other countries.

Despite recent efforts to connect education and employment, WBL opportunities for American students vary widely in availability and quality. U.S. employers, for the most part, do not view it as their responsibility to provide workforce training (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006). The European model of apprenticeships, in contrast, involves significant employer involvement, with businesses defining qualifications, offering paid apprenticeships, and assessing student performance. While some aspects of the European model may not align with American preferences, several features are attractive (Symonds et al., 2011). To promote more apprenticeships in the U.S., policymakers could consider funding measures to scale up programs, encouraging states to subsidize tuition for apprenticeships, and awarding college credit for job-based experience (Lerman, 2009). Public-private partnerships may play a pivotal role in supporting these training models. The renewed interest in WBL should draw upon past successes and challenges to create meaningful work-based learning experiences for high school students in the evolving educational landscape.

Work-Based Learning connects classroom learning to real-world applications, enhances student engagement, and fosters essential employability skills (Brown, 2003). It empowers students by involving them in real-life tasks, teaching self-reliance, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities, thus boosting self-confidence and motivation for further learning. While the research on WBL in the United States has yielded mixed results, there are evident benefits. WBL helps students apply classroom knowledge, increases motivation, explores career options, and enhances their understanding of the work environment (Brown, 2003; Kenny et al., 2010; Stern et al., 1998). It also improves work readiness (Halpern, 2006; Phillips et al., 2002), job-related

skills (Halpern, 2006; Hughes et al., 1999), school attendance, and reduces dropout rates (Hughes et al., 2001). Moreover, well-structured WBL can help students develop vital skills such as responsibility, hard work, meeting deadlines, and persistence (Stasz & Kagonoff, 1997).

However, high-quality WBL requires specific parameters. Supervision through schools enhances students' use of academic skills and interactions with adults (Stone et al., 1990). Long-term WBL experiences appear to be more effective (Linnehan, 2001), especially for at-risk students (Gemici & Rojewski, 2010). Yet, the benefits might not extend beyond high school (Stern et al., 1995). A crucial element of WBL is its integration with the school curriculum, which reinforces learning in both settings (Stasz, 1998). However, designing internships to connect closely with specific classroom-based curricula may not always be feasible (Hughes et al., 1999). Additionally, the role of employer mentors in WBL is not well-studied. Mentors may face challenges balancing quality and productivity (Halpern, 2006). Some employers may prioritize productivity over creating a safe learning environment (Taylor & Watt-Malcolm, 2007). Finally, the links between school and work in WBL are often tenuous (Stasz, 1998). While costs vary, WBL programs can incur expenses like student wages, administration, curriculum development, staff development, equipment, and facilities (Stasz, 1998). However, WBL programs with strong connections between work and school tend to perform better (Taylor & Walt-Malcolm, 2007). Countries with higher rates of intensive WBL, such as apprenticeships, have better school completion and post-secondary education rates, potentially due to employers covering continuing education costs and the value placed on high-quality academic and WBL programs (Bishop & Mane, 2004).

In conclusion, this literature review has explored the concept of Student Voice Theory, the role of distributed leadership, and the importance of soft skills in high school education.

Student Voice Theory emphasizes the significance of incorporating students' perspectives and input into educational decision-making processes. It has been shown to enhance organizational change efforts and empower students, particularly those who may be struggling within the educational system. Distributed leadership, grounded in the idea of shared leadership responsibilities among various stakeholders, has gained prominence in education, with a focus on integrating student voices. This approach challenges traditional top-down leadership models and positions students as active partners in the educational process. When students are given the opportunity to voice their thoughts and ideas, it empowers them and fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility for their education. Employer trends have led to researchers concluding that students must develop soft skills to maintain the demand of employers. This shift in the workforce underscores the need to examine how high schools can better prepare students in terms of soft skill development. While hard skills continue to be emphasized in high school curricula, there is a growing recognition that soft skills are equally essential for success in both higher education and the workforce. There is a great need to bridge the gap between what is taught in high school and the skills required for success in college and careers. The integration of soft skills into high school curricula has been explored as a potential solution to this challenge.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Student Voice Theory provided the baseline in expressing the importance of students having a say in educational policies or decision-making that impacted their education. This research applied the ideals of Student Voice Theory by allowing space for students to voice their perspectives on their education with the goal of impacting future educational change. By conducting research that targeted recent high school graduates, it was a retrospective viewpoint of Student Voice Theory. Although these students did not produce their opinions for their current educational desires, they had a clearer vantage point on what skills or competencies they could have learned in high school that would benefit them in their current academic and personal pursuits. Whereas interviewing current high schoolers might have provided a present perspective of what high schoolers would like to learn, by targeting first and second-year college students, the students were more able to provide a thoughtful perspective as to what skills and competencies would have benefited them as they transitioned from high school to college. Therefore, first and second-year college students were surveyed for this research in order to gain a better understanding as to what they wished they would have learned in high school that would benefit them academically, professionally, and personally. Since college and career readiness are simultaneously considered in education, the perspective for this research was that any results targeting either of these individual categories were congruent and could be grouped as a whole.

Sampling Strategy

The study's target population was comprised of first and second-year college students in Nevada, specifically among those who attended the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). A purposive sampling method was employed to ensure the sample was representative of various majors and ethnic backgrounds. UNLV is a large university, with a diverse population, and the

statistics from the 2022 school year were useful to demonstrate the broad population of students that were considered for this research. In 2022, UNLV reported a total enrollment of 30,660 students. Among these, 25,373 were undergraduate students, which constituted approximately 82.6% of the total student population. Graduate students accounted for 4,271 students (about 14%), while professional students made up the remaining 1,045 students (roughly 3.4%). Since only undergraduate students were surveyed for this data, it was relevant to acknowledge that they made up the vast majority of the student population at UNLV.

Among these students, 13,154 were male, representing approximately 43% of the total, while 17,506 were female, making up the remaining 57%. This relatively equitable representation of male and female students suggested a balanced gender distribution within the university. Regarding residency status, the majority of UNLV students were residents of Nevada, with 26,458 students, constituting approximately 86% of the total student population. Nonresident students numbered 4,202, making up the remaining 14%. Additionally, there were 810 international (nonresident) students, representing approximately 3% of the total student population. UNLV's commitment to diversity was evident in its racial and ethnic composition. The university welcomed students from various backgrounds, with different racial and ethnic identities. The breakdown of minority students was as follows: Native American or Alaskan Native (81 students, approximately 0.3%), Asian (4,651 students, approximately 15%), Black or African American (2,697 students, around 9%), Hispanic (9,819 students, approximately 32%), Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (227 students, about 1%), and Two or More Races (3,683 students, roughly 12%). Additionally, there were 346 students (approximately 1%) whose race or ethnicity was classified as unknown. White students accounted for 8,346 students, representing approximately 27% of the student population.

Understanding the demographic makeup of UNLV formed the basis of the sampling strategy, as it provided the foundational demographics from which the sample was drawn. The sample of first and second-year college students used for this research aligned with the demographical data here. The diverse representation in academic levels, residency status, and racial/ethnic backgrounds emphasized the need for purposive sampling to ensure the research captured a representative range of voices within the university community.

For this research, the researcher utilized the perspectives of students in first and second-year seminar courses at UNLV. The researcher aimed to survey 100 first and second-year seminar students. Every student at UNLV is expected to pass a first and second-year seminar course. Although there are many varieties of courses that satisfied this requirement, this research utilized the first and second-year seminar courses offered by the College of Education at UNLV. These courses provided a diverse group of students, as students from various majors, backgrounds, and ages took these courses. The first-year seminar at UNLV, COE 103, was designed to provide students with essential skills for success at the university. It focused on topics such as time management and study skills while also encouraging discussions and debates on contemporary issues. During the semester, students selected an issue to research and engaged in a service-learning project related to their chosen topic. Successful completion of COE 103 or a similar first-year seminar prepared students for the second-year seminar, COE 202. In COE 202, students further develop critical thinking skills, enhance their research and analytical abilities, and continue engaging in discussions on current issues. The course also emphasizes strengthening writing skills and fostering a sense of community through participation in service-learning projects alongside instructors and classmates. These courses provided a foundation for surveying students as a large population of students took these courses, and the emphasis of

research within the course itself may have encouraged students to participate in research projects, such as the one proposed.

Procedure

This research utilized a methodological procedure to understand the perspectives of first and second-year UNLV students regarding their high school experiences and their perceived educational needs. It combined both quantitative and qualitative analyses to provide a view of students' opinions and skills gaps while aligning the findings with academic content standards for educational improvement. Ultimately, the goal is to inform educational policy to better serve student needs and prepare them for future success.

This research involved a practical application of Student Voice Theory by utilizing the fifth and sixth rungs of Hart's ladder of participation, Consulted and Informed and Adult-Initiated, Shared Decisions with Children (Hart, 1992). The survey instrument for this research was designed to gather the input of recent high school graduates and allow the students to be both consulted and informed about the purpose and content of the survey. They had a chance to express their opinions on their high school experiences, the education system, and their transition into adulthood. Since the survey design and questions were developed in consultation with the first and second-year college students themselves, it ensured that their perspectives were taken seriously and integrated into the decision-making process. Therefore, the level of participation could fall within being Consulted and Informed, as the students acted as consultants to help shape the survey, and their resulting opinions were sincerely valued. This research could also fall within the rung of Adult-Initiated, Shared Decisions with Children, as an adult initiated this research project, but students gave their input that ultimately impacted any decision-making in the educational realm.

This research had a mixed methods approach, in which a survey involved qualitative and quantitative measures (Schooneboom & Johsnon, 2017). This QUAN → qual design is demonstrated through the complimentary nature of the qualitative analyses for the quantitative findings (Morse & Niehaus, 2009). The survey elicited both quantitative and qualitative results, and the procedure for analysis contributed to the blending of both methods. In the quantitative phase, a structured survey questionnaire was administered to a sample of participants. The survey contained Likert-scale items, demographic questions, and open-ended questions with the purpose of identifying which skills students felt like their high school education focused on, explaining their educational and personal background, and exploring what skills and competencies they wish they learned in high school. The quantitative aspect of this research formed a foundation of the student's personal and educational background that could be used to identify trends. The qualitative aspect of this research involved analyzing the open-ended question on the survey. This question specifically aimed to answer the research question of what specific skills or competencies students wished they learned in high school that would benefit them in higher education, personally, or professionally. This open-ended question was used to encourage participants to express desires freely (Mitra, 2005). During the analysis, the quantitative analyses were supported by the qualitative results. The qualitative findings also expanded on the significant quantitative findings in order to provide actionable solutions and hone in on the most prevalent student desires. In the analysis phase of this research, the qualitative data was used to better explain some of the broad findings in the quantitative data. For example, the quantitative results found a significant difference in the educational emphasis for students in terms of hard and soft skills; hard skills were significantly more emphasized in these students' high school education. At the same time, the vast majority of students noted a

desire to increase the emphasis on soft skills in their high school education. These quantitative analyses were supported by the qualitative results that honed in on exactly which soft skills students wish they learned in high school. Taken together, the following conclusion can be drawn: the high school curricula is primarily focused on hard skills, but students need more soft skills in their education to feel prepared for college and the workforce, and more specifically they crave skills such as financial literacy, life skills, communication, and professionalism.

This research project involved gathering and analyzing data from first and second-year students at UNLV regarding their high school experiences and what they believed they should have learned. Before commencing any data collection, obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was the first priority. This ensured that the research adhered to ethical guidelines and safeguarded the rights and privacy of the participants. The next step involved meticulously finalizing the survey instrument. In order to ensure student voices were accurately collected through this survey, the researcher piloted the survey with several students who were recent high school graduates and ensured the researcher and potential participants were on the same page, and the language of the survey was understood by the students. The goal of this meeting was to determine whether any of the questions could be worded differently and were understood by the students. Following this meeting, multiple changes were recommended and made.

First, in the follow up questions to the Likert Scale items addressing the mode of instruction for the various skills, the researcher added descriptions to ensure the students understood the terms (specifically ‘direct instruction’, ‘modeling’, and ‘indirect instruction’. Additionally, it was recommended that the soft skills were operationalized on the survey so that students understood exactly what components of the skill to consider. This change was made for questions 13-22. Finally, it was recommended that there should be clarity on the mode of

instruction options for these questions. Specifically, a student brought up the fact that multiple modes of instruction could have taken place, so the researcher changed the verbiage to specify the 'primary' mode of instruction. This methodology aligned with the principles of the Student Voice Research Framework, where intersubjectivity was critical (Brasof & Levitan, 2022). The researchers and the students needed to understand each other. When the survey items and larger goals for the research were understood and shared by the students and researcher, the student voices could more clearly be depicted in the data.

The second principle captured in the Student Voice Research framework was reflexivity, which explained how researchers could impact Student Voice initiatives by not acknowledging the influence of their own childhood and educational experiences (Brasof & Levitan, 2022). By involving students in the process of revising the survey, it ensured the students were holding the researcher accountable as to not let their experiences overpower the potential input of the students. Power dynamics were addressed in the third principle of this framework (Brasof & Levitan, 2022). Within the context of this research, by providing the students this survey (after receiving student input on the operationalization of the terms and questions), the researcher had a hands-off approach while the data was collected. This allowed students the freedom to express their perspectives anonymously, without the concern for repercussion or power dynamics to play a negative role. The final principle involved context, which captured the idea of data collections needing to be more congruent with student contexts (Brasof & Levitan, 2022). For this research, education was a prominent part of students' lives, and therefore, the data collection aligned well with student experiences and perspectives. Regardless of the student's background, they had something to contribute to this topic, and therefore had a voice to be heard on their educational experiences.

The survey was divided into three sections. The first section involved demographic data. Specifically, there were eight questions that asked participants about their identity, age, and similar demographic questions. This section also targeted educational demographic questions such as their primary high school location, if they participated in a CTE program (or a trade school or any after school programs that specifically targeted workforce readiness such as Junior Achievement), and similar education-based demographic questions. Then the survey transitioned to asking about their current education and high school experiences which comprised of 19 questions. These questions were in two parts: first, education-based questions and second, the degree to which their high school education focused on the various soft skills specifically addressed in the literature review above. The education-based Likert-scale questions involved questions about the student's confidence with hard skills and soft skills. Descriptions and examples of both hard and soft skills were provided for the student's reference. The second part of the Likert-scale items addressed the student's perspective on how much dependability, problem-solving and critical thinking, teamwork and collaboration, flexibility and adaptability, and communication were each emphasized in their high school education. Since these were the primary soft skills emphasized by employers, the skills were evaluated as to whether they were taught within a high school setting. If the participant indicated that those skills were emphasized in their education, there was a follow-up question regarding the mode of instruction for the skills. Finally, the last component of the survey involved an open-ended question that allowed the students to respond with what they wish they learned in high school. This question specifically asked: Please list and describe any specific skills or competencies you wish you had learned in high school that would have benefited you academically, professionally, or in your day-to-day life.

To gather data, the researcher actively recruited participants by visiting first and second-year seminar courses within the College of Education, specifically COE 103 and COE 202 courses. During these visits, the researcher introduced the research project, explained its significance, explained that participation in the research would not impact their grade in the course, and provided students with a QR code for the survey to participate. This face-to-face approach helped in building trust and rapport with potential participants and also provided an opportunity for the participants to ask questions or receive clarity on the research and its purpose. Since the researcher taught within two of the seven classes surveyed, the researcher instituted a safeguard of having her advisor introduce the research topic and provide the QR code in the classes the researcher taught. The researcher left the room for this portion of the class to avoid any bias of survey completion.

Data Analysis

The application of Student Voice Theory in the interpretation of survey data involved a systematic approach comprising various steps. First, the data collection was comprehensive, encompassing multiple facets of the student experience, such as academic, social, and emotional domains, to provide a holistic understanding of student perspectives. The data analysis phase involved both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative analysis focused on identifying trends and patterns within the numerical data, while qualitative analysis delved into the in-depth exploration of student responses and open-ended questions, aiming to extract nuanced insights.

During the interpretation process, special attention was paid to the diverse perspectives represented within the student population, acknowledging potential variations across different student subgroups, including demographic and contextual factors. Emphasizing the core tenet of Student Voice Theory, the involvement of students in the decision-making process was

prioritized, wherein the survey data informed discussions and actions within the educational institution. The interpretation of survey data, guided by the principles of Student Voice Theory, was expected to result in actionable steps to address student concerns and recommendations. This fostered an environment where student feedback directly influenced institutional policies and practices, promoting a more student-centric educational environment.

Data analysis began with the processing of collected responses. This study captured the responses of 100 participants. However, two respondents only responded to a portion of the demographic questions at the beginning of the survey, so their responses were entirely excluded from the study in order to maintain consistency and reliability. Additionally, some respondents did not complete the final open-ended question, but the quantitative responses were still analyzed. SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was used to conduct descriptive statistics, providing valuable insights into the demographic characteristics of the participants and trends related to the Likert-scale items. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations, were computed to summarize demographic information and participants' responses regarding desired skills and knowledge. Inferential statistics, such as regression, was used to see how the key skills impacted perceived college preparedness. The demographic information was insightful for understanding both the students' personal (age, ethnicity, etc.) and educational (major, CTE/specialized program participation, location of high school, etc.) backgrounds. The Likert-scale items were used to assess factors such as confidence in school, the degree to which students felt like high school had a purpose and was transferrable to college/workforce, and how much each of the following skills was addressed in their high school education: dependability, problem-solving and critical thinking, teamwork and collaboration,

flexibility and adaptability, and communication. Charts and tables were employed to visually represent these findings, making them more accessible and comprehensible.

For the qualitative component of the analysis, the open-ended responses were subjected to a category analysis with frequency counts. First, the response skills/competencies were categorized based on whether they were more directly aligned with being a hard skill or a soft skill. If considered a soft skill, it then proceeded to the following step. This research was primarily involved in analyzing the soft skills mentioned, so although the categorization was displayed through a table, only the responses with the soft skill denotation were further analyzed to see if they aligned with a content standard. To simplify the procedure, the grouping and matching were conducted with only identical or near-identical terms. For example, if three students indicated they would have liked to become more competent in communication, writing emails, and giving presentations, these respective responses would all be grouped together under the umbrella of 'communication' as they individually represented an aspect of communication. Some responses elicited several derived skills, in which case the response was counted in multiple categories. The categories were not set prior to reading the responses, but rather derived from the responses themselves.

The research also explored the alignment between the skills identified in the open-ended responses and the Nevada Academic Content Standards. The Nevada Academic Content Standards were available on the Department of Education's website and provided the required standards that subjects must follow within each grade level. Specifically, the high school standards were divided into subject-based categories and were the basis of the academic curricula for high schools in Nevada. If patterns of skills emerged that were not explicitly addressed in the standards, the researcher proposed opportunities for new standards to be

incorporated to better prepare students for college and the workforce through a student voice lens.

Chapter 4: Results

This research aimed to address the following research questions: To what degree do students perceive their high school education to have emphasized the key skills desired by employers; How are the key skills desired by employers primarily taught within a high school setting; and What specific knowledge, skills, and/or competencies do recent high school graduates wish they acquired within their high school education to foster both personal growth and professional development? Specifically by gaining an understanding of what skills are taught in various ways, the researcher is able to then ask if there are skills they wish were more focused on in high school that would better prepare them for their academic achievement, professional success, and personal development? This mixed-methods research design aimed to investigate the perspectives of college students in Nevada regarding the skills and knowledge they desired to acquire in their high school education to determine whether these skills aligned with existing educational standards.

In the examination of factors influencing college preparedness, regression analyses uncovered intricate relationships between skill emphasis and perceived readiness. The results demonstrated that both hard and soft skills significantly contributed to college preparedness, emphasizing their interconnected influence. However, specific soft skills, such as dependability, problem-solving, teamwork, flexibility, and communication, did not individually predict preparedness. Correlation analyses reinforced this, showing weak non-significant correlations between preparedness and the emphasis on hard and soft skills. Descriptive statistics elucidated the nuanced foundation of skill development, portraying a higher emphasis on hard skills across surveyed high schools. Post-high school, a substantial portion of participants entered the workforce, yet a significant percentage felt inadequately prepared for their jobs, hinting at

potential gaps in alignment between education and workplace expectations. Participants acknowledged the equal importance of both hard and soft skills, highlighting a recognition of the multifaceted demands of the modern workforce.

Demographic Data

The first ten questions of the survey were aimed at capturing the demographics of the participants. These questions addressed age, racial/ethnic identity, type of high school, location of high school, CTE participation, participation in workforce readiness programs, major in college, and year in college. The questions were selected to help understand the backgrounds of the respondents, so that their academic responses can be analyzed in relation to their individual contexts.

Table 1. Frequencies for Age

Age	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
18	2	2.041	2.532
19	51	52.041	64.557
20	13	13.265	16.456
21	6	6.122	7.595
22	2	2.041	2.532
23	1	1.020	1.266
24	2	2.041	2.532
25	1	1.020	1.266
27	1	1.020	1.266
Total	98	100.000	

The age distribution of participants is depicted in Table 1, showing that the majority fall within the range of 19 to 21 years. Specifically, 52.04% of participants are 19 years old, 13.27% are 20, and 6.12% are 21. The cumulative percentage reveals that 93.67% of participants are aged 22 or below.

Table 2. Frequencies for Racial or Ethnic Identity

Racial or ethnic identity	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Asian	15	15.306	15.789
Two Or More Races	19	19.388	20.000
Black or African American	6	6.122	6.316
Hispanic or Latino	24	24.490	25.263
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	2	2.041	2.105
White	29	29.592	30.526
Total	98	100.000	

Table 2 detailed the frequencies for racial or ethnic identity. The largest ethnic group identified is White, constituting 30.53% of the respondents. Following closely is the Hispanic or Latino category, representing 25.26% of the participants. The table reflects a significant representation of Asian individuals (15.79%), Two or More Races (20.00%), and Black or African American respondents (6.32%).

Table 3. Frequencies for Primary High School's Location

High School Location	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
International	2	2.041	2.105
United States	14	14.286	14.737
Las Vegas, Nevada	78	79.592	82.105
Total	98	100.000	

The frequencies table for the primary high school's location (Table 3) provides insights into the geographical distribution of the surveyed participants, shedding light on the diverse backgrounds of the respondents. A substantial majority, 82.11%, attended high school in Las Vegas, Nevada. Additionally, 14.74% of respondents attended high school in the United States but outside Las Vegas. The inclusion of an International category (2.11%) represents the population of students that primarily attended high school outside of the United States.

Table 4. Frequencies for Type of High School

Type of High School	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Charter/Magnet School	17	17.347	17.708
Homeschool	1	1.020	1.042
Private School	1	1.020	1.042
Public School	66	67.347	68.750
Technical Academy	11	11.224	11.458
Total	98	100.000	

The frequencies table detailing the types of high schools attended by participants (Table 4) represents the types of high school attended by the respondents. Public schools emerge as the predominant choice, with a significant majority of respondents, 68.75%, having attended public high schools. Technical academies also were heavily attended, accounting for 11.46% of respondents. Charter/Magnet schools, representing 17.71% of participants. Homeschooling and private school attendance exhibit minimal representation, each constituting approximately 1% of respondents.

Table 5. Frequencies for Career and Technical Education (CTE) Participation

CTE Participation	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
No	49	50.000	51.042
Yes	47	47.959	48.958
Total	98	100.000	

The frequencies table examining participation in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs during high school (Table 5) provided insight into the prevalence of such vocational and skill-focused educational initiatives within the study sample. The majority of respondents, constituting 51.04%, did not partake in CTE programs, highlighting a significant portion of individuals who pursued a more traditional academic path during their high school education. On the contrary, nearly half of the participants (48.96%) engaged in CTE programs.

Table 6. Frequencies for Participation in Programs That Specifically Targeted Workforce Readiness

Workforce Readiness Program Participation	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
No	79	80.612	82.292
Yes	17	17.347	17.708
Total	98	100.000	

The frequencies table (Table 6) examined participation in after-school programs targeting workforce readiness, such as Junior Achievement or Gear Up, which shed light on the extent to which students in the study sample availed themselves of these specialized extracurricular offerings. A significant majority, comprising 82.29% of respondents, did not participate in such programs, indicating that a substantial portion of the surveyed individuals did not engage in structured after-school activities explicitly designed to enhance workforce readiness skills. Conversely, 17.71% of participants reported active involvement in these programs.

Table 7. Frequencies for Major at UNLV

Major at UNLV	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Accounting	5	5.102	5.155
Anthropology	1	1.020	1.031
Architecture	4	4.082	4.124
Biology	2	2.041	2.062
Business	11	11.224	11.340
Business Administration	1	1.020	1.031
Business Management	1	1.020	1.031
Business Management on Information Systems	1	1.020	1.031
Business Marketing	1	1.020	1.031
Computer Science	6	6.122	6.186
Criminal Justice	2	2.041	2.062
Early Childhood Education	2	2.041	2.062
Economics	1	1.020	1.031
Education	3	3.061	3.093
Elementary Education	6	6.122	6.186
Exploring	1	1.020	1.031
Film	6	6.122	6.186
Finance	1	1.020	1.031

Major at UNLV	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Fine Art, Concentration in Photography	1	1.020	1.031
Graphic Design	3	3.061	3.093
Graphic Design and Media	1	1.020	1.031
HMD	1	1.020	1.031
Hospitality	8	8.163	8.247
Hospitality Management	1	1.020	1.031
Human Resources	1	1.020	1.031
Human Services	1	1.020	1.031
International Business	1	1.020	1.031
Journalism	1	1.020	1.031
Kinesiology	1	1.020	1.031
MIS	1	1.020	1.031
Marketing	1	1.020	1.031
Marketing and International Business	1	1.020	1.031
Mathematical Science	1	1.020	1.031
Medical Imaging	1	1.020	1.031
Music Education	1	1.020	1.031
Psychology	2	2.041	2.062
Secondary Education	7	7.143	7.216

Major at UNLV	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Social Work	1	1.020	1.031
Special Education	1	1.020	1.031
Sports Marketing	1	1.020	1.031
Theatre	1	1.020	1.031
Undeclared	3	3.061	3.093
Total	98	100.000	

The frequencies table (Table 7) detailing the current major or field of study at UNLV reflects the diverse academic pursuits of the participants. The most common major reported was Business, with 11 participants (11.22%). Other prevalent majors included Hospitality (8.16%), Secondary Education (7.14%), and Computer Science (6.12%). The data highlights a broad spectrum of academic disciplines, from Arts and Sciences (e.g., Anthropology, Biology, Film) to Business-related fields (e.g., Business Administration, Business Management) and Technology (e.g., Computer Science, MIS). The small percentage of participants categorized as "Undeclared" (3.06%) indicated that the majority of students have chosen set majors.

Table 8. Frequencies for Year in College

Year In College	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
1	5	5.102	5.208
2	77	78.571	80.208
3	14	14.286	14.583
Total	98	100.000	

The frequencies table (Table 8) outlines the current year of participants at UNLV. Second-year students constituted 78.57% of the sample, a large majority. In contrast, first-year students make up a smaller portion, with 5.10%, while third-year students account for 14.29%.

Descriptive Statistics for Skills

The descriptive statistics for participants' perceptions of the emphasis placed on hard and soft skills in their high school education are presented through the following tables and figures. The survey first asked respondents to rate how much they thought hard and soft skills were emphasized in their high school education, on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicated that a skill was not at all emphasized and 5 signified a high emphasis. Next the survey led the participant to do the same thing for a series of five soft skills. If the participant rated the perceived emphasis a 2 or higher, then they were led to respond with the primary mode of instruction for that particular skill.

Table 9. Skill Emphasis in High School

	Hard Skill Emphasis	Soft Skill Emphasis
Mean	3.604	2.925
Median	4.000	3.000
Mode	4.000	3.000
Std. Deviation	0.957	0.935

For hard skills, the valid responses from 96 participants revealed a mean of 3.604, indicating a moderate level of perceived emphasis (see Table 9). The median and mode were both 4.000, suggesting a central tendency toward a relatively high emphasis. Similarly, for soft skills, based on the valid responses from 93 participants, the mean was 2.925, indicating a slightly lower perceived emphasis compared to hard skills. The median and mode were 3.000, reflecting a central tendency around a moderate level of emphasis.

Following this means analysis, a dependent t-test was conducted to assess the significance of the difference between these two groups: the means of hard skills emphasis vs. the means of soft skills emphasis. The t-value was computed using the formula $t = (M - \mu)/SM$. The resulting t-value was compared against critical values from the t-distribution to determine the statistical significance of the observed difference. The significance level (α) was set at $p < .05$. In this case, the calculated t-value of -4.97 was found to be statistically significant ($p < .001$), indicating a significant difference in the means. Therefore, there is a significant difference between the perceived emphasis on hard skills and the perceived emphasis on soft skills in a high school education for the sample population.

Table 10. Skills Means

Soft Skills	Mean	Standard Deviation
Dependability	3.086	1.039
Problem Solving/Critical Thinking	3.261	.993
Teamwork/Collaboration	3.533	.974
Flexibility/Adaptability	2.675	1.141
Communication	3.084	1.107

Further analysis explored specific skills such as dependability, problem-solving/critical thinking, teamwork/collaboration, flexibility/adaptability, and communication skills (see Table 10). Dependability received a mean rating of 3.086, signifying a moderate emphasis, while problem-solving/critical thinking had a mean rating of 3.261, indicating a similar moderate emphasis. Teamwork/collaboration exhibited a higher mean of 3.533, suggesting a relatively stronger emphasis, while flexibility/adaptability received a mean of 2.675, pointing to a moderate emphasis. Communication skills, with a mean rating of 3.084, also demonstrated a moderate emphasis. The standard deviations for these specific skills (ranging from 0.974 to 1.141) underscore the variability in participants' perceptions.

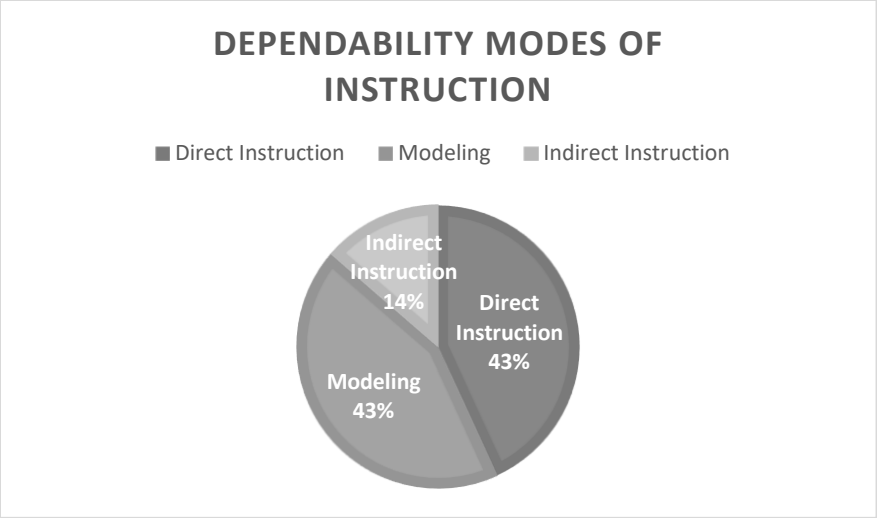


Figure 1. Dependability Modes of Instruction.

Figure 1 details the primary mode of instruction for the emphasis on Dependability in high school education. Among participants who indicated a moderate or higher emphasis on Dependability (score of 2 or above), the majority (43.18%) highlighted "Direct Instruction" as the primary mode. This suggests that a substantial portion of respondents experienced a hands-on, explicit teaching approach to instill dependability. Another 43.18% indicated "Modeling" as the primary mode, indicating that learning through observation and imitation was also prevalent. "Indirect Instruction" was selected as the primary mode of instruction by 13.64% of participants.

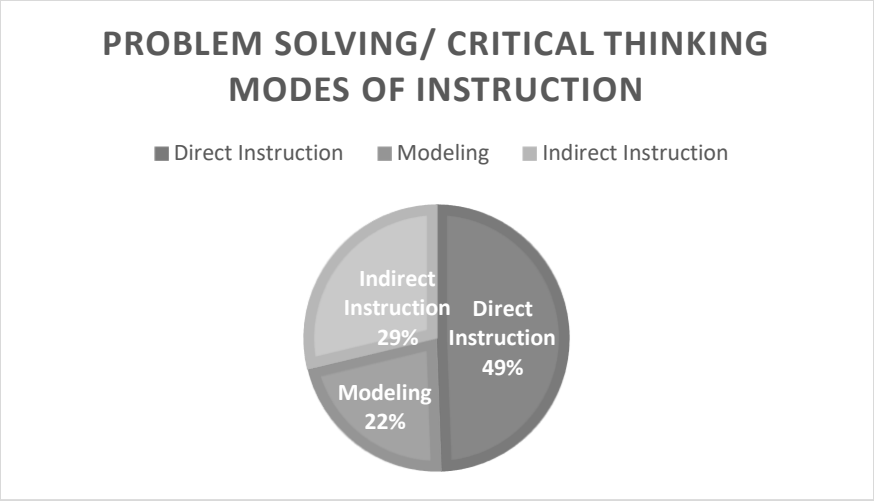


Figure 2. Problem Solving/Critical Thinking Modes of Instruction.

Figure 2 visualizes the primary modes of instruction for the emphasis on problem-solving/critical thinking in high school education. For respondents who selected a 2 or higher, indicating a moderate or higher emphasis on problem-solving/critical thinking, the majority (49.43%) reported "Direct Instruction" as the primary mode of instruction. Another 21.84% indicated "Modeling" as the primary mode, highlighting the importance of learning through observation and imitation in developing these skills. "Indirect Instruction" was selected as the primary mode of instruction by 28.74% of participants.

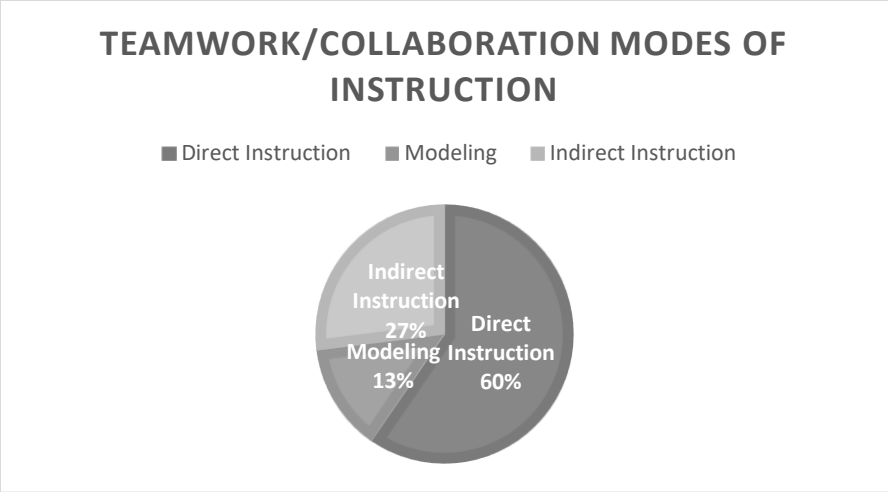


Figure 3. Teamwork/Collaboration Modes of Instruction.

Figure 3 offers insights into the primary instructional methods employed for emphasizing teamwork/collaboration during high school education. Among respondents who selected a 2 or higher, indicating a moderate or higher emphasis on teamwork/collaboration, a significant majority (59.55%) reported "Direct Instruction" as the primary mode of instruction. Another 13.48% indicated "Modeling" as the primary mode, whereas the choice of "Indirect Instruction" by 26.97% of participants reflects the varied educational strategies used to cultivate teamwork and collaboration skills.

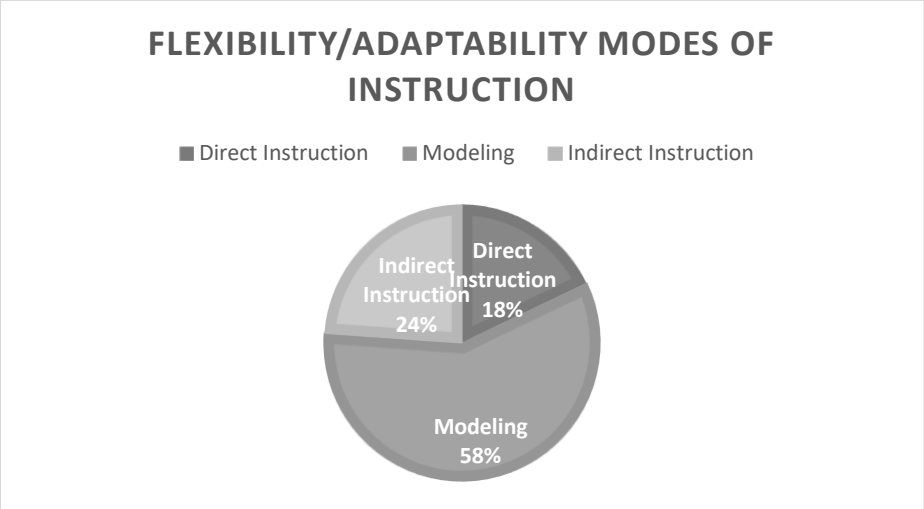


Figure 4. Flexibility/Adaptability Modes of Instruction.

Figure 4 provides a visual of the primary modes of instruction used to emphasize flexibility/adaptability during high school education for respondents who selected a 2 or higher. Notably, "Modeling" emerges as the predominant mode, with 58.21% of participants identifying it as the primary instructional approach. "Direct Instruction" is reported by 17.91% of respondents. Additionally, "Indirect Instruction" was chosen by 23.88% of participants to indicate the primary mode of instruction for teaching flexibility/adaptability.

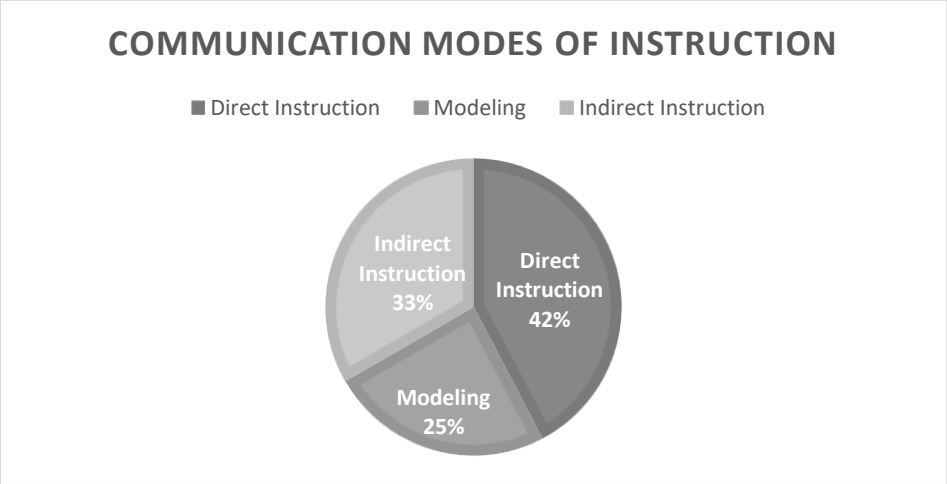


Figure 5. Communication Modes of Instruction.

Figure 5 revealed the primary modes of instruction utilized to emphasize communication skills for respondents who selected a 2 or higher on the prior question. "Direct Instruction" emerges as a significant mode, reported by 42.31% of participants, indicating a structured and explicit approach to teaching communication skills. "Modeling" is identified by 24.36% of respondents, suggesting that a considerable portion learned these skills through observation and imitation. "Indirect Instruction" was chosen by 33.33% of participants.

Table 11. Frequencies for Employment After Graduating High School

Employment After High School	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
No	23	23.469	24.468
Yes	71	72.449	75.532
Total	98	100.000	

Table 12. Frequencies for Job Preparedness

Job Preparedness	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
No	19	19.388	26.761
Yes	52	53.061	73.239
Total	98	100.000	

Examining participants' preparedness for college and employment (Table 11 and Table 12), the study found that 75.53% of the respondents had been employed since graduating from high school. Among those employed, 73.24% felt adequately prepared for their job(s).

Table 13. Frequencies for Skill Importance

Skill Importance	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Hard Skills	10	10.204	10.753
Soft Skills	48	48.980	51.613
Equally Important	35	35.714	37.634
Total	98	100.000	

Participants were asked which skill (hard skills, soft skills, or both) is more important to emphasize in education for academic success, professional advancement, and daily life (see Table 13). A substantial majority (48.98%) of respondents indicated a preference for emphasizing soft skills, while a considerably smaller proportion (10.20%) advocated for a focus

on hard skills. A significant segment (35.71%) asserted the equal importance of both hard and soft skills.

Correlations

Table 14. Correlations Between Variables

Variable		Dependability	Problem-solving/ critical thinking	teamwork/ collaboration	flexibility/ adaptability
Problem Solving/ Critical Thinking	Pearson's r	0.427			
	p-value	< .001			
Teamwork/ Collaboration	Pearson's r	0.318	0.170		
	p-value	0.003	0.113		
Flexibility/ Adaptability	Pearson's r	0.408	0.284	0.162	
	p-value	< .001	0.013	0.171	
Communication	Pearson's r	0.319	0.370	0.600	0.262
	p-value	0.004	< .001	< .001	0.030

There were several statistically significant relationships among the variables related to skill emphasis in high school education (see Table 14). Firstly, Dependability shows a significant positive correlation with Problem Solving/Critical Thinking ($r = 0.427$, $p < .001$), suggesting that students who perceived a higher emphasis on dependability in high school also tended to perceive a stronger emphasis on problem-solving and critical thinking. Secondly, Teamwork/Collaboration exhibits a positive correlation with Dependability ($r = 0.318$, $p = 0.003$) but not with Problem Solving/Critical Thinking, indicating a specific association between

teamwork emphasis and dependability perception. Additionally, Flexibility/Adaptability correlates significantly with Dependability ($r = 0.408$, $p < .001$) and Problem Solving/Critical Thinking ($r = 0.284$, $p = 0.013$), highlighting the interconnectedness of these skills. Lastly, Communication demonstrates positive correlations with all other skills: Dependability ($r = 0.319$, $p = 0.004$), Problem Solving/Critical Thinking ($r = 0.370$, $p < .001$), Teamwork/Collaboration ($r = 0.600$, $p < .001$), and Flexibility/Adaptability ($r = 0.262$, $p = 0.030$). These findings suggest that students who perceived a higher emphasis on communication skills in high school also tended to perceive a stronger emphasis on other skills.

College Preparedness and Skills

A regression was conducted to assess the relationship between students' perceived college preparedness upon high school graduation and various factors related to educational emphasis (see Table 15). The dependent variable was how prepared for college a student felt upon graduating from high school, rated on a scale of 1 to 5. The model summary demonstrated that the predictors (key skills desired by employers) account for a small proportion of the variance in feelings of college preparedness, with an adjusted R-squared value of 0.062. The adjusted R-squared value is used here as it is a more conservative measure since it accounts for the number of predictors in the model. In this case, since there are five key skills in the model, it would account for this in addition to the sample size. This value estimated that only approximately 6.2% of the variability in college preparedness was explained by the emphasis on the five key skills desired by employers in high school. Therefore, the overall regression model is not statistically significant, as indicated by the F-value of 1.822 and a corresponding p-value of 0.123, which is greater than the 0.05 alpha level. In addition to the lack of significance in the overall model, none of the individual skills desired by employers have statistical significance in

their relationship to predicting perceived college preparedness. This is demonstrated by the p-values all exceeding the .05 alpha level.

A post-hoc power analysis was completed in G*Power to ensure the sample size was robust enough to correctly reject a null hypothesis when it is false (Erdefelder, Faul, & Buchner, 1996). The post-hoc analysis resulted in a statistical power of 0.862 for this regression which indicated a relatively high level of statistical power. Here, this means that the regression model has a good ability to detect significant relationships between the variables. This means that the model is likely to correctly identify meaningful associations or effects in the data. Generally, a power of 0.80 or higher is considered desirable in statistical analyses, as it indicates a relatively low risk of Type II error (Kang, 2021).

Table 15. College Preparedness

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	RMSE
H_0	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.834
H_1	0.371	0.138	0.062	0.807

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
H_1	Regression	5.935	5	1.187	1.822	0.123
	Residual	37.144	57	0.652		
	Total	43.079	62			

Note. The intercept model is omitted, as no meaningful information can be shown.

Model		Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized	t	p
H_0	(Intercept)	3.175	0.105		30.229	< .001
H_1	(Intercept)	1.727	0.533		3.241	0.002
	Dependability Emphasis	0.044	0.119	0.054	0.373	0.710
	Critical Thinking/Problem Solving Emphasis	0.081	0.134	0.083	0.602	0.550
	Teamwork/Collaboration Emphasis	0.253	0.137	0.286	1.856	0.069
	Flexibility/Adaptability Emphasis	-0.011	0.102	-0.015	-0.106	0.916
	Communication Skills Emphasis	0.035	0.115	0.047	0.308	0.759

Another regression was conducted to assess the relationship between students' perceived college preparedness upon high school graduation and the extent to which a student's high school education emphasized hard skills and soft skills (see Table 16). The dependent variable was how prepared a student felt for college after graduating high school. This regression analysis examines the relationship between feelings of preparedness for college upon high school graduation and the emphasis placed on hard skills and soft skills in high school. The adjusted R-squared value of 0.352 demonstrated that approximately 35.2% of the variability in perceived college preparedness was accounted for by the emphasis on hard and soft skills in a student's high school education. This is confirmed by the ANOVA table that shows the F-value of 24.370 and the p-value <0.001, which demonstrates that the regression model is statistically significant. When analyzing the individual variables, both the emphasis on hard skills and soft skills result in statistically significant relationships with perceived college preparedness. This means that the emphasis on soft skills and the emphasis on hard skills individually (and positively) contribute to perceived college preparedness.

A post-hoc power analysis was also completed for this regression to ensure the sample size was robust enough to correctly reject a null hypothesis. The post-hoc analysis resulted in a statistical power of 0.999 for this regression which indicated a very high level of statistical power.

Table 16. College Preparedness After High School

Model Summary – College Preparedness After High School Graduation.

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	RMSE
H_0	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.958
H_1	0.606	0.367	0.352	0.771

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
H_1	Regression	29.003	2	14.502	24.370	< .001
	Residual	49.985	84	0.595		
	Total	78.989	86			

Note. The intercept model is omitted, as no meaningful information can be shown.

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized	t	p
H_0	(Intercept)	2.989	0.103		29.086	< .001
H_1	(Intercept)	-0.102	0.459		-0.222	0.825
	Hard Skill Emphasis	0.438	0.092	0.415	4.743	< .001
	Soft Skill Emphasis	0.511	0.090	0.494	5.649	< .001

Qualitative Results

According to the survey results, college students identified a range of skills they wished they had learned during their high school education. The responses were categorized based on the prominent skill(s) explicitly mentioned and by the operationalization of the skills. Although the soft skills were expanded into eighteen skill categories, hard skills were only mentioned five times and remain in their own category. The most frequently mentioned skill was financial literacy, with 32 responses emphasizing the need for education on budgeting and financial management. Additionally, 17 respondents expressed a desire for practical life skills, such as becoming independent and learning tasks like cooking and sewing. Communication skills were highlighted by 17 participants, with a specific focus on effective and context-specific communication. Professionalism, time management, and organization were also mentioned, reflecting a desire for a more comprehensive education in these areas. Other skills mentioned included learning strategies, genuine teamwork experiences, problem-solving, self-improvement, leadership, community engagement, emotional intelligence, networking, and a balanced emphasis on enthusiasm for learning. Some students also underscored the importance of education on research, health and wellness, and college readiness.

Table 17. Derived Skills

Derived Skill	Quantity of Responses	Sample Response
Financial Literacy	32	I wish that high school taught finance or at least the basics to budgeting your money.
Life Skills	17	To learn more about how to become independent, an actually undergo the process of becoming an adult. Home-ec like cooking or sewing would be helpful now.
Communication	17	I wish in high school we spoke or were taught effective communication more. More towards how to speak effectively and properly depending on the circumstances.
Professionalism	13	More emphasis on life after high school like how to get a job or act professionally. Even how to buy a house or how to cook. Felt like a lot of

		info I learned was dumped the second I graduated.
Time Management	6	How to be better at time management
Hard Skills	5	I definitely feel like a bigger emphasis on hard skills would've been a lot more beneficial for me in high school, especially the math aspect because being financially smart is a huge thing to get through life without debt.
Learning Strategies	4	I wish I would have learned how to study the correct way
Collaboration/Teamwork	4	Team work (but real teamwork, most group projects devolve into everyone splitting up and doing their own thing without unison)
Problem Solving	3	I think it would've been incredibly helpful if schools

		focused on more of a problem-posing model of education that allows students to develop more soft skills through discussion and thinking critically about their experiences, then allowing them to have agency over their future and recognize oppressive power structures. It would also help develop critical literacy for media or new knowledge. I feel like most students graduate unaware of systems that affect them and the means to freely think about anything other than the rigid status quo still being reinforced today. I think I could've been in a much better position in my life today had I been given

		the tools to practice these skills.
Self-Improvement	2	Working for the good of yourself and not the grade.
Leadership	2	Leadership and Confidence
Community Engagement	2	Sometimes the students were often labeled as either good or bad, I think it really puts in how competent a person becomes. Therefore I think a class in social behavior especially for school is rough neighborhoods.
Emotional Intelligence	2	Emotional intelligence and understanding of adult tasks such as taxes and resumes for jobs
Networking	2	Learn how to talk in public, how to be confident and how to network.
Enthusiasm	1	I wish I learned more about the fun side of school, rather than just academics

Research	1	How to improve your local community, how to exercise a joy in learning, how to do independent research, why the hard skills learned are important
Health/Wellness	1	I also wish high school taught better courses on understanding our own health and wellness.
College Readiness	1	I think highschool should prepare us more for College and talk about how financial aid works. I also think Driver's ED should be a required course or let it be available for all students.
Organization	1	Being organized

Chapter 5: Discussion

The objective of this study was to explore the preferences of recent high school graduates in Nevada, focusing on the knowledge, skills, and competencies they wished to have gained during their high school education to facilitate personal growth and professional development. More specifically, the research sought to identify any particular skills that these graduates believed should have been emphasized more in high school, contributing to enhanced academic achievement, professional success, and personal development. Utilizing a mixed-methods research design, the study aimed to capture the perspectives of college students in Nevada, assessing their desired skills and knowledge from high school to ascertain alignment with established educational standards. The mixed-methods approach is seen throughout the research, but primarily through the strategic survey design and the analysis of the results (Schooneboom & Johsnon, 2017). This research primarily utilized quantitative analyses, and used the qualitative analyses to compliment them- a deductive simultaneous design (Morse & Niehaus, 2009). The survey is designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative simultaneously and in consistent, yet complimentary ways. In terms of the results, the qualitative results in this study support the quantitative findings. Students perceive a greater emphasis on hard skills within their high school education (a statistically significant mean difference between hard and soft skills emphasis), and their qualitative results lend themselves to desiring greater soft skills within their high school education. This dichotomy presents itself throughout both the qualitative and quantitative results, and are used in tandem to present the findings of this research.

The quantitative findings largely showed that within the high school curriculum, there is a primary emphasis on hard skills. The mean differences between hard skill emphasis and soft skill emphasis in this sample's perceived high school education was statistically significant. Therefore, students report that their high school education predominantly focused on hard skills.

This also aligns with how the literature perceives soft skills, and the emphasis on hard skills to better align with the operationalization of those skills on standardized tests (Duckworth, Quinn, & Tsukayama, 2012). The qualitative results supported this finding, by demonstrating that almost all of the students desired more soft skills in their high school education. The top-reported skills that were missing from the sample's high school education were all soft skills. More specifically, students wish there was more emphasis on financial literacy, professionalism, communication, and life skills within their high school education. These qualitative findings fill in the gaps by demonstrating what soft skills should be implemented in high school in order to increase student's perceived preparedness for life, college, and their professional careers.

This study on recent high school graduates in Nevada revealed a moderate emphasis on hard skills and a slightly lower emphasis on soft skills in the respondents' high school education. The findings emphasized the significance of a balanced approach to skill development, highlighting a correlation between skills emphasized in high school and perceived college preparedness. Graduates expressed a need for financial literacy, life skills, effective communication, and professionalism, suggesting potential gaps between existing standards and students' practical needs. The study aligned with the evolving employment realm, emphasizing the growing importance of soft skills alongside hard skills. Insights from student voice theory underscored the value of actively involving students in decision-making processes, advocating for a more student-centric approach to education.

Skill Perception

The results of this research are particularly relevant to a student's high school education, where the emphasis on both hard and soft skills plays a crucial role in shaping their overall development. Here, the moderate perceived emphasis on hard skills, with a mean score of 3.604,

aligned with the traditional focus on academic subjects. However, an opportunity exists to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, ensuring that students are not only well-versed in hard skills and subject matter but also equipped with the technical competencies needed for future success, whether in higher education or the workforce. The slightly lower perceived emphasis on soft skills (mean of 2.925) in high school education highlights an area for improvement. Soft skills are increasingly recognized as essential for success in various aspects of life, including interpersonal relationships, leadership roles, and professional settings. High school is a formative period where cultivating these skills can significantly benefit students in their future endeavors.

The specific emphasis on teamwork/collaboration with a mean score of 3.533 is particularly relevant to high school, as collaborative projects and group activities are common components of the high school curriculum. Fostering teamwork early on not only enhances social skills but also prepares students for the collaborative nature of many higher education programs and careers. A mean score of 3.533 indicates that many students felt that teamwork and collaboration was addressed in high school, but not highly emphasized. Knowing that this is a top skill for employers and college/readiness, it is a pivotal skill to incorporate at a greater level into the high school education. Similarly, the low emphasis on flexibility/adaptability (mean of 2.675) underscores the importance of incorporating scenarios and activities in high school education that challenge students to adapt to different situations. This can contribute to their resilience and ability to navigate the complexities of an ever-changing world.

Three-quarters of the participants had been employed after graduating from high school. Among those employed, 73.53% felt as though they were adequately prepared for their jobs. Although this research did not ask participants what fields they had been employed in, that could

be an opportunity for future research; connecting career readiness to high school learning outcomes is a relevant and relatively understudied topic. Based on the participants' college majors, the top industries students plan to enter are business, hospitality, and education. All of these fields require high levels of human interaction and therefore are highly connected to soft skill development. The participants' perspectives regarding the importance of skills for academic/professional success and daily life shed light on the prevailing stances towards soft and hard skills in the broader educational context. A prominent 48.98% of respondents expressed a preference for emphasizing soft skills, signaling a recognition of the pivotal role these interpersonal and adaptability skills play in navigating not only academic challenges but also in the complexities of daily life. This emphasis on soft skills suggests a growing awareness that success extends beyond the mastery of subject matter and that personal and social competencies are essential components of a well-rounded education. This means that approximately half of the participants thought that soft skills were more important than hard skills and should be emphasized more in a high school education.

Contrastingly, a mere 10.20% of participants advocated for the prioritization of hard skills. This relatively low percentage underscores a shift in perspectives, challenging the conventional notion that academic success is solely contingent on technical proficiency. The diminishing emphasis on hard skills in this context may be indicative of an evolving educational landscape where the ability to collaborate, communicate effectively, and adapt to diverse situations is increasingly valued alongside, if not more than, traditional academic proficiency. This shift also reflects the trends noted in the workforce. If the job market is favoring soft skills, and students are saying soft skills are more important for their academic, professional, and daily life, it is suggested that a student's high school education should reflect that shift.

Finally, 35.71% of respondents believed in the equal importance of both soft and hard skills. This balanced perspective reflects the understanding that a comprehensive education should equip individuals with a spectrum of competencies, blending the analytical and technical aspects with the interpersonal and practical skills. In a larger educational context, this balanced viewpoint advocates for an integrated approach that nurtures students holistically, preparing them not only for academic success but also for the multifaceted challenges they will encounter in various facets of life.

The correlations among emphasized skills, hold significant implications for educational strategies and curriculum development. The positive correlations discovered, such as the significant positive correlation between Dependability and Problem Solving/Critical Thinking, underscore the interconnected nature of how skills are emphasized in education. These connections highlight the idea that when one skill is highly emphasized in a high schooler's education, it is also highly likely another skill is paired with it. For example, as the results suggest, when dependability is taught in high school, problem solving/critical thinking is also likely taught. The correlated nature of these skills indicates that they are often emphasized congruently in education. This highlights the importance of adopting an integrated approach to education, where the development of various skills is not seen in isolation but as a cohesive and complementary set. Educators can leverage these correlations to design interdisciplinary learning experiences that reinforce multiple skills simultaneously, fostering an interconnected understanding among students.

The regression analyses are instrumental in thinking about the impact of hard and soft skills on education. Even though the first regression (the impact of the key skills in predicting perceived college preparedness) did not have a statistically significant model, it is useful in

understanding the multifaceted nature of education and curricula. Although these five factors did not significantly predict perceived college preparedness, there may be a model that incorporates these five skills (in addition to many others) that would not only be more representative of the various factors in the education system, but also be a more well-rounded model. This is what encouraged the second regression model. The second regression model examined the impact of a high school's emphasis on hard and soft skills on their perceived college preparedness upon graduating high school. Interestingly, here, the model was significant which means hard and soft skill emphasis within a high school education is predictive of perceived college preparedness. Not only was the overall model significant, but the individual skills were also both significantly predictive. By acknowledging the importance of both skill sets, educational stakeholders can design curriculum frameworks that integrate interdisciplinary learning experiences to ensure their high school education is well-equipped with both hard and soft skills.

The regression analyses highlighted the multifaceted nature of education, emphasizing the need for whole-student models that account for the diverse factors influencing student outcomes. By embracing a whole-student approach to curriculum design and educational practice, educators can empower students with the tools, competencies, and confidence needed to thrive in higher education and beyond.

Desired Skills

The qualitative findings from recent high school graduates provided insight into the skills they believe would have benefited them academically, professionally, and personally. Aligning with the quantitative findings, the perceived emphasis on hard skills, created a large gap in soft skill education, which led students to primarily desire soft skills. Almost all respondents noted a desire for more soft skill integration in their high school education. Considering there is a

statistically significant greater emphasis on hard skills in this sample's high school education, it is not surprising that they would crave a greater emphasis on soft skill development to feel prepared for college, the workforce, and life. These results also align with the workforce needs and emphasis on soft skills. If students are not learning these skills in school, it makes sense that the workforce would note a gap in soft skill development among new hires and employees.

The overwhelming demand for financial literacy skills, expressed by 32 respondents, highlighted the practical need for understanding budgeting and financial management. This resonates with the real-world challenges that young adults face as they navigate financial independence, emphasizing the importance of incorporating financial literacy into high school curricula to equip students with essential life skills. In connecting this to the Nevada Academic Content Standards, there are specific standards dedicated to financial literacy. Seeing the prominence of this response, and the various ways it was articulated by respondents, the prominence is likely due to the standards not aligning with the needs of students. The standards focus heavily on more math application, rather than a focus on real-life application, which could explain why students are still commonly reporting this as a need when it is addressed by their educational standards.

The emphasis on life skills, expressed by 17 respondents, encompasses a desire for knowledge on how to become independent and manage the responsibilities of adulthood. This includes practical skills such as cooking and sewing, suggesting a yearning for a more comprehensive education that prepares students for the practical aspects of daily life beyond academic and professional realms. There are no standards within the Nevada Academic Content Standards that address these competencies. This is an opportunity for improvement. Students leave their classrooms feeling unprepared for life. As the education system has moved to

increased models of standardization, it has left students feeling behind in pursuits that benefit them in everyday life.

Communication skills emerged as a crucial aspect for 17 respondents, with a desire for effective communication training tailored to various circumstances. This underscores the recognition that clear and articulate communication is fundamental not only in professional settings but also in personal and social interactions. The call for enhanced communication education points to the importance of a broader approach to skill development that goes beyond traditional subject matter. Although the Nevada Academic Content Standards address communication skills in many subject areas and competencies, students seem to be seeking specific skills related to communication that are not addressed. Based on the participants' responses, students desire communication skills related to professionalism, which are not explicitly addressed in the standards.

The desire for professionalism skills expressed by 13 respondents indicates a gap in preparing students for life after high school, encompassing aspects such as job-seeking, acting professionally, and resume development. This points to the importance of integrating practical professional skills into high school education, ensuring that students are equipped with the knowledge and skills needed for a successful transition into adulthood. Skills for professionalism are indistinctly addressed in the Nevada Academic Content Standards, but are covered at great length for the Employability Standards for Career and Technical Education (CTE) Programs. Since students are reporting a great need for increased professionalism skills development in high school, it would be encouraged to replicate the Employability Skills Standards and make them accessible for all students, rather than just those in CTE programs.

The qualitative responses also highlight the importance of soft skills such as collaboration/teamwork, problem-solving, and emotional intelligence. These skills are seen as essential for personal growth and navigating complex societal structures. The call for a problem-posing model of education that fosters critical thinking and awareness of power structures reflects a desire for a more dynamic and engaging learning experience that goes beyond rote memorization. Some of these skills are addressed inconsistently throughout the Nevada Academic Content Standards, but Problem Solving/Critical Thinking is heavily addressed throughout these standards. This skill is noted as one of the top competencies required in high school, and therefore heavily emphasized in the standards. Based on the student responses, it seems that their desire for problem solving and critical thinking goes beyond a word problem in math, but rather having a more significant life application. With a greater emphasis in life skills in education, this skill would likely develop naturally.

These qualitative results highlight the importance of a comprehensive education that goes beyond the traditional emphasis on hard skills. These desired skills challenge the current education system, but quantifying actual skills that students need for life. The expressed desires for practical life skills, effective communication, and a broader range of soft skills point to a need for educational reform that aligns with the evolving demands of the workforce and society. Incorporating these insights into curriculum development can better prepare students for the challenges and opportunities they will encounter in their academic, professional, and personal journeys.

Research Connections

The research findings on recent high school graduates in Nevada align with the broader context of the evolving employment landscape, emphasizing the growing importance of soft

skills in the professional realm. The shift in hiring practices, recognizing the significance of not only academic prowess but also robust soft skills (Kameg et al., 2010), resonates with the aspirations expressed by high school graduates for a more balanced emphasis on both hard and soft skills. This aligns with the current paradigm in the workforce, emphasizing a comprehensive skill set that includes not just technical competencies but also interpersonal and adaptability skills. The study underscores the need for soft skills, such as dependability, problem-solving, teamwork, flexibility, and communication, aligning with existing literature (Tulgan, 2015; Evenson, 1999). These skills correlate with those identified by the Perkins Collaborative Resource Network as essential employability skills (Employability Skills, n.d.). The growing acknowledgment of the rise in automation and its impact on job roles further highlights the increasing importance of soft skills in shaping the emerging organizational structure (Brungardt, 2011). As technology replaces routine tasks, the emphasis on complex and intricate soft skills becomes essential for navigating the dynamic demands of the modern workplace (Guerra-Baez, 2019). The readiness gap identified in the study reflects a broader challenge in the workforce, emphasizing the need for curricular reform to better align with contemporary demands (Reis, 2018). The call for frequent curriculum reviews and dynamic reforms is consistent with the shift towards Outcome-Based Education (OBE) proposed by Spady (1994), highlighting the importance of aligning educational outcomes with the skills and knowledge needed for success in the workforce. If this alignment was done in Nevada, the desired skills by the students (that also aligned with the desired skills of the workforce) would be better addressed in an educational setting. The curriculum would address the soft skills outlined by the student, because those are the needs of society today. The identified discrepancy in high school emphasis on skills, as revealed through this research, resonates with previous studies (Gonsalves et al., 2019) that

highlight identity conflicts for students navigating between distinct skill orientations. This reinforces the need for a more balanced approach to skill development that acknowledges the importance of both hard and soft skills in preparing students for their future.

Student Voice Theory

In recent years, societal paradigms have shifted towards recognizing the vital role of soft skills in preparing students for the dynamic demands of the modern workforce. By actively involving students in decision-making processes, the research aimed to address what skills students desired to acquire while in high school to promote a more comprehensive and student-centric approach to education. The research acknowledged a noticeable deficit in soft skills among new employees, prompting an exploration of students' unique perspectives on the workings of the educational system. Drawing on student voice theory, the research suggested that students are well-positioned to offer valuable insights into what may or may not be working within the educational landscape. Studies by Brasof and Spector (2016), Kirshner et al. (2003), Eccles and Gootman (2002), Zeldin (2004), and Zeldin et al. (2005) supported the idea that involving young individuals in decision-making processes could enhance the envisioning and strategic planning for organizational change, particularly in terms of creating educational systems that benefit students and what they feel they need to learn.

Student voice theory underscored the importance of soliciting students' ideas and considering their perspectives to improve educational experiences. The research advocated for efforts to amplify student voices, such as establishing committees (Fielding, 2001; Mitra, 2004). These initiatives demonstrated various forms of organizational change, translating the impact of student voice into modifications in both practice and policy. Studies by Baroutsis et al. (2016), Fielding (2001, 2004), Levin (2000), Smyth (2006), and Taines (2012) showcased the tangible

benefits of incorporating student input in creating more captivating and efficient learning experiences. Struggling students often pinpointed issues related to school structure, classroom procedures, and limited opportunities to establish meaningful relationships with adults. Their perspectives, as highlighted in the research (Colatos and Morrell, 2003; Nieto, 1994; Soohoo, 1993), played a crucial role in identifying and addressing challenges faced by students grappling with educational obstacles. This student-centric approach provided a detailed understanding of what issues students actually face, rather than placing these narratives on them without their input.

Dana Mitra's pyramid of student voice typology and Roger Hart's Ladder of Children's Participation provided frameworks to understand the varying degrees of student power and collaboration between children and adults. These models highlighted the importance of increasing student agency and leadership, challenging traditional power dynamics, and creating collaborative relationships. By adopting such frameworks, the research sought to enhance student engagement and foster a sense of ownership in their educational journeys. This research was student-centered from start to finish. They not only provided their input on what questions should be asked and how to word them to be understood by their peers, but also provided their personal perspectives on what they wish they received from their high school education.

The integration of student voice theory into research on soft skills among Nevada's recent high school graduates reveals a promising avenue for educational reform. By actively involving students in decision-making processes and seeking their input throughout the process, educators and policymakers can harness the unique insights of students to address soft skills deficits, enhance educational experiences, and create more responsive and engaging learning

environments. Especially since students are education's largest stakeholders, their voice is critical in conversations around educational decision-making.

Research Implications

The findings of this research carry several practical implications that can significantly influence educational practices, policy-making, and institutional strategies to better equip high school graduates in Nevada for their future endeavors. Firstly, the insights derived from the study can guide curriculum design and reform. By recognizing the importance of incorporating both hard and soft skills with a balanced approach, educators can enhance existing programs or introduce new ones that align more closely with the evolving demands of the workforce. Even if the higher-level policies do not change to re-shape curricula, educators can place greater emphasis on teaching these skills within the existing curriculum. The study provided specific skills, such as teamwork, flexibility, and communication, that can be integrated into high school curricula to foster a more comprehensive and relevant learning experience. The study also emphasized the principles of Student Voice theory, advocating for active student participation in decision-making processes. Policymakers and institutions can use this insight to ensure that students' perspectives are considered when shaping educational policies, fostering a more inclusive and student-centric learning environment. Since students are the most prominent stakeholder in education, it is critical their perspectives are considered when making educational decisions. Ideally, they would have a more active role in shaping policies and developing curricula that better fit their needs.

Another practical implication lies in the realm of college and career readiness programs. Institutions can use the research findings to refine or develop programs that specifically target the identified skills, better preparing students for the transition from high school to higher

education or the workforce. The emphasis on soft skills highlights the importance of employability skills, suggesting the need for workshops, seminars, or specific courses that focus on teamwork, communication, leadership, life skills, financial literacy, and problem-solving. These skills should be better represented in the Nevada Academic Content Standards to ensure all students are receiving an equitable education that prepares them for life outside of the classroom. This is a new take on the 'whole-student' approach, because it is not just important for policy-makers to identify what students need and then enact regulations that cover those needs, but also considers the voices of the students when evaluating what the needs are and how they can be met.

Limitations and Future Research

As with any study, it was important to consider potential limitations and ethical considerations that may have arisen with this research. This study adhered to ethical guidelines and protocols, including obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring their anonymity and confidentiality, and obtaining institutional approvals as required. Participants had the right to withdraw at any point during the study without repercussions. Additionally, prior to collecting data, the researcher gained IRB approval.

This research, while comprehensive and methodical, had several limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the sample primarily consisted of first and second-year students within the College of Education at UNLV. While efforts were made to ensure diversity within this group, this selection may not have fully represented the broader UNLV student population, nor accounted for the unique perspectives of students in other colleges or those at different stages of their academic journey. Additionally, the research faced potential response bias, as survey participation was voluntary. Students who chose to participate may have possessed distinct

motivations or viewpoints compared to those who opted out, possibly affecting the generalizability of the findings. A further limitation related to recall bias. Given that participants were reflecting on their high school experiences, there was a risk that their memories may have been influenced by their current college encounters, which could potentially impact the accuracy of their responses. While the research aimed to identify the skills students wished they had acquired in high school, it may not have delved deeply into the underlying reasons behind these desires. The qualitative analysis could provide insight into what skills were perceived as lacking (according to the students in the sample), but it may not have fully explored the root causes of these gaps. Although Student Voice Theory did not require a deep exploration of the 'why' behind every student perspective, this could be an opportunity for future research to connect the gaps between what students needed in their education and why those needs were not fulfilled.

There was also a potential for bias in the interpretation and coding of open-ended responses by researchers. Despite efforts to ensure consistency, subjectivity may have influenced the identification and categorization of themes from these responses. The researcher was an instructor for first and second-year students, some of which may have elected to participate in the survey. Therefore, it was critical to attempt to remove any personal aspects of the responses and be as objective as possible when conducting thematic coding and dissecting the responses, which was safeguarded by the fact that no identifying information was provided on the survey, so the researcher could not link any individual responses to specific students.

Building upon the insights gained from this research, future studies should delve deeper into the nuanced dynamics of skill development in high school education, particularly exploring the long-term impact of enhanced hard and soft skills on students' academic, professional, and personal trajectories. A longitudinal study tracking the progress of individuals who experienced a

curriculum enriched with the identified skills could provide valuable insights into the sustained effects of such educational emphasis. Additionally, a comparative analysis between schools that have integrated these skills into their curricula and those that have not could offer a comprehensive understanding of the outcomes and benefits associated with skill-focused education. Future research could also investigate the role of parental involvement, after-school activities, and community support in reinforcing the development of these skills, considering them as external factors influencing students' educational experiences.

Surprisingly, the regression analysis indicated a lack of a significant correlation between students' perceptions of their schools addressing soft skills and their preparedness for college and career. This suggests that, despite some level of instructional focus on soft skills, the impact of such education may not have been substantial enough to significantly influence students' readiness for higher education and the workforce. This unexpected finding highlights the necessity for a more thorough examination of the effectiveness and intensity of soft skills instruction in high schools. Despite the majority of students expressing the view that emphasizing soft skills in education is crucial, the regression analysis demonstrated no significant relationship between those who reported their schools addressing soft skills and their level of college and career preparedness. This discrepancy may be attributed to the possibility that, although schools provided some instruction on these skills, it might not have been delivered at an intensity sufficient to yield a significant impact on students' overall readiness.

Conclusion

The findings from this study of recent high school graduates in Nevada shed light on crucial aspects of their educational experiences, preferences, and perceived preparedness for college and careers. The research underscored a nuanced balance in the emphasis on hard and

soft skills during high school, with a current moderate focus on hard skills and a lower emphasis on soft skills. Notably, the identified gap between the perceived importance of soft skills and their relative emphasis in high school education highlights the need for a more targeted and intensified approach to soft skills instruction. The study's alignment with existing literature, particularly in the context of the evolving employment realm and the growing recognition of soft skills' significance, reinforces the broader discussion on educational reforms. The integration of student voice theory provided a valuable dimension, emphasizing the importance of actively involving students in decision-making processes to bridge gaps between existing curricula and students' practical needs. As the workforce continues to evolve, this research advocates for a more student-centric and skill-integrated approach to education, emphasizing a development strategy that adequately prepares students for the challenges and opportunities of higher education, professional pursuits, and everyday life.

Appendix A. Survey

INFORMED CONSENT

Department of Educational Psychology, Leadership, and Higher Education

---

TITLE OF STUDY: Using Student Voices to Direct Curricular Reform: Exploring High School Educational Desires to Improve Curricular Decisions

INVESTIGATOR(S): Anna Colquitt under Dr. Rebecca Nathanson

For questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Anna Colquitt at **anna.dreibelbis@unlv.edu.**

For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted, contact **the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-0020 or via email at IRB@unlv.edu.**

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

You are invited to participate in a research study. I sincerely appreciate your participation in this survey, which aims to gain valuable insights into the perspectives of first and second-year college students regarding their high school experiences and the skills or competencies they believe could have better prepared them for their current academic, professional, and personal pursuits.

PARTICIPANTS

You are being asked to participate in the study because you fit this criteria: a UNLV student in a first or second year seminar course that has graduated from high school.

PROCEDURES

Your participation is vital in helping me gather information that can contribute to educational improvements and policy changes. Your honest and thoughtful responses to this survey will provide valuable insights that can shape future educational strategies and curricular decisions. The survey is divided into several sections, each designed to gather specific information. These sections include questions about your demographic information, your high school experiences, the emphasis placed on various skills in your high school education, and your reflections on your high school preparation for college. The survey will also include an open-ended question at the end, where you can provide more detailed insights into the skills or competencies you believe you should have learned in high school.

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION

There may not be direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. However, we hope to learn what students desire to learn in high school in order to shape curricular reform in the future.

RISKS OF PARTICIPATION

There are risks involved in all research studies. This study may include only minimal risks, but I do not anticipate any risks from participating in this study.

COST /COMPENSATION

There may not be financial cost to you to participate in this study. The study will take approximately 20 to 40 minutes of your time. You will not be compensated for your time.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All information gathered in this study will be kept as confidential as possible. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a secure electronic database for five years after completion of the study. After the storage time the information gathered will be shredded and disposed of appropriately.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with UNLV. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT:

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I have been able to ask questions about the research study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me. By clicking the button below, you are indicating your consent to participate in this research.

Survey Questions

Section 1: Demographics

Q1 What is your age?

_____

Q2 What is your racial or ethnic identity (select all that apply)?

- ☐ Asian (1)
- ☐ Black or African American (2)
- ☐ Hispanic or Latino (3)
- ☐ Native American or Alaskan Native (4)
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (5)
- ☐ White (6)
- ☐ Two or More Races (7)
- ☐ Other (8)

Q3 Please specify your primary high school's location (city, state, country).

_____

Q4 What type of high school did you primarily attend?

- Public (1)
- Private (2)
- Charter/Magnet (3)
- Technical Academy (4)
- Homeschool (5)
- Other (6)

Display This Question:

If What type of high school did you primarily attend? = Other

Q5 Since you selected, 'Other' for your type of high school, please explain

_____

Q6 Did you participate in a Career and Technical Education (CTE) program in high school?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q7 Did you participate in any after school programs that specifically targeted workforce readiness, such as Junior Achievement or Gear Up?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Display This Question:

If Did you participate in any after school programs that specifically targeted workforce readiness,... = Yes

Q8 If 'yes', please specify what program you participated in.

_____

Q9 What is your current major or field of study at UNLV?

_____

Q10 Which year are you in at UNLV?

- First Year (1)
- Second Year (2)
- Other (3)

Q33 Hard Skill & Soft Skill Description:
Hard skills in education refer to the specific, measurable, and often technical abilities or knowledge that can be taught and assessed, such as mathematics, science, and computer programming. These skills typically have clear right and wrong answers. On the other hand, soft skills in education encompass a range of non-technical, interpersonal, and personal qualities like communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability.

Q11 On a scale of 1 to 5, how much do you think your high school emphasized hard skills? For your reference, hard skills are described above.
(1= Did not emphasize, 5 = Highly Emphasized).

Did Not Emphasize	A little	Neutral	A lot	Highly Emphasized
1	2	3	4	5

Q12 On a scale of 1 to 5, how much do you think your high school emphasized soft skills? For your reference, soft skills are described above.
(1= Did not emphasize, 5 = Highly Emphasized).

Did Not Emphasize	A little	Neutral	A lot	Highly Emphasized
1	2	3	4	5

Q32 Note: For the following questions, please respond with how much your school emphasized your development with the soft skills mentioned in the question.

Q13 How much do you think your high school education emphasized developing the skill of dependability?
Dependability refers to the ability of an individual to be reliable, accountable, and trustworthy in their interactions and commitments with others, demonstrating consistent and responsible behavior in a collaborative or team-based setting.
(1 = Not emphasized, 3 = Neutral, 5 = Strongly emphasized)

Not Emphasized	Slightly Emphasized	Neutral	Emphasized	Strongly Emphasized
1	2	3	4	5

Display This Question:

If How much do you think your high school education emphasized developing the skill of dependability... [.] >= 2

Q14 Since you selected a 2 or higher (indicating Dependability was emphasized in your high school education), in what way was this skill emphasized? Choose the primary mode of instruction.

- Direct Instruction (i.e. the skill was taught through formal curriculum and/or academic lessons) (1)
- Modeling (i.e. teachers demonstrated the skill for students, but it was not directly taught) (2)
- Indirect instruction (i.e. the skills were emphasized in school policies and principles but the development of this skill was not a part of learning) (3)

Q15 How much do you think your high school education emphasized problem-solving/ critical thinking skills?
Problem-solving and critical thinking skills encompass the ability to analyze, evaluate, and devise effective solutions to complex issues or challenges through logical and systematic thought processes.
(1 = Not emphasized, 3 = Neutral, 5 = Strongly emphasized)

Not Emphasized	Slightly Emphasized	Neutral	Emphasized	Strongly Emphasized
1	2	3	4	5

Display This Question:

If How much do you think your high school education emphasized problem-solving/ critical thinking sk... [.] >= 2

Q16 Since you selected a 2 or higher (indicating problem solving/critical thinking was emphasized in your high school education), in what way was this skill emphasized? Choose the primary mode of instruction.

- Direct Instruction (i.e. the skill was taught through formal curriculum and/or academic lessons) (1)
- Modeling (i.e. teachers demonstrated the skill for students, but it was not directly taught) (2)
- Indirect instruction (i.e. the skills were emphasized in school policies and principles but the development of this skill was not a part of learning) (3)

Q17 How much do you think your high school education emphasized teamwork/collaboration? This skill involves the ability to collaborate effectively with others, leveraging individual strengths, and fostering a cohesive and cooperative environment to achieve shared goals or objectives.
(1 = Not emphasized, 3 = Neutral, 5 = Strongly emphasized)

Not Emphasized	Slightly Emphasized	Neutral	Emphasized	Strongly Emphasized
1	2	3	4	5

Display This Question:

If How much do you think your high school education emphasized teamwork/collaboration? This skill in... [.] >= 2

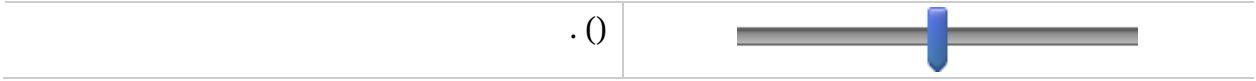
Q18 Since you selected a 2 or higher (indicating teamwork/collaboration was emphasized in your high school education), in what way was this skill emphasized? Choose the primary mode of instruction.

- ○ Direct Instruction (i.e. the skill was taught through formal curriculum and/or academic lessons) (1)
- ○ Modeling (i.e. teachers demonstrated the skill for students, but it was not directly taught) (2)
- ○ Indirect instruction (i.e. the skills were emphasized in school policies and principles but the development of this skill was not a part of learning) (3)

Q19 How much do you think your high school education emphasized flexibility/adaptability? Flexibility/adaptability is the capacity to adjust and thrive in the face of changing circumstances, demonstrating the ability to embrace new ideas, tasks, or roles with openness and resilience. (1 = Not emphasized, 3 = Neutral, 5 = Strongly emphasized)

Not Emphasized | Slightly Emphasized | Neutral | Emphasized | Strongly Emphasized

1 2 3 4 5



Display This Question:

If How much do you think your high school education emphasized flexibility/adaptability? Flexibility... [.] >= 2

Q20 Since you selected a 2 or higher (indicating flexibility/adaptability was emphasized in your high school education), in what way was this skill emphasized? Choose the primary mode of instruction.

- ○ Direct Instruction (i.e. the skill was taught through formal curriculum and/or academic lessons) (1)
- ○ Modeling (i.e. teachers demonstrated the skill for students, but it was not directly taught) (2)
- ○ Indirect instruction (i.e. the skills were emphasized in school policies and principles but the development of this skill was not a part of learning) (3)

Q21 How much do you think your high school education emphasized communication skills? Communication skills encompass the ability to convey and exchange information effectively, utilizing verbal, nonverbal, and written means to articulate ideas, thoughts, and emotions clearly and comprehensively.
(1 = Not emphasized, 3 = Neutral, 5 = Strongly emphasized)

	Not Emphasized	Slightly Emphasized	Neutral	Emphasized	Strongly Emphasized
	1	2	3	4	5
. ()					

Display This Question:

If How much do you think your high school education emphasized communication skills? Communication s... [.] >= 2

Q22 Since you selected a 2 or higher (indicating this skill was emphasized in your high school education), in what way was this skill emphasized? Choose the primary mode of instruction.

- Direct Instruction (i.e. the skill was taught through formal curriculum and/or academic lessons) (1)
- Modeling (i.e. teachers demonstrated the skill for students, but it was not directly taught) (2)
- Indirect instruction (i.e. the skills were emphasized in school policies and principles but the development of this skill was not a part of learning) (3)

Q23 How prepared for college did you feel when you graduated from high school?
(1 = Not at all Prepared, 3 = Adequately Prepared 5 = Very Prepared)

	Not Prepared		Adequately Prepared		Very Prepared
	1	2	3	4	5
. ()					

Q24 Have you been employed since graduating from high school?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Display This Question:

If Have you been employed since graduating from high school? = Yes

Q25 If you have worked after high school, did you feel adequately prepared for your job(s)?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q26 If you have been employed after high school, how much did high school contribute to you feeling adequately prepared for your job?
(1 = Did not contribute to me feeling prepared, 3 = Neutral, 5 = Highly contributed to me feeling prepared).

	Did Not Contribute	A little	Neutral	A lot	Highly Contributed
	1	2	3	4	5
. ()					

Q27 How helpful do you think it would be for high schools to focus more on...

	Not Helpful		Neutral		Very Helpful
	1	2	3	4	5
Hard Skills (Math, Programming, etc.) ()					
Soft Skills (Communication, Collaboration, etc.) ()					

Q28 Which of the two types of skills do you view as more important to emphasize in education for continual academic success, professional growth, and day-to-day life?

- ○ Hard Skills (1)
- ○ Soft Skills (2)
- ○ One is not more important than the other (3)

Q29 Please list and describe any specific skills or competencies you wish you had learned in high school that would have benefited you academically, professionally, or in your day-to-day life.

_____

References

A nation at risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform. (1983). https://edreform.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/A_Nation_At_Risk_1983.pdf

ACT. (2012). *The condition of college & career readiness*. Retrieved from https://www.act.org/research-policy/college-career-readiness-report-2012

Adecco Staffing, USA. (2020). *Impact of the American Skills Gap: Adecco USA*. Adecco Staffing, USA. Retrieved November 16, 2022, from https://www.adeccousa.com/employers/resources/skills-gap-in-the-american-workforce/

Almeida, F., & Morais, J. (2023). Strategies for Developing Soft Skills Among Higher Engineering Courses. Journal of Education, 203(1), 103–112. https://doi.org/10.1177/00220574211016417

Andrews, J., & Higson, H. (2008). Graduate Employability, 'Soft Skills' Versus 'Hard' Business Knowledge: A European Study, Higher Education in Europe, 33:4, 411-422, DOI: 10.1080/03797720802522627

Appleton, J. J., Christenson, S. L., & Furlong, M. J. (2008). Student engagement with school: Critical conceptual and methodological issues of the construct. *Psychology in the Schools*, *45*(5), 369–386. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.20303

Appleton, James & Christenson, Sandra & Furlong, Michael. (2008). Student engagement with school: Critical conceptual and methodological issues of the construct. Psychology in the Schools. 45. 369 - 386. 10.1002/pits.20303.

Archambault, I., Janosz, M., Morizot, J., & Pagani, L. (2009). Adolescent behavioral, affective, and cognitive engagement in school: Relationship to dropout. *Journal of School Health*, *79*(9), 408–415. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1746-1561.2009.00428.x

Augsberger, A., Collins, M. E., & Gecker, W. (2017). Best practices for youth engagement in municipal government. *National Civic Review, 106*(1), 9-16.

Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology, 52,* 1–26. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.1

Bandura, A. (2006). Toward a psychology of human agency. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 1*(2), 164–180. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6916.2006.00011.x

Bandura, A., & National Inst of Mental Health. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory.* Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Baroutsis, A., McGregor, G., & Mills, M. (2016). Pedagogic voice: Student voice in teaching and engagement pedagogies. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society, 24*(1), 123-140.

Barton, A. & Tan, E. (2010) *We Be Burnin'!* Agency, Identity, and Science Learning, Journal of the Learning Sciences, 19:2, 187 229, DOI: 10.1080/10508400903530044

Bates. (2013). *Publisher: Youth On Board*. NCFP. https://www.ncfp.org/publishers/youth-on-board/

Bempechat, J., Kenny, M. E., Blustein, D., and Seltzer, J. R. (2014). "Fostering positive youth development through work-based learning: the Cristo-Rey model," in Engaging Youth in Schools: Empirically-Based Models to Guide Future Innovations. National Society for the Study of Education, Vol. 113, eds D. S. Shernoff and J. Bempechat (New York, NY: Teachers College Press), 232–252

Berg, S., Bradford, B., Robinson, D. B., & Wells, M. (2018). Got Health? Action researching a student-led health promotion program. *Canadian Journal of Action Research, 19*(1), 33–47.

Biddulph, M. (2011). Articulating student voice and facilitating curriculum agency. *The Curriculum Journal*, *22*(3), 381–399.

Biddulph, M. (2011). Articulating student voice and facilitating curriculum agency. *The Curriculum Journal*, *22*(3), 381–399.

Biesta, G. J. J. (2012). Philosophy of education for the public good: five challenges and an agenda. *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 44*(6), 581–593.

Binet, A., & Simon, T. (1916). *Development of intelligence in children*.

Bishop, J. H., & Mane, R. (2004). "The Impacts of Career-technical Education on High School Labor Market Success." Economics of Education Review, 23, 381-402.

Bloch, J., & Spataro, S. E. (2014). Cultivating critical-thinking dispositions throughout the business curriculum. *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, *77*(3), 249-265.

Bloemert, J., Paran, A., & Jansen, E. (2020). Connecting students and researchers: the secondary school student's voice in foreign language education research. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *50*(4), 429–449.

Boekaerts, Monique. (2011). Emotions, emotion regulation, and self-regulation of learning. Handbook of self-regulation of learning and performance. 408-425.

Boser, U. & Burd, S. (2009). Bridging the gap: How to strengthen the PK-16 pipeline to improve college readiness. New America Foundation.

Bragg, S. (2007) "It's Not about Systems, It's about Relationships": Building a Listening Culture in a Primary School. In: Thiessen, D. and Cook-Sather, A., Eds., International Handbook of Student Experience in Elementary and Secondary School, Springer. Dordrecht, 659-680. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/1-4020-3367-2_26.

Brasof, M., & Levitan, J. (2022). Student Voice Research: Theory, Methods, and Innovations From the Field.

Brasof, M., & Spector, A. (2016). Teach students about civics through schoolwide governance. Phi Delta Kappan, 97(7), 63–68. https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721716641652

Bron, J. G. (2014). What students want to learn? Involving students in negotiating the social studies classroom curriculum. *Journal of International Social Studies*, *4*(1), 3–16.

Brown, B. L. (2003). CTE and work-based learning (ERIC Digest no. 252). ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult Career and Vocational Education. ED482334.

Brungardt, C. (2011). The intersection between soft skill development and leadership education. *Journal of Leadership Education*, *10*(1), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.12806/v10/i1/rf1

Burke, C. & Könings, K. (2016) Recovering lost histories of educational design: a case study in contemporary participatory strategies, Oxford Review of Education, 42:6, 721-732, DOI: 10.1080/03054985.2016.1232244

Casner-Lotto, J., & Barrington, L. (2006). *Are They Really Ready to Work? Employers' Perspectives on the Basic Knowledge and Applied Skills Of New Entrants to the 21st Century US Workforce*. Washington, DC: Partnership for 21st Century Skills, Corporate Voices for Families, and the Society for Human Resource Management.

Chang, Y., & Brickman, P. (2018). When Group Work Doesn't Work: Insights from Students. CBE Life Sci Educ. 17(3):ar42. doi: 10.1187/cbe.17-09-0199. PMID: 30183565; PMCID: PMC6234829.

Cheng, A. (2012). Student voice in a Chinese context: Investigating the key elements of leadership that enhance student voice. International Journal of Leadership in Education. 15. 10.1080/13603124.2011.635809.

Chhuon, V., & Wallace, T. L. (2014). Creating connectedness through being known: Fulfilling the need to belong in US high schools. *Youth & Society*, *46*(3), 379-401.

Chopra, C. H. (2016). Creating a shared ownership for learning: Instructionally focused partnerships. International Journal of Student Voice, 1 (1).

Code, J. R. (2010). *Assessing Agency for Learning: Agency for Learning and Measuring Agency for Learning: Validating the Agency for Learning Questionnaire (AFLQ) and agency as a mediator of academic achievement*. Summit Research Repository. https://summit.sfu.ca/item/11308

Colatos A. M., & Morrell E. (2003). Apprenticing urban youth as critical researchers: Implications for increasing equity and access in diverse urban schools. In Rubin B. & Silva E. (Eds.), *Critical voices in school reform: Students living through change* (pp. 113–131). London, England: RoutlegeFalmer.

Coll, L., O'Sullivan, M., & Enright, E. (2018). 'The trouble with normal': (re)imagining sexuality education with young people. *Sex education*, *18*(2), 157–171.

Coll, L., O'Sullivan, M., & Enright, E. (2018). 'The trouble with normal': (re)imagining sexuality education with young people. *Sex education*, *18*(2), 157–171.

Connell, J.P., Spencer, M.B. and Aber, J.L. (1994) Educational Risk and Resilience in African-American Youth: Context, Self, Action, and Outcomes in School. Child Development, 65, 493-506. https://doi.org/10.2307/1131398

Conner J. (2015). Student voice: A field coming of age. *Youth Voice Journal*, 5.

Conner, J. O., & Cosner, K. (2015). *Youth Change Agents: Comparing the sociopolitical identities of youth organizers and Youth Commissioners.* Democracy & Education. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1100132

Conner, J.O., Ober, C.N., & Brown, A.S. (2016). The Politics of Paternalism: Adult and Youth Perspectives on Youth Voice in Public Policy. Teachers College Record, 118, 1-48.

Conner, L. N. (2021). *Integrating STEM in higher education: Addressing global issues*. Routledge.

Cook-Sather, A. (2014). "The trajectory of student voice in educational research."

Cook-Sather, A., Bovill, C., & Felten, P. (2014). *Engaging students as partners in learning and teaching : A guide for faculty*. John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.

Cook-Sather, A. (2009). From traditional accountability to shared responsibility: The benefits and challenges of student consultants gathering midcourse feedback in college classrooms. *Assessment & evaluation in higher education*, *34*(2), 231-241.

Corbett, D., & Wilson, B. (1995). Make a difference with, not for, students: A plea to researchers and reformers. Educational Researcher, 24(5), 12-17.

Cothran, D. J., & Ennis, C. D. (2000). Building bridges to student engagement: Communicating respect and care for students in urban high schools. *Journal of Research & Development in Education, 33*(2), 106–117.

Crisis of confidence: Current college students do not feel prepared for the workforce. Center for Education Consumer Insights. (n.d.). https://cci.stradaeducation.org/report/crisis-of-confidence-current-college-students-do-not-feel-prepared-for-the-workforce/

Cushman, K. (2000). Students solving community problems: Serious learning takes on a new look. *Challenge journal: The journal of the Annenberg challenge, 4*(1).

Dale, C (2008), How to Win Friends & Influence People, Pocket, ISBN 978-0-671- 02703-2

Daniels, D. H. K., Kalkman, D. L., & McCombs, B. L. (2001). Young children's perspectives on learning and teacher practices in different classroom contexts.*Early Education and Development, 12*(2), 253–273.

Darche, S., Nayar, N., & Bracco, K. R. (2009). Work-Based Learning in California: Opportunities and Models for Expansion (Technical Report). San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

Day, C. (2011). Organizational democracy, trust and the progressive distribution of leadership. *C. Day, P. Sammons, K. Leithwood, D. Hopkins, Q. Gu with E. Ahtaridou, Successful School Leadership: Linking with Learning and Achievement*, 193-222.

DeKay, S. H. (2012). Interpersonal communication in the workplace: A largely unexplored region. *Business Communication Quarterly*, *75*(4), 449-452.

Deluca, S., & Rosenbaum, J. E. (2001). Individual agency and the life course: do low-SES students get less long-term payoff for their school efforts?. *Sociological Focus*, *34*(4), 357-376.

Duckworth, A. L., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2005). Self-Discipline Outdoes IQ in Predicting Academic Performance of Adolescents. Psychological Science, 16(12), 939–944. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2005.01641.x

Duckworth, Angela & Quinn, Patrick & Tsukayama, Eli. (2012). What No Child Left Behind Leaves Behind: The Roles of IQ and Self-Control in Predicting Standardized Achievement Test Scores and Report Card Grades. Journal of educational psychology. 104. 439-451. 10.1037/a0026280.

Dunleavy, J., Milton, P., & Crawford, C. (2010). The search for competence in the 21st century. *Quest Journal*, *2*, 1-8.

Durlak, J.A., Weissberg, R.P., Dymnicki, A.B., Taylor, R.D. and Schellinger, K.B. (2011), The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions. Child Development, 82: 405-432. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01564.x

Earles. (2003). In *Age, segregation and the rights of children*. https://doi.org/info:doi/

Eccles, & Gootman. (2002). *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*. https://doi.org/10.17226/10022

Ekstrom, R. B., Goertz, M. E., Pollack, J. M., & Rock, D. A. (1986). Who drops out of high school and why? Findings from a national study. Teachers College Record, 87(3), 356-373

Ellis, Kisling, & Hackworth (2014). Teaching Soft Skills Employers Need, Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 38:5, 433-453, DOI: 10.1080/10668926.2011.567143.

Employability Skills. PCRN: Employability skills. (n.d.). https://cte.ed.gov/initiatives/employability-skills-framework

Enright, E., & O'Sullivan, M. (2010). 'Can I do it in my pyjamas?' Negotiating a physical education curriculum with teenage girls. *European Physical Education Review*, *16*(3), 203–222.

Enright, E., & O'Sullivan, M. (2012). 'Producing different knowledge and producing knowledge differently': rethinking physical education research and practice through participatory visual methods. *Sport education and society*, *17*(1), 35–55.

Erdfelder, E., Faul, F., & Buchner, A. (1996). GPOWER: A general power analysis program. *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments & Computers, 28*(1), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.3758/BF03203630

Evenson, R. (1999). Soft skills, hard sell. *Techniques: Making Education & Career Connections*, 74(3), 29-31.

Farrington, C. A., Roderick, M., Allensworth, E., Nagaoka, J., Keyes, T. S., Johnson, D. W., & Beechum, N. O. (2012, May 31). *Teaching adolescents to become learners: The role of noncognitive factors in shaping school performance--A Critical Literature Review.* Consortium on Chicago School Research. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED542543

Felten, Peter & Bovill, Catherine & Cook-Sather,. (2014). Engaging students as partners in learning and teaching (1): benefits and challenges – what do we know?.

Fielding, M. (2001). Students as radical agents of change. Journal of Educational Change, 2(2), 123–141.

Fielding, M. (2004). Transformative approaches to student voice: Theoretical underpinnings, recalcitrant realities. British Educational Research Journal, 30(2), 295–311.

Fielding, M. (2006). "Leadership, radical student engagement and the necessity of person

Flores, K. L., Matkin, G. S., Burbach, M. E., Quinn, C. E., & Harding, H. (2012). Deficient critical thinking skills among college graduates: Implications for leadership. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *44*(2), 212-230.

Flutter, J., & Rudduck, J. (2004). Consulting pupils: What's in it for schools? London: Routledge.

Fredricks, J. A., Blumenfeld, P. C., & Paris, A. H. (2004). School engagement: Potential of the concept, state of the evidence. *Review of Educational Research*, *74*(1), 59–109. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543074001059

Fullan, M. (2016). The Meaning of Educational Change. *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, 28–41. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203986561-9

Furrer, Carrie & Skinner, Ellen. (2003). Sense of Relatedness as a Factor in Children's Academic Engagement and Performance. Journal of Educational Psychology. 95. 148-162. 10.1037/0022-0663.95.1.148.

Galloway, M., Conner, J., & Pope, D. (2013). Nonacademic Effects of Homework in Privileged, High-Performing High Schools. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, *81*(4), 490–510. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220973.2012.745469

Gemici, S., & Rojewski, J. W. (2010). Contributions of cooperative education in preparing atrisk students for post-high school transition. Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 15, 241–258.

Global talent trends. LinkedIn Talent Solutions. (n.d.). https://business.linkedin.com/talent-solutions/global-talent-trends

Goldstein, Jeffrey. (1999). Emergence as a Construct: History and Issues. Emergence. 1. 49-72. 10.1207/s15327000em0101_4. (O'Connor and Wong, 2002; Martin, 2003

Goleman, D. (1998). Working with emotional intelligence. New York: Bantam.

Gonsalves, J., Metchik, E. Y., Lynch, C., Belezos, C. N., & Richards, P. (2019). Optimizing service-learning for self-efficacy and learner empowerment. Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning 25, 19–41. doi: 10.3998/mjcsloa.3239521.0025.202

Goodenow, C. (1993). Classroom belonging among early adolescent students. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, *13*(1), 21–43. https://doi.org/10.1177/0272431693013001002

Goodlad, J. I., & McMannon, T. J. (1997). *The public purpose of education and schooling*. Jossey-Bass.

Gordon, M. D. (2008). Management Education and the Base of the Pyramid. Journal of Management Education, 32(6), 767–781. https://doi.org/10.1177/1052562908318329

Guerra-Báez, S.P. (2019). A panoramic review of soft skills training in university students. *Psicologia Escolar e Educacional*, 23, 1–10.

Halpern, R. (2006). After school matters in Chicago: Apprenticeship as a model for youth programming. Youth and Society, 38, 203-235.

Harris, A. (2004). Distributed leadership and school improvement: Leading or misleading?. *Educational management administration & leadership*, *32*(1), 11-24.

Hart, R. A. (1992). Children's Participation: From tokenism to citizenship (Rep. No. 4). Florence: UNICEF ICDC.

Hart, R. A. (2008). Stepping Back from 'The Ladder': Reflections on a Model of Participatory Work with Children. In A. Ried, B. Jensen, & V. Simovska (Eds.), Participation and learning (pp. 19-31). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.

Hase, Stewart & Kenyon, Chris. (2000). From andragogy to heutagogy. Ultibase Articles. 5. 1-10.

Hauseman, D. C. (2016). Youth-led community arts hubs: Self-determined learning in an out-of-school time (OST) program. *Cogent Education*, *3*(1), 1210492.

Havlicek, J., Lin, C. H., & Braun, M. T. (2016). Cultivating youth voice through participation in a foster youth advisory board: Perspectives of facilitators. *Children and Youth Services Review, 69*, 1-10.

Heckman, J., & Kautz, T. (2012). Hard evidence on soft skills. *Labour economics*, *19*(4), 451–464. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2012.05.014.

Heckman, J.J. (2008), SCHOOLS, SKILLS, AND SYNAPSES. Economic Inquiry, 46: 289-324. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1465-7295.2008.00163.x

Hewitt, S. (2008), "9 Soft Skills for Success". retrieved August 2008, from http:/ www.askmen.com/money/career_100/121_career.html

Hewitt, S. (2008), "9 Soft Skills for Success". retrieved August 2008, from http:/ www.askmen.com/money/career_100/121_career.html

Hilton SR, Slotnick HB (2008). Proto-professionalism: how professionalization occurs across the continuum of medical education. *Med Ed.* 2005;39:58–65.

Hoachlander, Gary. (2008). Bringing Industry to the Classroom. Educational leadership: journal of the Department of Supervision and Curriculum Development, N.E.A. 65.

Hodges, C. B., Moore, S., Lockee, B. B., Trust, T., & Bond, M. A. (2020). The difference between emergency remote teaching and online learning. *Educase Review, 27*. https://er.educause.edu/articles/2020/3/the-difference-between-emergency-remote-teaching-and-online-learning

Hoffman, N. (2011). Schooling in the workplace: How six of the world's best vocational education systems prepare young people for jobs and life. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Howley, D., & Tannehill, D. (2014). "Crazy ideas": Student involvement in negotiating and implementing the physical education curriculum in the irish senior cycle. *Physical Educator, 71*(3), 391–416.

Hughes, K. L. Bailey, T. R., & Mechur, M. J. (2001). School-to-Work: Making a Difference in Education. A Research Report to America. New York, NY: Institute on Education and the Economy, Teachers College, Columbia University

Hughes, K. L., Moore, D. T., & Bailey, T. R. (1999). Work-Based Learning and Academic Skills (IEE #15). New York, NY: Institute on Education and the Economy, Teachers College, Columbia University.

Hyslop-Margison, E. J. (2008). Constructivism and education: Misunderstandings and pedagogical implications. *The Teacher Educator, 43*(1), 72–86. https://doi.org/10.1080/08878730701728945

Ito, M., Gutiérrez, K., Livingstone, S., Penuel, B., Rhodes, J., Salen, K., ... & Watkins, S. C. (2013). *Connected learning: An agenda for research and design*. Digital Media and Learning Research Hub.

Jain, S., & Dowson, M. (2009). Mathematics anxiety as a function of multidimensional self-regulation and self-efficacy. Contemp. Educ. Psychol. 34, 240–249.

Jansen, R., van Leeuwen, A., Janssen, J., Jak, S., and Kester, L. (2019). Self-regulated learning partially mediates the effect of self-regulated learning interventions on achievement in higher education: a meta-analysis. Educ. Res. Rev. 28:100292. doi: 10.1016/j.edurev.2019.100292

Jean Rudduck & Michael Fielding (2006) Student voice and the perils of popularity, Educational Review, 58:2, 219-231, DOI: 10.1080/00131910600584207

Johnson D. W., Johnson R. T. (2009). An educational psychology success story: Social interdependence theory and cooperative learning. *Educational Researcher*, (5), 365–379.

Johnston, P. H., & Nicholls, J. G. (1995). Voices We Want to Hear and Voices We Don't. *Theory Into Practice*, *34*(2), 94–100. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1476957

Kameg, Howard, V. M., Clochesy, J., Mitchell, A. M., & Suresky, J. M. (2010). The Impact of High Fidelity Human Simulation on Self-Efficacy of Communication Skills. Issues in Mental Health Nursing, 31(5), 315–323. https://doi.org/10.3109/01612840903420331

Kang H. (2021). Sample size determination and power analysis using the G*Power software. *Journal of educational evaluation for health professions*, *18*, 17. https://doi.org/10.3352/jeehp.2021.18.17

Kelly, J. (2022). *U.S. lost over 60 million jobs-now robots, Tech and artificial intelligence will take millions more*. Forbes. Retrieved January 10, 2023, from https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackkelly/2020/10/27/us-lost-over-60-million-jobs-now-robots-tech-and-artificial-intelligence-will-take-millions-more/?sh=15e55c9c1a52

Kenny, M. E., Walsh-Blair, L. Y., Blustein, D. L., Bempechat, J., & Seltzer, J. (2010). Achievement motivation among urban adolescents: Work hope, autonomy support, and achievement-related beliefs. Journal of Vocational Behavior, 77, 205-212.

Kincheloe, J. (2007). Clarifying the purpose of engaging students as researchers. In D. Thiessen & A. Cook-Sather (Eds.), *International handbook of student experience in elementary and secondary school* (pp. 745–774). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.

Kirschner, P., Sweller, J., & Clark, R. (2006) Why Minimal Guidance During Instruction Does Not Work: An Analysis of the Failure of Constructivist, Discovery, Problem-Based, Experiential, and Inquiry-Based Teaching, Educational Psychologist, 41:2, 75-86, DOI: 10.1207/s15326985ep4102_1

Kirst, Michael. (2004). The High School-College Disconnect. Educational Leadership. 62.

Klem, A. M., & Connell, J. P. (2004). Relationships matter: linking teacher support to student engagement and achievement. *The Journal of school health*, *74*(7), 262–273. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1746-1561.2004.tb08283.x

Klemencic, Manja. (2015). What is student agency? An ontological exploration in the context of research on student engagement.

Knorr Cetina, K., Schatzki, T.R., & von Savigny, E. (Eds.). (2000). The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203977453

Kondracki, N.L., Wellman, N.S., & Amundson, D.R. (2002). Content analysis: Review of methods and their applications in nutrition education. J Nutr Educ Behav. 34(4):224-230.

Krippendorff K. (2012). Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications

Kumpulainen, K., Lipponen, L., Hilppö, J., & Mikkola, A. (2013). Building on the positive in children's lives: A co-participatory study on the social construction of children's sense of agency. *Early Child Development and Care*, *184*(2), 211–229. https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2013.778253

Lee, D., Watson, S. L., & Watson, W. R. (2019). Systematic literature review on self-regulated learning in massive open online courses. Australasian Journal of Educational Technology, 35(1), 28-41. https://doi.org/10.14742/ajet.3749

Leithwood, K., & Riehl, C. (2004). What we know about successful leadership. *Practising Administrator*, *26*(4).

Lerman, R. I., Eyster, L. & Chambers, K. (2009). The Benefits and challenges of registered apprenticeships: The sponsors' perspective. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

Lerner, R. M., Almerigi, J. B., Theokas, C., and Lerner, J. V. (2005). Positive youth development: a view of the issues. J. Early Adolesc. 25, 10–16. doi: 10.1177/0272431604273211.

Levin, B. (2000). Putting students at the centre in education reform. Journal of Educational Change, 1(2), 155-172.

Levin, D. T. (2000). Race as a visual feature: using visual search and perceptual discrimination tasks to understand face categories and the cross-race recognition deficit. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, *129*(4), 559.

Levin, M. (2012). Academic integrity in action research. Action Research, 10(2), 133–149. https://doi.org/10.1177/1476750312445034

Linnehan, F. (2001). The relation of a work-based mentoring program to the academic performance and behavior of African American students. Journal of Vocational Behavior, 59, 310-325.

Loughry, M. L., Ohland, M. W., & Woehr, D. J. (2014). Assessing teamwork skills for assurance of learning using CATME team tools. Journal of Marketing Education, 36(1), 5-19.

Lowden, K., Hall, S., Elliot, D., & Lewin, J. (2011). Employers' Perceptions of the Employability Skills of New Graduates. Edge Foundation.

Lukes, M. (2015). Latino Immigrant Youth and Interrupted Schooling: Dropouts, Dreamers and Alternative Pathways to College. *Latino Immigrant Youth and Interrupted Schooling*, v–vi. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781783093441-toc

Lundy, L. (2007). "'Voice Is not enough: conceptualizing Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child." *British Educational Research Journal*, *33*(6), pp.927-942

Lynch, K. (2001). Equality in Education. *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, *90*(360), 395–411. http://www.jstor.org/stable/30095506

Mager, U., & Nowak, P. (2012). Effects of student participation in decision making at school. A systematic review and synthesis of empirical research. *Educational Research Review*, *7*(1), 38–61. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2011.11.001

Malen, B., & Vincent Cochran, M. (2015). Beyond pluralistic patterns of power: Research on the micropolitics of schools. In B.C. Cooper, J.G. Cibulka, & L.D. Fusarelli (Eds.), Handbook of education politics and policy (2nd ed.) (pp. 3-36). New York, NY: Routledge.

Martin, A.J., Nejad, H., Colmar, S. & Liem, G.A.D. (2012). Adaptability: Conceptual and empirical perspectives on responses to change, novelty and uncertainty. Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling, 22(1), 58–81. doi:10.1017/ jgc.2012.8.

Mayes E., Mitra D. L., Serriere S. C. (2016). Figured worlds of citizenship: Examining differences made in "making a difference" in an elementary school classroom. *American Educational Research Journal*, 53(3), 605–638. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831216648378

Mayring, P. (2000). Qualitative Content Analysis. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *1*(2). https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-1.2.1089

Miller, D. (1989). Matching Strategies and Strategy Making: Process, Content, and Performance. Human Relations, 42(3), 241–260. https://doi.org/10.1177/001872678904200303

Mitra, D. L. (2004). The significance of students: Can increasing "student voice" in schools lead to gains in youth development. Teachers College Record, 106(4), 651–688.

Mitra, D. L. (2005). Adults advising youth: Leading while getting out of the way. Educational Administration Quarterly, 41(3), 520–553.

Mitra, D. L. (2005). Increasing student voice and moving toward youth leadership. The Prevention Researcher, 13(1), 7–10.

Mitra, D. L. (2007). Student voice in school reform: From listening to leadership. In D. Thiessen & A. Cook-Sather (Eds.), International handbook of student experience in elementary and secondary school (pp. 727–744). Dordrecht, Springer.

Mitra, D. L. (2008). Amplifying student voice. *Educational Leadership*, *66*(3), 20-25.

Mitra, D. L. (2009). "Collaborating with students: Building youth-adult partnerships in schools." American Journal of Education, 15 (3), pp. 407-436.Ochoa-Becker et al., 2001

Mitra, D. L. (2014). Student voice in school reform: Building youth-adult partnerships

Mitra, D. L., & Gross, S. J. (2009). Increasing student voice in high school reform: Building partnerships, improving outcomes. Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 37(4), 522-543.

Mitra, D. L., & Serriere, S. C. (2012). Student voice in elementary school reform: Examining youth development in fifth graders. *American Educational Research Journal*, *49*(4), 743–774. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831212443079

Mitra, D., Serriere, S., & Stoicovy, D. (2012). The role of leaders in enabling student voice. Management in Education, 26(3), 104–112. https://doi.org/10.1177/0892020612445678

Mockler, N., & Groundwater-Smith, S. (2014). *Engaging with student voice in research, education and community beyond legitimation and guardianship*. Springer International Publishing.

Moeller, R. W., & Seehuus, M. (2019). Loneliness as a mediator for college students' social skills and experiences of depression and anxiety. *Journal of adolescence*, *73*, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2019.03.006

Moore, T., & Morton, J. (2017). The myth of job readiness? Written communication, employability, and the 'skills gap' in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education, 42*(3), 591-609.

Morse JM, Niehaus L. (2009). *Mixed method design: Principles and procedures.* Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press.

Moss & Tilly (2001), p. 44 http://english.aawsat.com/2016/07/article55353840/soft-skills-keyfuture-success-middle-east-pupils

National Association of Colleges and Employers, "Salary Survey, Spring 2010" (2010). *Salary Survey*. 6. https://scholarworks.uni.edu/salarysurvey/6

National Center for Education Statistics. (2011). School and staffing survey: Public school questionnaire, 2007-08. Washington, DC: Author.

National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, National Conference of State Legislatures, National Association of State Boards of Education, & Council of Chief State School Officers. (2008). Accelerating the agenda: Actions to improve America's high schools. Washington, DC: National Governors Association.

New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies,49(2), p.131.Courtney, 2014

Niemi, H. (2015). Teacher professional development in Finland: Towards a more holistic approach. Psychology, Society and Education, 7(3), 278-294.

Nieto S. (1994). Lessons from students on creating a chance to dream. *Harvard Educational Review*, 64(4), 392–426.

Noguera, P. (n.d.). *Understanding the link between racial identity and school-related behaviors*. Joaquin's Dilemma / Education Rights . https://www.inmotionmagazine.com/er/pnjoaq1.html

Oldfather, P. (1995). Songs "come back most to them": Students' experiences as

Olson, C.B., Kim, J.S., Scarcella, R., Kramer, J., Pearson, M., vanDyk, D.A., Collins, P., & Land, R.E. (2012) Enhancing the interpretive reading and analytical writing of mainstreamed English learners in secondary school: Results from a randomized field trial using a cognitive strategies approach. *American Educational Research Journal*, 49(2), 323-355.

Pekrul, S., & Levin, B. (2007). Student voice in school reform: From listening to leadership. In D. Thiessen and A. Cook-Sather (Eds.), International Handbook of Student Experience in Elementary and Secondary school (pp. 711-726). Berlin, Germany: Springer.

Perkins, D. F., & Jones, K. R. (2004). Risk behaviors and resiliency within physically abused adolescents. *Child abuse & neglect*, *28*(5), 547-563.

Perry-Hazan, Lotem & Nir, Tal. (2016). The framed right to participate in municipal youth councils and its educational impact. Children and Youth Services Review. 69. 10.1016/j.childyouth.2016.07.012.

Person, Ann E., Emily Moiduddin, Megan Hague-Angus, and Lizabeth M. Malone (2009). Survey of Outcomes Measurement in Research on Character Education Programs (NCEE 2009-006). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

Peter van Huizen , Bert van Oers & Theo Wubbels (2005) A Vygotskian perspective on teacher education, Journal of Curriculum Studies, 37:3, 267-290, DOI: 10.1080/0022027042000328468

Phillips, S. D., Blustein, D. L., Jobin-Davis, K., & White, S. F. (2002). Preparation for the school-to-work transition: The views of high school students. Journal of Vocational Behavior 61(2), 202-216.

Piaget, J. (1977). The Development of Thought. Equilibration of Cognitive Structures. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Piaget, J. (1985). The equilibration of cognitive structures: The central problem of intellectual development. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (New translation of the development of thought) child's conception of geometry.

Pineda-Báez, C., Hennig Manzuoli, C., & Vargas Sánchez, A. (2019). Supporting student cognitive and Agentic Engagement: Students' voices. *International Journal of Educational Research, 96*, 81–90. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2019.06.005

Pintrich, P. R. (2000). The Role of Goal Orientation in Self-Regulated Learning. In M. Boekaerts, P. R. Pintrich, & M. Zeidner (Eds.), Handbook of Self-Regulation: Theory, Research, and Applications (pp. 451-502). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Pittman, K., Ferber, T. and Irby, M. (2000), "*Youth as effective citizens*", unpublished report, International Youth Foundation, MD.

Podolefsky, N. S., Rehn, D., & Perkins, K. K. (2013). Affordances of play for student agency and student-centered pedagogy. In *AIP Conference Proceedings* (Vol. 1513, No. 1, pp. 306-309). American Institute of Physics.

Priestley M & Minty S (2013) Curriculum for Excellence: 'A brilliant idea, but. . .'. Scottish Educational Review, 45 (1), pp. 39-52. http://www.ser.stir.ac.uk/pdf/355.pdf

Quinn, S., and Owen, S. (2014). “Freedom to grow: Children's perspectives of student voice.”

Rainio, A. P., & Hilppö, J. (2016a). The dialectics of Agency in educational ethnography. *Ethnography and Education*, *12*(1), 78–94. https://doi.org/10.1080/17457823.2016.1159971

Rainio, A. P., & Hilppö, J. (2017). The dialectics of agency in educational ethnography. *Ethnography and Education*, *12*(1), 78-94.

Raudenbush, S. W., & Jean, M. (2014). To what extent do student perceptions of classroom quality predict teacher value added. In T. Kane, K. Kerr, & R. Pianta (Eds.), Designing Teacher Evaluation Systems. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Raymond, L. (2001, June). Student involvement in school improvement: From data source to significant voice. In *Forum* (Vol. 43, No. 2, pp. 58-61). Symposium Journals.

Reinsch Jr, N. L., & Gardner, J. A. (2014). Do communication abilities affect promotion decisions? Some data from the c-suite. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, *28*(1), 31-57.

Reis, S. (2018). Curriculum reform: Why? What? How? and how will we know it works?. Isr J Health Policy Res 7, 30. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13584-018-0221-4

Remedios, R. (2012). The role of soft skills in employability. *International Journal of Management Research and Reviews*, *2*(7), 1285.

Robinson, C. (2014) Children, their Voices and their Experiences of School: what does the evidence tell us? York: Cambridge Primary Review Trust.

Robinson, C., & Taylor, C. (2013). Student voice as a contested practice: Power and participation in two student voice projects. Improving Schools, 16(1), 32–46. https://doi.org/10.1177/1365480212469713

Robles, M. M. (2012). Executive perceptions of the top 10 soft skills needed in today's workplace. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 75(4), 453–465.

Rocco, M. (2019). *Developing hard and soft skills: An engineering manager's guide*. https://hired.com/blog/candidates/hard-soft-skills-engineering-manager/

Rodríguez, L. F., & Conchas, G. Q. (2009). Preventing Truancy and Dropout Among Urban Middle School Youth: Understanding Community-Based Action From the Student's Perspective. Education and Urban Society, 41(2), 216–247. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124508325681

Rose, R., and Shevlin, M. (2008). "Enabling communication through increased participation: teachers as listeners in inclusive classrooms." Invited Presentation presented to: Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education (IATSE) International Conference, Dublin,12 - 14 June 2008

Rothwell, J.T. (2015). Defining Skilled Technical Work. Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2709141 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2709141

Rudduck, J. (2007). Student voice, student engagement, and school reform. In D. Thiessen & A. Cook-Sather (Eds.) International handbook of student experience in elementary and secondary school (pp. 587-610). Netherlands: Springer.

Rudduck, J., & Flutter, J. (2000). Pupil participation and pupil perspective: 'carving a new order of experience'. Cambridge journal of education, 30(1), 75-89.

Rudduck, J., & McIntyre, D. (2007). Improving Learning through Consulting Pupils (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203935323

Rumberger, Russell W., 2010. "Education and the reproduction of economic inequality in the United States: An empirical investigation," Economics of Education Review, Elsevier, vol. 29(2), pages 246-254, April.

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *The American psychologist*, *55*(1), 68–78. https://doi.org/10.1037//0003-066x.55.1.68

Schooley, R. (2017). *Why are soft skills missing in today's applicants* [Murray state theses and dissertations]. Murray State University. https://digitalcommons.murraystate.edu/etd/42

Schoonenboom, J., & Johnson, R. B. (2017). How to Construct a Mixed Methods Research Design. *Kolner Zeitschrift fur Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, *69*(Suppl 2), 107–131. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11577-017-0454-1

Schramm, F., & Morais, D. C. (2013). A bilateral and multi-issue negotiation framework to support a supply chain of construction industry. *Pesquisa Operacional*, *33*, 491-512.

Selman, R. L. (1980). The growth of interpersonal understanding. New York: Academic.

Selman, R. L. (2003). The promotion of social awareness: Powerful lessons from the partnership of developmental theory and classroom practice. *The Social Science Journal*, *41*(2), 325–329. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.soscij.2004.01.019

Selman, R. L., Levitt, M. Z., & Schultz, L. H. (1997). The friendship

Sheridan, S., and Samuelsson, I. P. (2001). "Children's conceptions of participation and influence in pre-school: A perspective on pedagogical quality." Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 2

Shilcutt, J. B., Oliver, K. L., & Aranda, R. (2022). “I wish dance class NEVER ended”: an activist approach to teaching dance. *Journal of Dance Education*, *22*(2), 108–118.

Shriver, T. P., & Weissberg, R. P. (1996). No new wars! Education Week, 15, 33-37.

Skinner, Ellen & Belmont, Michael. (1993). Motivation in the classroom: Reciprocal effect of teacher behavior and student engagement across the school year. Journal of Educational Psychology. 85. 571-581. 10.1037/0022-0663.85.4.571.

Skinner, Ellen & Kindermann, Thomas & Furrer, Carrie. (2009). A Motivational Perspective on Engagement and Disaffection Conceptualization and Assessment of Children's Behavioral and Emotional Participation in Academic Activities in the Classroom. Educational and Psychological Measurement. 69. 493-525. 10.1177/0013164408323233.

Skolverket. (2011). “Curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and the leisure-time centre.” Ordförrådet AB, Stockholm. ISBN: 978-91-86529-58-1

Smyth, J. (2006). Educational leadership that fosters ‘student voice’. *International journal of leadership in education*, *9*(4), 279-284.

Smyth, J. (2006). Educational leadership that fosters “student voice.” International Journal of Leadership in Education, 9(4), 279–284.

Smyth, J.M. (2007) Beyond Self-Selection in Video Game Play: An Experimental Examination of the Consequences of Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game Play. Cyber Psychology & Behavior, 10, 717-721. http://dx.doi.org/10.1089/cpb.2007.9963

SooHoo, S. (1993). Students as Partners in Research and Restructuring Schools. *The Educational Forum*, *57*(4), 386–393. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131729309335445

Spady, W.D. (1994) Outcome-Based Education: Critical Issues and Answers. American Association of School Administrators, Arlington.

Spires, H.A., Lee, J.K., Turner, K.A. & Johnson, J. (2008). Having Our Say: Middle Grade Student Perspectives on School, Technologies, and Academic Engagement. Journal of Research on Technology in Education, 40(4), 497-515. Retrieved September 19, 2023 from https://www.learntechlib.org/p/106110/.

Stasz, C., (1998). Work-based learning: High hopes or dim realities? Paper prepared for the Foundation on Work, Learning, and Assessment Workshop

Stasz, C., & Kaganoff, T. (December 1997). Learning how to learn at work: Lessons from three high school programs. Berkeley, CA: National Research Center in Vocational Education.

Stern, D., Finkelstein, N., Stone, J. R., Latting, J., & Dornsife, C. (1995). School to work: Research on programs in the United States. Washington, DC: The Falmer Press

Stern, D., Rahn, M. L., & Chung, Y-P. (1998). Design of work-based learning for students in the United States. Youth Society, 29, 471-502.

Stone, J., Stern, D., Hopkins, C., & McMillion, M. (1990). Adolescents' perceptions of their work: School supervised and non-school supervised. Journal of Vocational Education Research, 15(2), 31-53.

Student voice: Equipping students to take action. Student Voice: Equipping Students to Take Action. (n.d.). https://www.stuvoice.org/

SUSSMAN, R.W., TAB RASMUSSEN, D. and RAVEN, P.H. (2013), Rethinking Primate Origins Again. Am. J. Primatol., 75: 95-106. https://doi.org/10.1002/ajp.22096

Sweet, M. & Michaelsen L. K. (2007). How group dynamics research can inform the theory and practice of postsecondary small group learning. *Educational Psychology Review*, (1), 31–47.

Sweller, J. (2010). Cognitive load theory: Recent theoretical advances. In J. L. Plass, R. Moreno, & R. Brünken (Eds.), *Cognitive load theory* (pp. 29–47). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511844744.004

Symonds, W. C., Schwartz, R. B., & Ferguson, R. (2011). Pathways to prosperity: Meeting the challenge of preparing young Americans for the 21st century. Report issued by the Pathways to Prosperity Project, Harvard Graduate School of Education. Boston, MA: Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Taines, C. (2012). Intervening in alienation: The outcomes for urban youth of participating in school activism. *American Educational Research Journal*, *49*(1), 53-86.

Taylor, A., & Watt-Malcolm, B. (2007). Expansive learning through high school apprenticeship: Opportunities and limits. Journal of Education and Work, 20(1), 27-44

The future of work 2021: Global hiring outlook. Monster.com. (2021). https://hiring.monster.com/resources/blog/future-of-work-2021-summary/

Tobin, P. (2006), "Managing Ourselves- Leading others". ICEL 2006, inspiring Leadership: Experiential learning and leadership development. Vol. 2, pp.36-42

Troth, A. C., Jordan, P. J., Lawrence, S. A., & Tse, H. H. (2012). A multilevel model of emotional skills, communication performance, and task performance in teams. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *33*(5), 700-722.

Tulgan. (2015). Bridging the soft skills gap : how to teach the missing basics to today's young talent (1st edition.). Jossey-Bass.

U.S. Department of Labor, Soft Skills: the competitive edge, https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/publications/fact-sheets/soft-skills-the-competitive-edge.

UNESCO. (2016). World Youth Report: Youth Civic Engagement. United Nations, New York,NY

Unicef. (1990, November 1). *The state of the world's children 1990*. UNICEF. https://www.unicef.org/reports/state-worlds-children-1990

United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the rights of the child*. UN document A/44/25, UN. Geneva, Switzerland: Author.

VanFossen, P. J. (2005). "'Reading and math take so much of the time…': An Overview of Social Studies Instruction in Elementary Classrooms in Indiana." Theory and Research in Social Education,33 (3), pp. 376-403.

Voogt, J., & Roblin, N. P. (2010). *21st century skills discussion paper.* University of Twente.

Welch, W. W. (1969). 4: Curriculum Evaluation. Review of Educational Research, 39(4), 429–443. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543039004429

William T. Grant Foundation. (1988, December 31). *The forgotten half: Non-College Youth in America. an interim report on the school-to-work transition.* ERIC. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED290822

Willingham, W.W., Pollack, J.M. and Lewis, C. (2002), Grades and Test Scores: Accounting for Observed Differences. Journal of Educational Measurement, 39: 1-37. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-3984.2002.tb01133.x

Wu, H-C, Weiss, J., Kornbluh, M., and Roddy, L. (2014). "Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric: A tool for professional development and program evaluation in youth settings." East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University.

Young, M. (2014). What is a curriculum and what can it do?. The Curriculum Journal, 25: 7-13. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585176.2014.902526

Zeldin, S. (2004), Preventing youth violence through the promotion of community engagement and membership. J. Community Psychol., 32: 623-641. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.20023

Zeldin, S., Larson, R., Camino, L. and O'Connor, C. (2005), Intergenerational relationships and partnerships in community programs: Purpose, practice, and directions for research. J. Community Psychol., 33: 1-10. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.20042

Zhang, A. (2012). Peer Assessment of Soft Skills and Hard Skills. *Journal of Information Technology Education: Research, 11*(1), 155-168. Informing Science Institute. Retrieved January 17, 2023 from https://www.learntechlib.org/p/111498/.

Zhenjing, G., Chupradit, S., Ku, K. Y., Nassani, A. A., & Haffar, M. (2022). Impact of Employees' Workplace Environment on Employees' Performance: A Multi-Mediation Model. *Frontiers in public health*, *10*, 890400. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2022.890400

Zimmerman, B. (1990) Self-Regulated Learning and Academic Achievement: An Overview, Educational Psychologist, 25:1, 3-17, DOI: 10.1207/s15326985ep2501_2

Zimmerman, B. (2000). Attaining self-regulation: A social cognitive perspective.

Zimmerman, B. J. (1989). A social cognitive view of self-regulated academic learning. Journal of educational psychology, 81(3), 329-339. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.81.3.329

Curriculum Vitae

Anna Colquitt
Anna.m.colquitt@gmail.com

EDUCATION

William S. Boyd School of Law, University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Juris Doctor, May 2023
Involvement: Nevada Law Journal, Editor, August 2021–May 2023; Curriculum Committee, Member, September 2020 – May 2023
Publications: Published Article in BYU's Education and Law Journal, 2023
Honors: Highest Pro Bono Honors, 2023; Dean's Honor, 2021–2023

College of Education, University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Doctor of Philosophy, Educational Psychology, May 2024
GPA: 3.98

University of Florida
Bachelor of Science, Family, Youth, and Community Sciences, *summa cum laude*, December 2019
Minor: Nonprofits and Organizational Leadership
Honors: Undergraduate Dean's List (every semester from 2016 – graduation); completed Honor's Thesis and research on curriculum review and development

RESEARCH

Nevada Governor's Office of Workforce Innovation, Las Vegas, NV
Research Grant Recipient, March 2023 – August 2023

- Received a research grant to identify the gaps in soft skill development in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs in Nevada
- Will present research findings at a conference in December 2023

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, NV
Researcher, August 2023-Present

- Conducted research through the lens of Student Voice Theory to explore what recent high school graduates wish they would have learned in high school to better prepare them for college and/or the workforce

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, NV
Researcher, September 2022– Present

- Conducted a content analysis of the Nevada Academic Content Standards in order to identify the gaps between what the standards addressed and what employers deemed necessary for career readiness

University of Florida, Gainesville, FL
Researcher, September 2017-December 2019

- Conducted research on learning outcomes for the Family, Youth, and Community Sciences department at the University of Florida
- Created focus groups with faculty and developed new learning outcomes used by the department following my research

EXPERIENCE

Kenny Guinn Center for Policy Priorities, Las Vegas, NV
Director of Education Policy, December 2023 – Present

- Led the development and execution of multiple education research and policy analyses, overseeing mixed-methods research designs to produce impactful reports and briefs for state and national stakeholders.
- Established strategic partnerships with diverse stakeholders in education at local, statewide, and national levels, serving as the primary spokesperson for education policy matters and providing research support to legislative and executive branches.
- Directed grant writing efforts on a local and national level, and supervised a team of researchers, guiding their work to ensure the accurate capture and publication of pertinent education policy information while maintaining alignment with organizational goals.

UNLV College of Education, Las Vegas, NV
Civic Engagement Instructor, August 2022 – December 2023

- Curated and delivered lesson plans related to civic engagement for first and second year students based on service learning initiatives
- Executed a research project for students to introduce them to scholarly research and facilitated their presentations of their semester-long research to UNLV students and faculty
- Collaborated with a group of other instructors to strengthen my teaching strategies
- Courses include: COE 103 (Fall 2022) and COE 202 (Spring 2023, Fall 2023)

Educate Nevada Now, Las Vegas, NV
Summer Extern, May 2022 – August 2022

- Drafted demand letters regarding equity in funding for educational services
- Conducted legal research for education policy efforts
- Analyzed Nevada education case law

Thomas and Mack Education Advocacy Clinic, Las Vegas, NV
Education Advocate, January 2022 – May 2022

- Advocated for 6 children in order to ensure their IEPs were being properly implemented
- Met with school officials in order to revise IEPs to meet child's current needs
- Researched confines of IDEA and IEP implementation to account for specific needs of clients

Bloom Work-Wear LLC, Las Vegas, NV
Founder & CEO, December 2021 – Present

- Created a company in order to cultivate a community of young professionals and provide access to stylish and affordable work-wear for those entering professional fields
- Sourced, budgeted, marketed, and managed all aspects of creating and maintaining the company

William S. Boyd School of Law, Las Vegas, NV
Research Assistant to Dean Sara Gordon, September 2020 – January 2022

- Developed a system for curriculum review based on new ABA standards
- Worked alongside the Associate Dean of Student Affairs to implement new guidelines for professors' curricula

Nevada Supreme Court, Las Vegas, NV
Summer Extern, May 2021 – August 2021

- Observed legal proceedings such as Pardons Board, Criminal Settlement Conferences, Homicide Trials, Family Court, and Drug Court
- Wrote bench memos for civil cases heard by the NV Supreme Court
- Conducted legal research on various topics of the law from summary judgement to duty in negligence cases
- Worked alongside the NV Supreme Court clerks to research and draft memos

Communities in Schools of Nevada, Las Vegas, NV
Intern, May 2019 – August 2019

- Developed an activation station to be used at an educational event in order to gain awareness for the organization
- Proofread grants and identified grant-funding opportunities
- Researched education policy initiatives to explore new areas for the organization to expand

LEADERSHIP / VOLUNTEERISM

Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada, Las Vegas, NV
Education Advocate, March 2021 – Present

Law Education and Disability Equal Rights Society, Las Vegas, NV
Education Director, April 2021 – May 2023

Kids' Court School, Las Vegas, NV
Educator and Competency Leader, January 2021 – May 2023

SKILLS / HONORS

- UNLV 'Outstanding Teacher' Award, 2024
- UNLV Highest Pro Bono Honors, 2023
- Named "Local Hero" by the NBC Las Vegas Affiliate for work with Dress for Success, 2016
- Volunteered over 400 hours during 3.5 years at UF, 2016–2019