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ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for increasing employment skill awareness for students to be better prepared to enter the world of work. The problem of insufficient employment skills is documented by data revealing large numbers of students who are unable to meet the demands of employers. Analysis of probable-cause data revealed students' lack of social skills and work ethics, lack of teacher time spent on employment instruction, and lack of employment skills typical of entry level employers. A review of the literature provided expert guidance. Four major categories of intervention were selected: (1) incorporation of employment skills taught in Civics, Special Education English, and Industrial Technology classes; (2) increased time spent on communication skills; (3) student exposure to job opportunities by the use of job fairs and job shadowing experiences; (4) the development of increased interpersonal skills by the use of cooperative learning as an instructional technique. Postintervention data suggests that these interventions were successful in increasing the employment skills awareness of the students. The 20 appendixes contain survey forms, checklists, sample journal entry sheet and cover, vocabulary lists and a test, interview rubric and mock interview letter, and employability checklist. (Author/EMK)

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**INCREASING EMPLOYMENT SKILL AWARENESS FOR STUDENTS TO BE
BETTER PREPARED TO ENTER THE WORLD OF WORK**

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Jo Ann McCarroll
David Popek**

**An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate
Faculty of the school of Education in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership**

Saint Xavier University & IRI/Skylight

Field Based Masters Program

Chicago, Illinois

May, 1998

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ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for increasing employment skill awareness for students to be better prepared to enter the world of work. The target population consists of ninth through twelfth grade students, located in neighboring suburban communities in Northern Illinois. The problem of insufficient employment skills has been documented through data revealing large numbers of students unable to meet the demands of employers.

Analysis of probable cause data revealed student lack of social skills and work ethics. Additionally, the data indicated the lack of teacher time spent on employment instruction. Furthermore documentation from employers indicated the lack of employment skills of entry level employees.

A review of solution strategies suggested by experts, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of four major categories of intervention: incorporation of employment skills taught in Civics, Special Education English and Industrial Technology classes. Second, increased time spent on communication skills. Third, student exposure to job opportunities by the use of job fairs and job shadowing experiences. Finally, the development of increased interpersonal skills by the use of cooperative learning as an instructional technique.

Post intervention data suggests that classroom interventions of incorporation of employment skills taught throughout the curriculum, increased time spent on communication skills, job fairs, job shadowing experiences and the use of cooperative learning have increased the employment skills awareness of the students. Post surveys completed by students in the targeted programs indicated that students feel confident of their employment abilities due to the interventions.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The students of the targeted high schools exhibit a lack of skills that interferes with employability. Evidence for the existence of the problem includes employment skills surveys completed by potential employers, interviews of recent graduates, surveys of current students and teacher checklists.

Immediate Problem Context

Site A is composed of two building within the same district. The student population of site A has a total enrollment of 4,482 students, with an ethnic breakdown of 47% White, 32.3% Black, 18.1% Hispanic, 2.1% Asian/Pacific Islander and 0.6% Native American. Of the total student population 44% are of low-income families, 8% of the students have limited English skills and 6.8% of the students drop out of high school. The attendance at site A is 91.5% with chronic truancy at a 0% level.

In comparison site B has a total student population of 2,604, students with an ethnic breakdown of 88.7% White, 5.9% Black, 3.1% Hispanic, 2.2% Asian/Pacific Islander and .1% Native American. Of this student population 6% are from low-income families, 0% of the students have limited English skills and there is a 1.7% drop out rate. The attendance at site B is 93.4% with chronic truancy at a 1.1% level.

The faculty and staff at site A consists of a total of 249 teachers with 87% being White, 8.9% Black, 3.6% Hispanic and .4% Asian/Pacific Islander. Teachers at site A have an average teaching experience of 15.2 years. Teachers with bachelor's degrees equals 38.8% and those with a master's degree equals 61.2%. Site B has a total faculty and staff of 126. Of that 126, 90.8% are White, 6.9% are Black, 2.4 are Hispanic and 0% are Asian/Pacific Islander or Native American. The average teaching experience for faculty members at site B is 15.4 years. Teachers with bachelor's degrees total 34.1%, whereas teachers with a master's degree or above total 65.9% of the total faculty.

The facilities at Site A have been maintained but have been relatively unchanged for the past thirty years. Due to

the increased population, Site B has increased their present facility with a multimillion-dollar addition.

Site A is currently working on state learning goals, outcomes, and objectives in all curricular areas. Teachers are developing and piloting assessment instruments and unified methods of testing all students. Site B has done a great deal to embed technology throughout the curriculum. Graduates find that they are not only academically prepared but, from a technological standpoint, have been schooled to meet the demands of continued education or job opportunities. Site A is in the process of completing the North Central Accreditation program. Most staff development is geared toward that process. At Site B reading and writing across the curriculum is the major focus at this time.

The Surrounding Community

The community of site A has a total population of 128,225. This population is ethnically diverse as is reflected in the student background sighted earlier. The median family income of site A is \$28,925. Within the community there is a group of businesses called the site A foundation which provides some moral and a little financial support. There are also various parent groups that support extra curricular activities, such as Band Parents, Tech

Prep Parents and Athletic Boosters. The local newspaper is a double-edged sword that partially shows the positive aspects of the schools and at the same time tends to sway public opinion against the District.

Site B serves a large geographic area of diverse population. The site draws its students from seven distinctly different elementary districts. Estimates indicate that about five percent of the sites, 2,530 students, come from low-income families. Site B is considered a suburban, but not a large or mid-size city. Even though site B is not a unit district much work has been done cooperatively with the feeder elementary schools. Common outcomes have been agreed on for all curricular areas. Representatives from the elementary schools and high school have met to map out areas of study and textbooks for grades seven through twelve. Administrators meet monthly to address topics that affect the districts.

A strong sense of community support exists for Site B. The support has been reflected in the passage of two referenda in the past seven years. This passage has enabled Site B to construct a \$34 million addition. This addition will house 3,000 students and will include seventy-nine new classrooms, a community recreation center, a swimming pool, and an auditorium along with expanded

seating in the gymnasium. The media center will be expanded and will serve as the technological heart of the school.

In conclusion both Sites are dealing with the issue of community involvement. Sites A and B are working on ideas to improve communication between the business community and the schools.

National Context of the Problem

The problem of student employability has generated concern at the national and the state levels, which is reflected in the form of a survey sponsored by the National Association of Manufacturers. Experts found that employers want schools to take more responsibility for students' employability skills development. Employers said that they want schools to teach both general and specific employability skills, including attendance, punctuality, and good work attitudes (Lankard, 1990). The skills the employers are looking for according to McPartland are that students are "quick learners" and have a "willingness to adapt and learn."

A survey of employers of personnel found the following academic skills as most important in entry-level jobs: reading, math, writing, problem-solving/reasoning, and manual/perceptual skills (Lankard, 1990). The need to

teach these employability skills results from concerns about this country's ability to compete in the world economy. "Preliminary work by Carnevale was followed by efforts by both public and private agencies to address the strongly felt need to improve the work-related skills of those entering the workforce" (Saterfiel, McLarty, 1995).

The creation of Tech Prep programs and the passage of the 1990 Perkins Act are two more examples of the existence of the problem. Tech Prep is a federally funded and locally supported educational program promoting cooperation, global economic competitiveness, lifelong learning and changes in student expectations, educational attitudes, teaching styles and school wide organization structure. The Tech Prep curriculum is an integration of all disciplines and is complementary with workplace skills. Tech Prep provides opportunities for students to apply academic theories to real-life situations, and it focuses on lifelong learning skills. In Illinois, Tech Prep consists of a sequence of academic and technical courses taught during the two years of secondary school prior to graduation. Tech Prep may also be implemented (1) during post-secondary education that leads to an Associate of Applied Science degree or (2) as an apprenticeship of at least two years following high school. The sequence must

include integrated academic and technical content, workplace skills and instruction delivered both at the worksite and in the school/college setting.

In Vocational Education, the Perkins Act of 1990 was developed to evaluate and improve program effectiveness (Coyle-Williams, Maddy-Bernstein, Carolyn 1991). This Act generates significant improvements for individuals who are members of special populations. Vocational educators have been called upon to redouble efforts to serve special populations and to focus upon academic, as well as occupational achievements of students.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

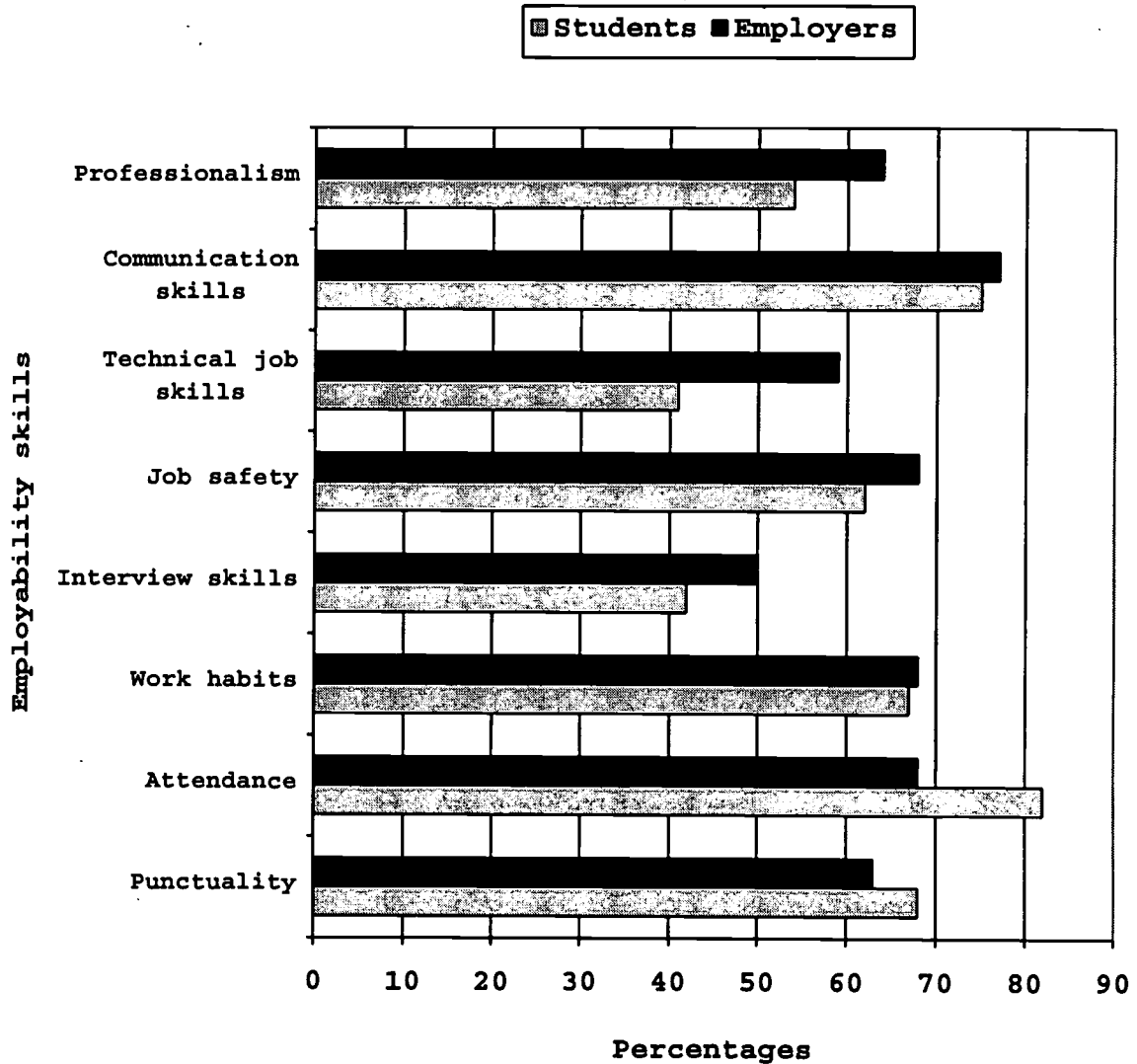
Three types of data sources were used to document the problem, which is the lack of employability skills, taught in the vocational, Tech Prep and special education courses. First, two surveys were administered. One survey was administered to current students in each of the above-mentioned programs, and the other survey was issued to local community employers. Second, recent graduates were interviewed. Third, checklists were given to teachers at both sites A and B.

The primary goal of the two surveys was to compare student perceptions of their learned skills against employer expectations of employability skills needed (Appendix A) (Appendix B). Also, the surveys focused on which specific employability skills were lacking more than others. The data collected from these surveys were derived from actual student opinions and local employer observations. Looking at the data it is clear that both the students and the employers had some concerns about the

current status of the employability skills being taught in the current curriculum. A summary of the results is presented in figure 1.1

Figure 1.1

Results of current Student and Local Employer Survey



Neither the students nor the employers surveyed were completely satisfied with employability skills. Forty-two

percent of the students surveyed felt especially deficient in the area of interview skills. In addition only 41% of the students surveyed felt they were adequately prepared in technical job skills. On the other hand 82% of the students surveyed felt they were being taught attendance skills. The reason for the high score in the area of attendance could be the result of stringent attendance policies at both sites A and B. The general perception of the students at this point is that they are not prepared for the world of work.

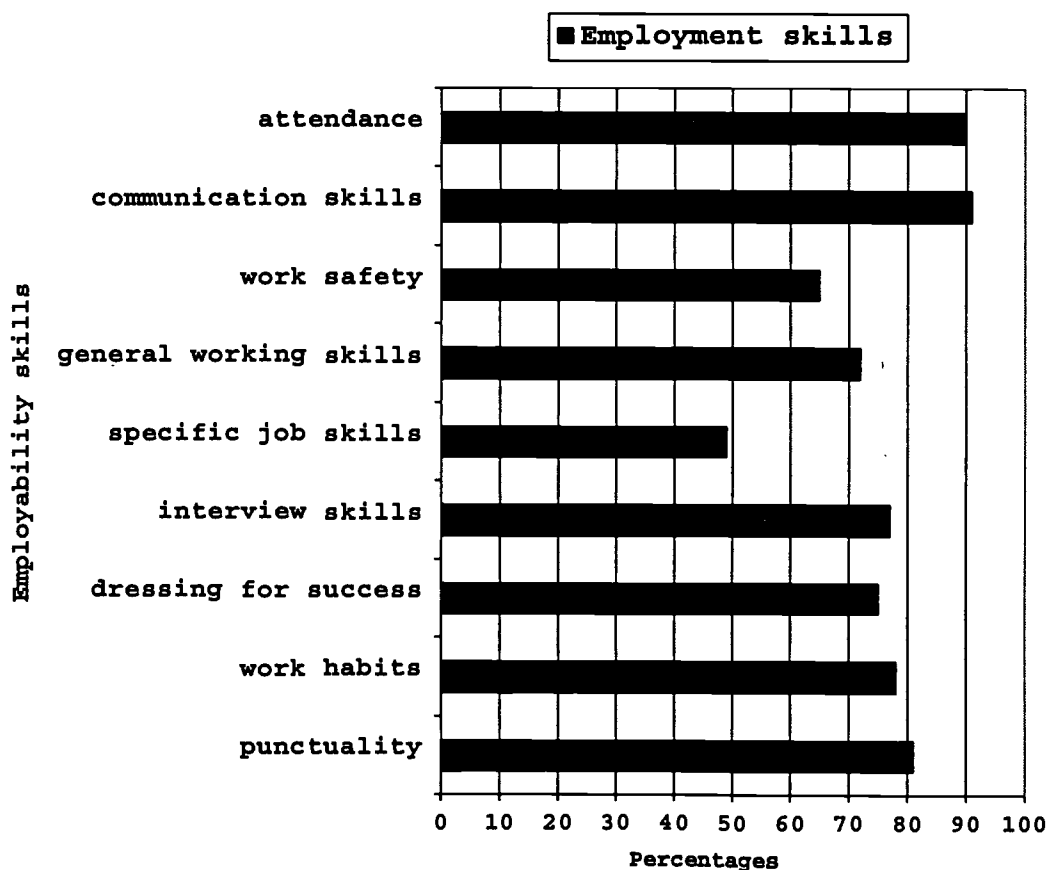
Fifty percent of the employers surveyed felt that students were most deficit in the area of interview skills. Furthermore 59% of the employers surveyed indicated that students were deficit in technical job skills as well. Overall, the results of the employer survey indicated that students exhibit an unacceptable level of employment skills. Seventy-seven percent of the employers surveyed did however indicated that students were best prepared in communication skills. Still employers felt that students were deficit in all other employment areas. It is obvious that students have not reached a satisfactory level of competence according to surveyed local employers.

There is a strong correlation between the student's perception of their skills and the employer's observations.

Students realize they are not being taught the skills that employers are looking for. Based on the findings of the surveys, both students and employers rate employment preparation at a below average level.

In addition to surveying current students and local employers, phone interviews were conducted of recent graduates (Appendix C). The purpose of the interviews was to determine if the recent graduates felt that their high school experience aided them in their present employment situation. A summary of the results is presented in figure 1.2.

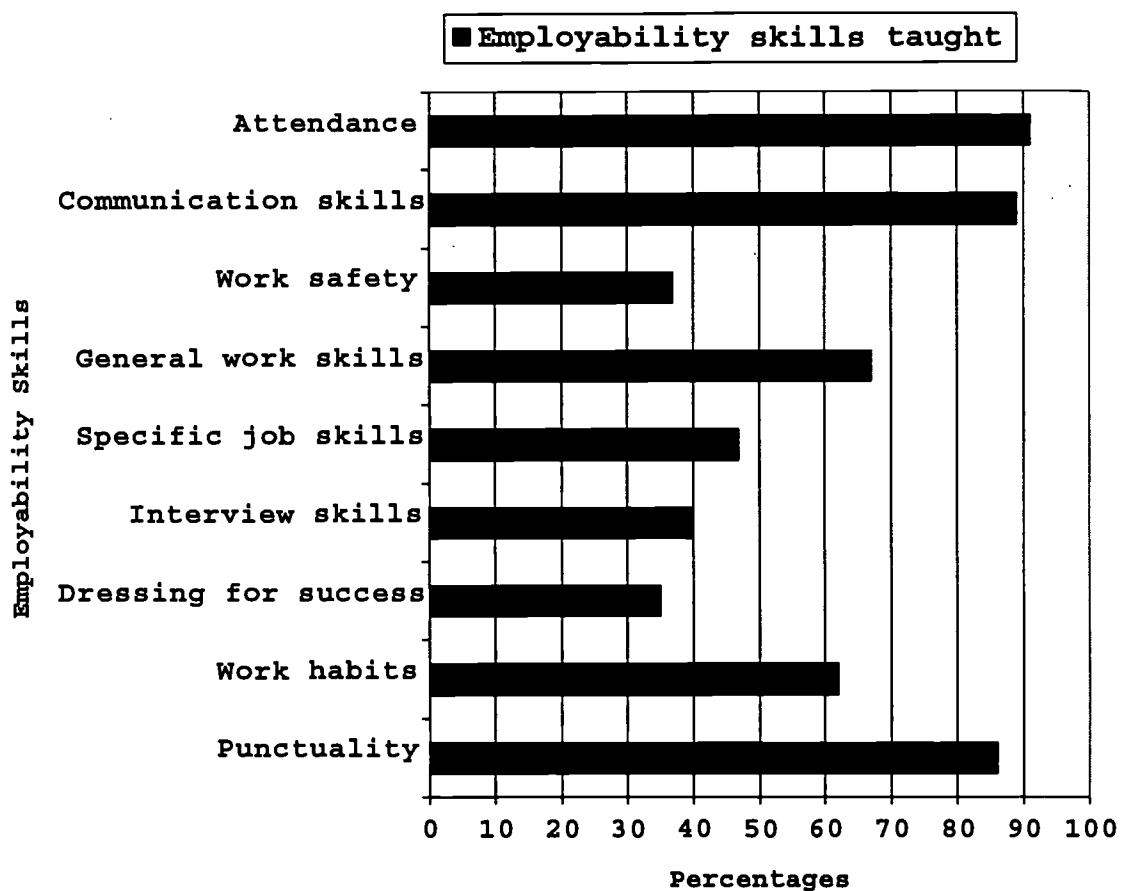
Figure 1.2 Results of Recent Graduate Survey



Of the recent graduates interviewed, 75% believed that high school did help them with the above mentioned employability skills. It should be noted that 81% of the graduates interviewed were involved in either vocational education, Tech Prep or special education. This may account for the high percentage of positive responses on the survey, as these programs traditionally focus on employment skills education. Only 49% of the surveyed students indicated positive preparation in the area of specific job skills. The reason for the low percentage in this area may be attributed to the fact that the above mentioned programs deal more with general work skills and career exploration. Although the percentages were higher they were still not at an acceptable level.

The third form of data collection was the teacher checklist. Checklists were randomly given to teachers at both sites. The purpose of the teacher checklist was to document if employability skills were being taught in the present curriculums at both sites A and B(Appendix D). A summary of the results is presented in figure 1.3.

Figure 1.3

Results of Teacher Checklist on Employability Skills Taught

According to the results of the teacher checklists the skills taught with the greatest emphasis were punctuality at 86%, attendance at 91% and communication skills at 89%. Other areas were reported at considerably lower percentages; dressing for success was 35%, interview skills was 40% and specific job skills was rated at 47%. Again it should be noted that the high percentage in the area of attendance and punctuality could be due to the attendance

policies at sites A and B. The high percentage in communication skills could be the result of the mandatory English graduation requirements at both sites.

Probable causes

Data to indicate the probable cause factor was collected from the teacher checklists as well.

Documentation indicated that 62% of the teachers surveyed are currently using employment skills training as part of their present curriculum. Additionally 61% of the teachers surveyed felt that their high schools were not preparing the students for the world of work. Results of the current high school surveys concurred that employability skills were not consistently taught as part of the students high school experience. The culmination of data indicates that students are not prepared for the world of work because they are not being taught the skills.

The literature confirms the beliefs of local high school teachers and students at both sites A and B. Dr. Kay duPont, author of several books on business etiquette says "The workplace is not high school. Suddenly one is thrust into a whole new culture. If no one tells you about it before you have to do it, the transition can be an unnecessarily rough experience" (Guidry 1997 p.5). While it's true that the workplace is not a high school, there

certainly are ways in which high schools can prepare students for the work experience. This would make the transition from school to work a little less traumatic.

Why aren't high schools better preparing students for the school to work transition? Probable causes for employability skills not being an integral part of the educational process could be: first, limited time to cover district mandated curriculum requirements. Second, employability skills are not part of standardized tests such as IGAP (Illinois Goal Assessment Program) CAT and ACT. Many teachers feel the need to raise the scores of the standardized tests, as the scores are reported in published school report cards. Standardized test scores reflect the school's ability to prepare students for college. Many parents and districts in our society believe that the college-bound track is the only option for post-secondary success.

Edgar, Parker, Siegel and Johnson, (1994, p.8) state that "we are one of the most diverse societies in the world, and yet we try to educate our youth in a one-option system." This coincides with this team's belief that high schools are not preparing students for the transition from high school to the world of work.

Jessica deCouray Hinds(1997) confirms that, many students leave high school without any idea of what they want to major in or what they are good at. This leads one into the literary review which will include ways of accomodating the non-college bound students.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

A review of the literature on solutions suggests a variety of strategies to remediate the lack of employability skills exhibited by high school students. Experts on the subject suggest several teaching strategies directed toward improving employment potential. Among the suggestions are cooperative learning, increased communication skills, interview-related activities, employers speaking to students and job shadowing. Furthermore school intervention is seen as the solution to the traumatic transition from school to work for students.

Employers are expecting particular professional work habits from their new hires as is stated in Techniques(1997). Among the skills cited as important by employers is the "ability to work as part of a team, communicate effectively, manage people and be decisive." Employer Jill Stephens, director of Corporate Outreach America Online says, "You absolutely have to be able to work on teams, rather than being entirely self-oriented" (Techniques, 1997 p.23). One way to teach team

building skills could be to have students work in small groups and give each group a problem to solve (Doyle, Gray, Gambee 1995).

Students need to learn to communicate with one another in small groups in a variety of ways. The National Employee Services and Recreation Association reports that prospective employers look for oral communication skills first in job candidates (Metal working Opportunities, 1997). As literature confirms these communication skills must transfer from the classroom to the workplace in order for the employee to be successful. Today's high performance work-place requires well rounded employees who can work in teams, complete many different tasks, think critically to solve problems and understand the theories behind technical processes as well as how to apply them.

As reported in a survey conducted by Cheryl Harrison, "employers want youth to be competent at basic reading, writing, speaking and math skills." "Given the deplorable level of student communication skills, on the one hand, and the ever increasing demand for technical people who can write well, on the other, the integration of technical writing into technical subjects is of paramount importance" (Reis, 1997 p.43). "Employers are willing to teach employees whatever else they need to know" (Harrison, 1985

p.2). In offering suggestions to students preparing for the job market, employers recommend courses in public speaking and writing (Recruiting Trends 1996-97). While all students at both sites A and B are required to take Speech and Writing as part of the English curriculum, this team can supplement the coursework by using journal writings, related vocational vocabulary activities, and requiring students to develop professional portfolios. These vital communication skills are not only important for preparing students for the job force, but are also imperative in the hiring process. Students must first develop a well-written resume to be considered for an interview and then must be able to communicate effectively during an interview to be considered for an employment position. Schools must adopt more stringent attendance policies in order to prepare students for attendance expectations of the workplace (Byers, Miller, 1998).

An annual study conducted by Michigan State University, as cited in Techniques (1996-97), offers suggestions as to what schools can do to aid students in job placement. First give career information seminars on job search, resume writing and interviewing techniques. Second, give students mock interviews. As part of the vocational English curriculum at site B, students will be

required to develop a professional portfolio containing letters of application, resumes and sample job application forms. Students will also be required to participate in mock job interviews. During the interviews the students will be rated in the areas of appearance and articulation. When students complete these activities they will have acquired the self-confidence needed to be successful in their employment endeavors. Students will have insight as to what employers are requiring; therefore they will be prepared with exemplary placement portfolios and superb interviewing techniques. "A competent and successful job placement service will help you write your resume, strengthen your interview skills and host employer visits and interviews" (Moskowitz, 1995 p.26).

Not only is it important for students to know what employers are looking for, they also need realistic exposure to the professions they are interested in. Jan Lewis in her article in Techniques (Lewis, 1997), states that students may have one career in mind, but we want them to look at other careers that might relate to that one career. Therefore on a typical "career day" there will be guest speakers who will discuss jobs students might be interested in and will answer related employment questions. These speakers might be parents or other members of the

local communities. "The major players in forming school-to-work programs include schools, employers and labor and community based organizations" (Laanan, 1995). "The accomplished teacher works with colleagues, the community, business and industry and post-secondary institutions to extend and enrich the learning opportunities available to students and to ease the school to work transition" (Byers, Miller, 1998 p.13).

Another form of occupational exposure for students could be in the form of job shadowing. In Jan Lewis' article (Lewis, 1997), she recommends that students choose a career and then be allowed to shadow an adult on that job for a day. The idea of job shadowing is not a new one; as far back as 1985 Fitzgerald suggests the possibility of using experience-based career education as one such alternative (Harrison, 1985). Research also states "Again, workbased learning opportunities need to be developed by faculty, in conjunction with employers, and reflect training and job needs of the community" (Elliot, May, Torbenson, 1996 p.6).

In keeping with research Site A is currently involved in a job shadowing experience through the Tech-Prep program. This is step one in Site A's career exploration curriculum. Here students choose an occupation that they

might be interested in, a job coach is contacted and the student shadows this person to get a feel of what that job entails. After reviewing the literature on solutions and strategies, a project outcome statement is formulated to state the intended accomplishment of this project. In order to help remediate the lack of employability skills in high school students, this team plans to develop work related activities through the use of cooperative learning, increased communication skills, interview related activities, inviting employers to speak to students and job shadowing experiences. A monthly action plan with detailed interventions is developed to resolve the problem of the lack of employability skills in high school students.

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of increased instructional emphasis on employment skills, to heighten student awareness and to promote transfer of employability skills. Students from the two selected sites will, during the period of September 1997, to January 1998, increase knowledge of employment skills as a result of work related activities in the classroom. Transfer will be measured by pre and post student surveys, student journals, and teacher checklists.

In order to accomplish the terminal objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. A survey will be created and administered to current students and recent graduates to determine their ideas and opinions on the current status of employment skill instruction.
2. Within the lesson plans, time will be scheduled to include employment skills learning activities.
3. A checklist of desirable employment skills will be created and distributed to local employers.
4. A checklist of time spent on employment skills will be created and distributed to teachers at the two selected sites.

Project Action Plan

Action Plan for intervention

- I. September
 - A. Survey current students
 1. current student pre-survey
 2. employment skills instruction received
 - B. Survey recent high school graduates
 1. employment instruction received
 2. measure transfer
 - C. Develop and implement classroom procedures
 1. introduction of student professional journals
 2. discussion and practice of employment skills
 - D. Compile and analyze surveys

1. current high school students
2. recent high school graduates

II. October

- A. Survey local employers
 1. desirable employment skills needed
 2. prioritize employment skills
- B. Continue developing and implementing procedures
 1. professional journals
 2. employment skills activities
- C. Teacher checklists
 1. employment skills taught
 2. checklist

III. November/December

- A. Compile and analyze data
 1. employer survey
 2. teacher checklist
- B. Continue implementing procedures
 1. student journals
 2. employment skills

IV. January

- A. Surveying current high school students
 1. current high school student post-survey
 2. employment skills instruction
- B. Compile and analyze data from post-survey

V. February

A. Project results

B. Make adaptations to curriculum

Methods of Assessment

Three separate processes will be used to evaluate the effects of the interventions. First current student surveys will be administered to assess the transfer of employability skills taught. Second, student journals will be used to track development of student's insights of their own employability. Finally teacher checklists will be used to document observable employability skills used on a daily bases in the classroom.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was to remediate the lack of employability skills in high school students. In order to achieve this objective, a four-part action plan was implemented. First a survey was administered to current students and recent graduates to determine their ideas and opinions on the status of present employment skill instruction. Second, a checklist was distributed to teachers at the two selected sites to measure the time teachers spent on employment activities in the current curriculum. Third, local employers were asked to rate the level of mastery of employment skills in their employees who are either current students, or who had recently graduated from high school. Finally employment skills activities were developed through the use of cooperative learning, increased communication skills, interview related activities, job fairs and job shadowing experiences. These employment skill activities were then implemented into the

Tech Prep Government, Special Education English and Industrial Woods classes at both sites A and B.

Data Collection

The first part of the action plan was to collect data to evidence the problem. In the first month of school the current high school students were surveyed in the areas of Special Education English, Tech Prep Civics and Industrial Woods Technology (Appendix A). The purpose of the survey was to determine the students' perception of the employability skills taught in the present curriculums. Next recent high school graduates were interviewed by phone (Appendix C). The purpose of the phone interviews was to determine if the recent graduates felt that their high school experience aided them in their present employment situation. The third part of the action plan included surveying local employers. The survey was designed to pinpoint the employer expectations and compare them to the perceptions of new hires (Appendix B). Finally random teachers were asked to fill out a checklist (Appendix D). The purpose of the checklist was to determine if employment skills were being taught in the present curriculums at both sites A and B.

Interventions

The first intervention was designed to increase the amount of teamwork, communication skills and problem solving. Cooperative learning was used as an instructional technique in delivering subject matter content. One such example of cooperative learning was in the Woods Technology class. Here students were divided into groups of four and were designated as "construction crews." A team building exercise of interpreting football pro team names was implemented. The groups were given a list of clues and were to use the clues to determine the name of the professional football team that the clue represented. After this team building activity, groups were then instructed to agree on a company name and slogan. The crews then made a poster to advertise their company. Once this was accomplished, the crews were set on the task of building a playhouse. Each crew worked on the house for one day and another crew rotated onto the job the next day. The crews were graded on their ability to work together and to accomplish the goals assigned for that day. In order to receive the maximum points for that period the students had to work as a team and complete the task.

Another example of the use of Cooperative Learning was used at site B. Here random groups were assigned

throughout the school year. While in groups, the focus was on problem solving and the development of interpersonal skills. Students throughout the year worked cooperatively on the World of Work packets. These packets focused on the employment skills necessary to find, apply, interview and begin a job. The student groups were instructed to analyze the information in the materials, reach a consensus on the correct answers and complete the packets by the scheduled deadline.

Additional Cooperative group activities included the development of written documents. Pairs were assigned the tasks of writing a letter of application, preparing a fact sheet and developing a resume. Students then had to edit their partner's documents before each piece could be added to the student's professional portfolio.

The second intervention used in the action plan involved incorporating instructional strategies to promote increased communication skills. At both sites A and B, in all three classrooms, students were asked to keep professional journals (Appendixes E, F). The journals not only provided practice in writing skills to communicate thoughts to the instructor, but the stems for each journal entry all related to an employability skill (Appendix G). Each day a journal stem was written on the board; students

would copy the stem and respond to it. When students completed the task, the stem was read for the class and then a discussion would take place. In this fashion topics ranging from "the importance of attendance" to "the purpose of a resume" could be discussed.

In the Special Education English classroom a Vocational English curriculum was developed for senior students who did not intend to go on to a four-year university. This course was designed to improve basic reading and writing skills and to place an emphasis on vocational techniques necessary to survive in the labor force.

The first technique used in the Special Education classroom was to improve the student's awareness of vocational words. Students were given ten weekly vocational vocabulary words and definitions (Appendixes H through O). The students were required to copy the words and definitions. Each day the class took part in activities to accomplish a brief review of the week's vocabulary list. Daily review activities ranged from illustrating the word's meaning on the board to orally using the words in a sentence. Every Friday the students were given a quiz to assess their recall of the words and definitions (Appendix P). Students had to match the words

with the correct definitions and use five of the words in a complete sentence.

The second technique used in the Special Education English classroom was designed to increase the student's awareness of the hiring process. Each week students were given vocational packets focusing on areas such as: writing a letter of application, preparing a fact sheet, writing a resume and preparing for an interview. Once students mastered the information introduced in each packet, time was scheduled in the computer lab. In the lab the students word-processed personal letters of application, fact sheets and resumes. These items were edited and added to the student's professional portfolio (Appendix Q). As the semester continued students assembled a personal portfolio that could actually be used as part of the interviewing process.

The third intervention used in the action plan was the use of interview related activities. In the Special Education English classroom at site B, students were given direct instruction on interviewing strategies. First students completed the World of Work packet. This packet stressed the dos and don'ts of interviewing. Next, in cooperative groups the students brainstormed possible interview questions they might be asked. Then students

were assigned a partner and were required to interview each other, using the list of questions the class had assembled. Each person conducting the interview was asked to fill out a rubric for the person being interviewed (Appendix R). When both of the students finished the interview they were asked to exchange rubrics and give each other feedback. The next step of the interview unit was for each of the students in the Special Education English class to be interviewed by the instructor. Again the instructor filled out a rubric for each student and gave the student feedback. The final step in the unit was to set up an interview for each student with an Administrator in the building (Appendix S). Administrators were chosen so that the interview might be as realistic for the student as possible. Students were required to take their professional portfolio with them and present it during the interview. Administrators were asked to complete a rubric for each student, which served as the assessment tool for the unit.

The fourth intervention used in the action plan was the development of career fairs and job shadowing experiences for the students. In the Industrial Technology classroom at site A students were taken to the Caterpillar Tractor Co. for a tour of the plant. While at the plant the

head of the personal department spoke to the students about the benefits offered at the plant. He then proceeded to tell the students how individuals waste these benefits by not showing up for work or coming to work late. The importance of promptness and attendance was repeated at least three times throughout the talk. The students were able to see first hand, the value of good attendance and punctuality.

Once again the business community was involved in increasing the students awareness for the need of employability skills, when a representative from Chemstress Engineering came to speak to the Industrial Technology classes at site A. This representative again stressed the importance of good attendance and punctuality. He said that more employees lose their jobs because of the lack of these skills than for any other reason.

The final work based learning intervention, which the students experienced, was a job/career fair, including a job shadowing experience. The career fair, held at site A, involved several community employers, invited to the school for the purpose of career exposure and discussion with the students. The students were given the opportunity to visit with each of the employers. This activity was done in the student's respective cooperative groups. Some of the

careers they were exposed to include nursing, radiologist technician, dental hygienist, an agricultural specialist, medical doctor, lawyer, and educator. The students were appreciative of the chance to explore these new and varied career opportunities.

The Tech Prep Freshman at site A also experienced a job shadowing activity. This one-time activity gave the students the opportunity to see first hand the skills and abilities needed in a typical workday for various occupations. The students were matched with businesses based on their career interests and goals. This "learning through observation" technique is particularly valuable for students as a preliminary job survey. This activity expands their knowledge about what types of jobs and careers are available. It also gives students an idea of the skills needed both in particular fields as well as those necessary for any job.

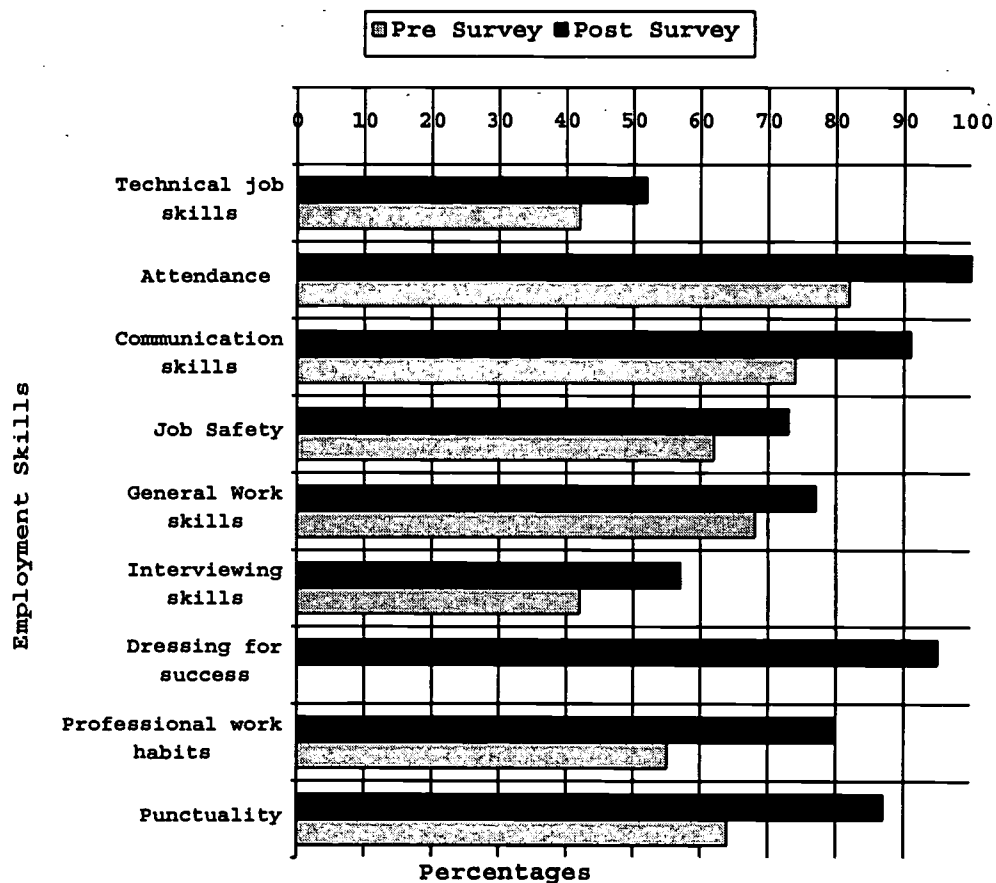
As part of their experience, the student is to complete an employer questionnaire. The major task is to ascertain what the work week consists of (i.e., hours, days shifts). Students need to find out the various responsibilities and duties of the job. Students are asked to learn what salary and/or hourly wage that accompany each job. In addition, the students must determine what the job

outlook in the field is as well as the necessary training and/or degrees needed. Finally, the advantages and disadvantages of the position must be made known.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to determine any improvement in student knowledge of employability skills, a pre-survey and post-survey (Appendix A) were given to current high school students at sites A and B. As was stated in chapter two, the results of the pre-survey indicated that the students rated their employability training to be rather limited. The post-survey indicated that the interventions used at Sites A and B greatly improved the student's perception of their employment skill education. Since the results of the student's perception of their employability skills was fairly close to the results of the employer survey, these researchers feel that the student's perception of their employability training is a useful gauge as to the effectiveness of the interventions. Judging by the results of the pre and post surveys of current high school students the researchers feel that these students are now considerably more prepared to enter the work force than they were prior to the interventions. The pre and post survey results are compared in figure 1.4.

Figure 1.4 Pre and Post Survey Results of Current High School Students



As was illustrated in the bar graph in figure 1.4 the current high school students reported that their training in the targeted skill areas increased considerably. In the pre survey 42% of the students surveyed felt especially deficient in the area of interview skills. As result of the interventions, interview skills increased by 15%. Technical job skills went from 41% to

52%, an increase of 11%. In the area of attendance skills, an area that was rated high by the students in the pre survey increased by 18%. One hundred percent of the students surveyed felt that attendance skills were adequately presented throughout the school year. Through the use of cooperative learning we were able to touch on the area of communication by having the students work together, by talking through problems they had to solve. The groups also had to present their findings to the class, which aided the students in their public speaking skills. The cooperative learning activities gave the students experience in team building which promotes professional work habits; as was stated in the literature review, employers want employees who can work as a team.

Communication skills were also increased with the use of journal writing. This activity gave students practice in writing on a regular basis. Journal writing gave students a chance to reflect on their current employability skills and judge where they would like to be. The journal writing initiated another way to present information to the students. The journal stems were designed to include hints on employability, employer's perceptions, career information and interviewing tips.

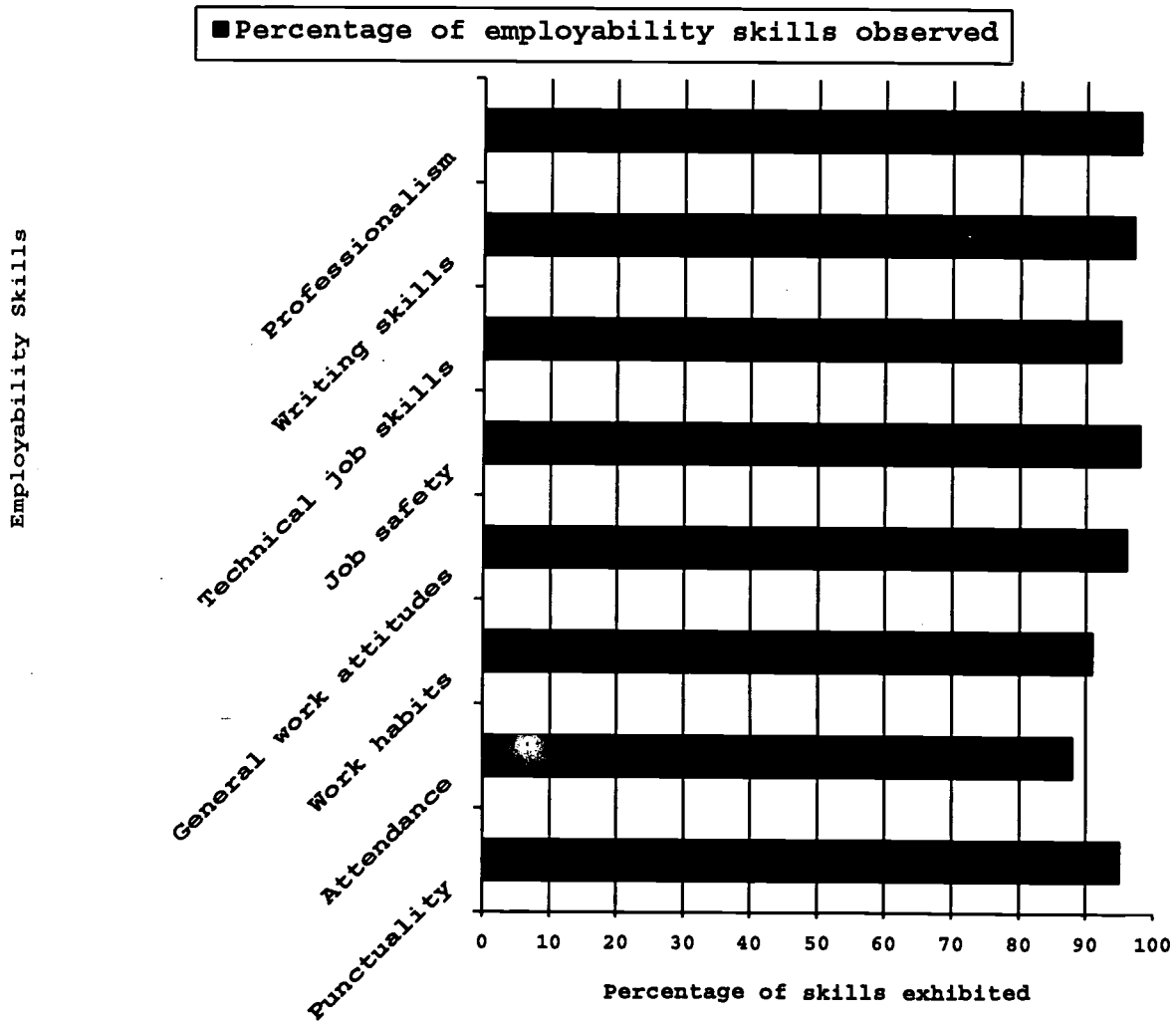
Through this one intervention many of the employability areas were covered.

Bringing the business community into the schools and taking the students into the business community also touched on several of the employability skills. The students heard from real employers, who are associated with large companies that offer good jobs, speak about attendance, punctuality, working as a team, being able to communicate, using safe work habits and the importance of having an overall positive work attitude. The job shadowing activities brought these skills even closer to the student.

In order to monitor the students use of the employability skills presented to them a teacher observation checklist was developed (Appendix T). This checklist was used over a four-week period. The instructors at the two sites observed the students in the classrooms going about their daily routine. Each time a student did not display the appropriate behavior a check was marked in the appropriate box. The behaviors observed were the employability skills that the instructors have been working to improve throughout the school year. As shown in figure 1.5, the students demonstrated a high percentage of transfer of the employability skills taught.

If students are able to transfer these skills in the classroom setting, these researchers feel confident that these same skills will transfer into the workplace.

Figure 1.5 Results of Teacher Checklist of observable
Employability Skills



The purpose of the teacher checklist was to document the transfer of employability skills covered in the interventions. As was shown in figure 1.5 the results indicate a high level of transfer. All employability skills were observed at 88% or higher. By demonstrating the transfer of the employability skills in the class, it was the hope of these researchers that these skills would then transfer into the workplace. Although, in some cases students were suspended for a significant amount of time or absent due to illness, it did not have a significant effect on the results. It seems that the interventions did have a positive effect on the student's perception of their employability training and their overall school work habits.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the presentation and analysis of data, the students have showed significant improvement in their perception of employability skill education as witnessed by their demonstration of these skills in the classroom situation. The number of students who felt that all the employability skills were covered in their classes also

increased. The demonstration of the employability skills was present as shown by the teacher checklists.

Although improvements were noted in the above-mentioned area, the researchers feel that the improvements are restricted to those disciplines taught by the teacher researchers and not followed school wide. The researchers also feel that these skills should be covered in other classes throughout the school, so that positive influence could affect more students. Our question in this project was "Are high schools producing employable graduates?" It seems that the answer to our question is that not enough schools are. Students have felt that the employability skills were not covered in their classes. Employers felt that many high school graduates did not demonstrate the necessary employability skills necessary to be a desirable employee. According to the teacher checklist information, most teachers do not cover the employability skills in their present curriculums.

The teacher researchers were satisfied with the activities used in this intervention. They did effectively increase the student's perception of the level of their employability education. It also seems to have had an effect on student behavior in the classroom. The teacher researchers feel that high schools should incorporate more

employability education into the present curriculum and across the curriculum school wide.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Are High Schools Producing Employable Adults?**Current High School Student Survey**

Directions: Circle yes or no for each of the following questions.

1. Do you have plans for a career at this point?
Y N
2. Do you get help on employability skills from your Counselor?
Y N

Are you currently enrolled in any of the following programs?

Industrial Technology	Y	N
Foods courses	Y	N
Office Occupations	Y	N
Tech Prep	Y	N
Cooperative Education (work-study program)	Y	N
Inclusion Special Education	Y	N

Are any of the following employability skills taught in your classes?

Punctuality	Y	N
Professional work habits	Y	N
Dressing for success	Y	N
Interviewing skills	Y	N
Specific job skills	Y	N
General work skills	Y	N
Work safety	Y	N
Communication skills (speaking, writing)	Y	N
Attendance	Y	N

Do you feel that your high school experience has helped you to become employable?

Y N

Do you feel that your high school has directed you to get the training you will need for your career?

Y N

APPENDIX B

Employment Skills Survey

Dear Employer,

My colleagues and I are involved in a graduate program through Saint Xavier University. Our graduate work involves a research project in which we are trying to discover if high schools are producing employable graduates. It would be a great help to us if you could take some time from your busy schedule and complete the survey below and return it in the self-addressed, stamped envelope provided. Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely
Theresa Carter
Jo Ann McCarroll
David Popek

In general rate the employability skills of current high school students or recent high school graduates at the entry-level positions in your business.

	Poor				excellent
1. Punctuality	1	2	3	4	5
2. Attendance	1	2	3	4	5
3. Work Habits	1	2	3	4	5
4. Interview Skills	1	2	3	4	5
5. General Work Attitudes	1	2	3	4	5
6. Technical Job Skills	1	2	3	4	5
7. Job Safety	1	2	3	4	5
8. Writing Skills	1	2	3	4	5
9. Communication Skills	1	2	3	4	5
10. Professionalism	1	2	3	4	5

Please list any generalizations you can make about the quality of preparedness of the recent high school graduate or high school students in the work force.

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APPENDIX C

Are High Schools Producing Employable Graduates?**High School graduate employability survey**

Directions: circle yes or no for each of the following questions

1. Do you have plans for a career at this point?

Y N

2. Did you receive help with employability skills while in High school?

Y N

Were you enrolled in any of the following programs while attending high school?

Industrial Technology	Y	N
Foods courses	Y	N
Office Occupations	Y	N
Tech Prep	Y	N
Cooperative Education (work-study program)	Y	N
Inclusion Special Education	Y	N

Were any of the following employability skills taught in your classes while attending high school?

Punctuality	Y	N
Professional work habits	Y	N
Dressing for success	Y	N
Interviewing skills	Y	N
Specific job skills	Y	N
General working skills	Y	N
Work safety	Y	N
Communication skills (writing, speaking)	Y	N
Attendance	Y	N

Do you feel that your high school experience helped you to become employable?

Y N

Do you feel that your high school has directed you to get the additional training that you will need for your career?

Y N

APPENDIX D

**Are High Schools Producing Employable Graduates?
Checklist for Teachers**

Teachers,

Please take a few moments to fill out this checklist. The results will help in the writing of our action research, which is part of the field base masters program through Saint Xavier University. If you would be interested to know the results of our data collection please indicate with a check in the appropriate box at the end of the survey and one of us would be happy to share our research results with you.

Sincerely,
Theresa Carter
Dave Popek
Jo Ann McCarroll

Directions: Circle yes or no for each question below.

Are you currently teaching any of the following programs?

Industrial Technology	Y	N
Foods Courses	Y	N
Office Occupations	Y	N
Tech Prep	Y	N
Cooperative Education	Y	N
Special Education	Y	N

Are any of the following employability skills taught as part of your present curriculum?

Punctuality	Y	N
Professional work habits	Y	N
Dressing for success	Y	N
Interviewing skills	Y	N
Specific job skills	Y	N
General working skills	Y	N
Work Safety	Y	N
Communication skills	Y	N
Attendance	Y	N

Do you feel that the High School in which you work, prepares students for the world of work?

Y N

Do you feel that the High school, in which you work, directs students to get the vocational training, they will need for their career?

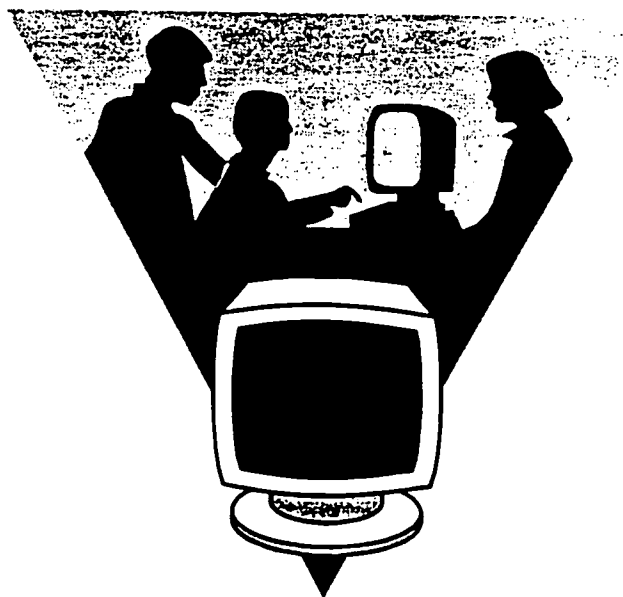
Y N

APPENDIX E
Professional Journal Cover

Name _____



Professional Journal



APPENDIX F
Journal Entry Sheet

JOURNAL ENTRY

Date _____

Stem _____

JOURNAL ENTRY

Date _____

Stem _____

APPENDIX G

Vocational Awareness Professional Journal Stems



1. How would an employer rate your attendance based on your school attendance? How would you improve your attendance?
2. Why is attendance so important to employers?
3. How would an employer rate your punctuality, based on your school punctuality?
4. Why is being to work on time so important to employers?
5. Why is important for your letter of application and resume to be perfect?
6. Why is following directions so important in the workplace? How would you rate your skills at following directions?
7. Why is important for applications to be filled out neatly and accurately?
8. What types of information would you include on your fact sheet? Why?
9. How would a professional portfolio be beneficial to you?
10. How will you use your professional portfolio?
11. During an interview, what would you want an employer to know about you? Why?
12. During an interview why is it important to speak clearly and distinctly?
13. Rate the overall quality of your work from 1-5. Why would you give yourself this rating?
14. How would you improve your rating?
15. Rate your overall dependability from 1-5. Why would you give yourself this rating?
16. How would you improve your rating?
17. Why is important to fill out your W-4 cards completely?
18. Why is important to fill out your time cards neatly and completely?
19. Who would be a person to ask if you had questions about your job?

APPENDIX H

Words in the Workplace Vocabulary list #1

1. Agency-A private or government organization that does certain work for other companies or people.
2. Anxiety-A feeling of nervousness.
3. Applicant-The person applying for a job.
4. Apprentice-A person who works and studies with a trained worker to learn a skill.
5. Aptitude-A natural ability or talent.
6. Authorization-Official approval; the power or right to act, order, or make certain decisions.
7. Beneficiary-A person who receives the death benefits from life insurance after the insured person has died.
8. Benefits Package-Extra things a company offers, such as paid sick leave, paid vacation time, paid holidays, medical and life insurance, child care, employee discounts.
9. Bonus-Something that is given in addition to what is expected, additional earnings.
10. Compromise-The acts of settling a disagreement between parties by having each party give up something.

APPENDIX I

Words in the Workplace Vocabulary List #2

1. Confidential-Private; secret.
2. Consequences-Outcomes; results of actions.
3. Constructive Criticism-Suggestions or advice which help a person to become better.
4. Contract-A written agreement between two parties.
5. Contribution-Giving or donating something.
6. Courteous-Having good manners, being polite.
7. Deduction-Something taken away or subtracted from earnings.
8. Dependent-Anyone, spouse, child that relies on another person for financial support.
9. Dexterity-Having skill in using hands, body, or mind when performing a task.
10. Direct Deposit-Worker arranges for a paycheck to be put in bank account automatically.

APPENDIX J

Words in the Workplace Vocabulary List #3

1. Discrimination-An unfair difference in treatment.
2. Dismissal-The act of being sent away or being allowed to leave.
3. Dues-Money paid regularly for being a member of a group, such as a union.
4. Duties-The tasks which are part of the worker's job.
5. EEOE-Abbreviation for Equal Employment Opportunity Employer. This employer guarantees not to discriminate in hiring and employment practices based on race, sex, religion, age, physical challenge, or national origin.
6. Executive-A person who directs or manages in business or government.
7. Experience-The skill or knowledge a person gains from doing something.
8. The Family and Medical Leave Act-A federal law that guarantees a worker unpaid time off to care for an ill family member or for reasons of birth, adoption, or foster care of a child. This law guarantees that a worker may return to a company without any penalty.
9. Fatigue-Being tired.
10. Federal tax-The taxes taken out of a worker's salary or wages that is paid to the Federal Government.

APPENDIX K

Words in the Workplace Vocabulary List #4

1. FICA-Abbreviation for Federal Insurance Contributions Act. The tax taken out of a worker's salary or wages which is paid to the Federal Government.
2. Flex Time-A benefit a company offers which allows an employee to work a schedule that is convenient to the worker.
3. Foreman-An employee who is in charge of other workers.
4. Full time-Working 35 to 40 hours per week at a particular job, depending on the rules of a company.
5. Human Resources Department-The department where all employee records are kept and where many employee services are offered.
6. Harassment-The bothering or annoying of someone, especially over a period of time.
7. Hazardous-Dangerous; able to cause harm, injury, or damage.
8. Incentives-Benefits; something that makes one work or try harder.
9. Infraction-A breaking of a rule or law.
10. Initiative-The ability to get things started without being told to.

APPENDIX L

Words in the Workplace Vocabulary List #5

1. Income-Money received from doing work.
2. Inferior-Of poor quality; below average or unacceptable.
3. Interview-A meeting for a special purpose, such as employment or evaluation.
4. Inventory-A detailed list of items on hand. Many companies take an inventory of their products or stock at the end of a selling season.
5. Invoice-A bill for goods or services.
6. Lay off-Either a temporary or a permanent dismissal from a job. Some seasonal jobs require lay offs when there is not enough work.
7. Liability-A legal responsibility; something that works against you.
8. Limitation-Something that prevents or holds someone back.
9. Medicare-health care benefits, which are provided by the government through the FICA, tax.
10. Minimum wage-The lowest amount an employer may legally pay a worker.

APPENDIX M

Words in the Workplace Vocabulary List #6

1. Morale-The way a person or group feels about the work they are doing.
2. National Labor Relations Board-An organization established to help protect labor laws and help form unions. Sometimes they help negotiate between employers and employees; often called the NLRB for short.
3. Negotiate-To talk over a problem or situation with the hope of coming to an agreement. Unions often negotiate contracts for higher wages and benefits for their members.
4. Networking-Meeting with people to share advice, offer assistance, or provide information related to work.
5. Occupation-Profession; the work a person does for a living.
6. Offensive-Unpleasant, disagreeable.
7. Overtime-Time worked that is more than the regular hours a worker was hired for.
8. Part-time-Work that is less than full time.
9. Pension-Money paid regularly by a company to someone who has retired from that company.
10. Perks-Benefits or extras.

APPENDIX N

Words in the Workplace Vocabulary List #7

1. Precautions-Things done ahead of time to avoid danger or harm.
2. Profit-The amount of money left over after the costs of running a business, such as rent, employees' pay and benefits, etc., have been paid.
3. Promotion-A moving up to a higher position with better pay.
4. Purchase order-A company form used for the ordering of supplies; also referred to as a P.O.
5. Quota-The share one person in a group is expected to give, or is allowed to get, out of a total.
6. Recommendation-A suggestion that someone well-suited for a particular job.
7. Recruiter-One who gets workers to join a company.
8. Reimbursement-A repayment of money spent.
9. Rejection-A refusal to allow, accept, or approve.
10. Salary range-The lowest to highest amount paid for a particular job.

APPENDIX O

Words in the Workplace Vocabulary List #8

1. Seniority-Having certain rights due to the length of service spent at a company.
2. Severance pay-Extra pay given to employees who are dismissed through no fault of their own. The amount of pay is usually based on how long the worker was employed.
3. Stamina-Having a great amount of energy without suffering; the strength to continue without becoming tired.
4. Tactful-Saying or doing the correct thing without offending anyone.
5. Temporary agency-A company that places people in jobs which are intended to last only a short period of time.
6. Terminate-To fire; to let go.
7. Unemployment compensation-Payments given to a qualified unemployed person at regular times by a state agency. Workers usually qualify for unemployment compensation when they have been laid off.
8. Union-A worker's group formed to protect workers' wages, benefits, and working conditions.
9. Unreliable-Not dependable; not trustworthy.
10. Vacancy-An empty position or place. A job vacancy occurs when a worker leaves his or her position.

APPENDIX P
Sample Vocational Vocabulary Test

Name _____

Date _____ Hour _____

Words in the Workplace Vocabulary test #2

***Directions-**Match the words in the word list with the correct definition below. Write the correct vocabulary word on the lines provided.

WORD LIST

Confidential	consequences	constructive criticism
Contract	contribution	courteous
Deduction	dependent	dexterity
Direct deposit		

_____ 1. Having skill in using hands, body, or mind when performing a task.

_____ 2. Having good manners, being polite.

_____ 3. Suggestions or advice which help a person to become better

_____ 4. Private; secret

_____ 5. Outcomes; results of actions

_____ 6. A written agreement between two parties

_____ 7. Worker arranges for a paycheck to be put in bank account automatically

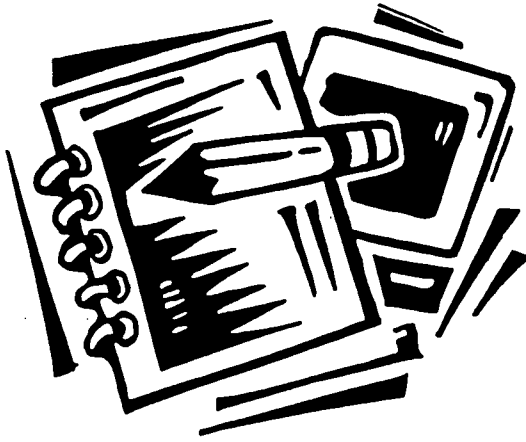
_____ 8. Anyone, spouse, child that relies on another person for financial support

_____ 9. Something taken away or subtracted from earnings

_____ 10. Giving or donating something

***Directions-**Choose five of the vocabulary words and use them in a complete sentence. Write the sentences below or on the back.

APPENDIX Q



Professional Portfolio Grade Checklist

1. letter of application	1	2	3
2. Fact sheet	1	2	3
3. Job applications(at least two)	1	2	3
4. Resume	1	2	3
5. Vocational journal sheets	1	2	3
6. Vocational vocabulary lists and tests	1	2	3
7. Vocational packets/worksheets	1	2	3
8. Miscellaneous	1	2	3

PERSONAL REFLECTION

The pieces I am comfortable with in my portfolio are...because

The pieces I want to continue to improve are...because

APPENDIX R
Sample Interview Rubric

Student Name _____

Date of interview _____ Time of Interview _____

INTERVIEW RUBRIC

APPEARANCE

Hair neat and clean	1	2	3
Girls-makeup appropriate			
Guys-clean shaven	1	2	3
Appropriate jewelry	1	2	3

ENTERING THE ROOM

Introduction	1	2	3
Waited until asked to be seated	1	2	3
Self-assured posture	1	2	3

DURING THE INTERVIEW

Appropriate posture while sitting	1	2	3
Eye contact	1	2	3
Listened carefully	1	2	3
Used proper English to answer questions	1	2	3
Spoke clearly and distinctly	1	2	3
Asked appropriate questions	1	2	3

LEAVING THE INTERVIEW

Polite (thanked you for the interview)	1	2	3
Self-assured posture	1	2	3

APPENDIX S
Sample Mock Job Interview Letter

To:
From: Jo Ann McCarroll
Re: Mock job interview, Friday March 20th, 8:00 a.m.

Thanks so much for taking the time to interview one of my students. This activity is part of the Vocational English, Special Education curriculum for seniors. Through out the semester students have been working on job placement skills and the development of their professional portfolios (ask to see the portfolios as part of the interview).

A brief explanation of the job the students will be applying for is included below. I have also included some questions you might ask them. Feel free to ask them any other questions that you might have. Attached is a scoring rubric, please take a moment and fill out the rubric. This rubric will provide the students with feedback on the interview.

Again thank you so much for taking the time to help me with this project. Because of your help, students are experiencing a valuable real-life lesson.

Sincerely

Jo Ann McCarroll

The student you will interview is _____

The job the student is applying for is _____

Possible interview questions

1. How did you become interested in this profession?
2. What courses have you taken to prepare you for this profession?
3. Why are you applying for this job?
4. What experience do you have that would prepare you for this job?
5. How would your teacher/last boss describe you?
6. How do you spend your spare time?
7. Tell me why I should hire you for this position?
8. How would you rate your cooperation skills? Why?
9. How would you be an asset to this company/school?

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