A STUDY CONTRASTING EMPLOYERS AND STUDENTS EXPECTATIONS OF A WORK EXPERIENCE PROGRAM

by

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ABSTRACT

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Over the decades, American education has undergone many reforms, endured many harsh criticisms, and managed to stay quite the same. Schools were designed to prepare students for work, the military, technical schools, and colleges. While the emphasis was upon the academics, schools did participate in work-based learning, usually under the auspices of the vocational departments.

Work-based learning was not then, and is not now new to American education. Its roots lie in our agricultural past. When crops needed to be harvested, barns built, and other seasonal chores completed; these youngsters left the confines of the classroom and learned by experience many lessons not taught in the traditional school setting. Over the years, students continued to leave school to go to work, but the school basically ignored the employer and the student once the student left the school campus.

Over these years, work-based learning continued, but changed very little until the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 which encouraged the creation of learning environments for

students at work. A study of work-based employment programs found that successful programs must have three components: a trained mentor who supervises the student, a skilled student who is prepared to work, and educational training in soft skills necessary for successful employment. The origin of these soft skills lies in the fact that students and employers needed to identify the skills necessary for a successful work experience program. Published and released in June, 1991, SCANS clearly identified skills through a three-part foundation:

However, there was a major problem once these competencies were published and released to employers and schools. Previously, schools had determined curriculum content for students. Now, schools were facing a set of competencies which they had not previously addressed to a great degree. Students were suddenly faced with a new set of expectations, expectations which they could somewhat understand, but not in the context of what they were doing. Leaving the restrained, traditional confines of the school, earning money for cars and other luxuries, and the freedom to mingle with individuals outside of the school were their perceptions of what work-experience should be.

Employers were looking more specifically for the SCANS competencies. What resulted was a mix of expectations on the part of the employer and the part of the student taking place in a work experience program.

The purpose of this study is to review, analyze, critique, and draw sets and implications from literature on the subject of contrasting expectations of a work-based learning experience on the parts of employers and students.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Over the decades, American education has undergone many reforms, endured many harsh criticisms, and managed to stay quite the same. Schools were designed to prepare students for work, the military, technical schools, and colleges. This mission continued with some minor changes, but basic time schedules of September to June, class periods of equal duration, and the five day week continued. While the principal focus was on preparing students for that next step of education, vocational departments had long ago taken on the mission of preparing students for work. Woodworking, welding, metal working, cooking, sewing, and other such vocational classes were designed for training those who were not "expected" to further their education. Their mission was separate from the academics of English, Writing, Mathematics, and Science. The vocational educator termed this learning "work-based education."

Work-based learning was not then, and is not now new to American education. Its roots lie in our agricultural past where farm youngsters would leave their one room school house on rainy days and during winter months. When crops needed to be harvested, barns built, and other seasonal chores completed; these youngsters left the confines of the classroom and learned by experience many lessons not taught in the traditional school setting. Over the years, students continued to leave school to go to work, but the school basically ignored the employer and the student once the student left the school campus.

Schools retreated to the confines of their walled perimeters and students rarely left the building, save for field trips. However, in the 1970s schools re-ignited work-based learning by allowing vocational students to leave school to go to work early. The highly gifted and academic students stayed in school to study traditional curriculums. These non-traditional students would

work in restaurants, car garages, and gas stations, but their work-release time was rarely supervised nor even monitored. Historically, American education had viewed the workplace as the end result for learning, rather than seeing it as a learning opportunity in itself (Hoye, 1999).

As early as 1985, industry and business representatives expressed extreme dissatisfaction between the gap of skills requirements for entry level employment and the skills possessed by those seeking these jobs (Cotton, 1999). Most importantly, employers were not as upset with the skills performance as they were with non-technical skills, also known as "employability skills." These skills were identified as reading, basic arithmetic, and other basic skills such as problems solving, decision-making, and other higher-order thinking skills. These employers also expressed concern about dependability, a positive attitude, cooperativeness, and other affective skills and traits. Employers continued to find far too many entry-level job applicants deficient in employability skills and asked schools to place more emphasis on developing these employability skills.

Another concern was that students who head off to work immediately after high school, as opposed to college bound, often drifted from one job to another, without learning the skills necessary in the technological workforce. As a result of that inadequate preparation, many youth struggled when entering their first job, were quickly unemployed, and floundered in jobs without much advancement or job satisfaction (Smith, 1993).

In spite of these findings and recommendations from employers, over these years, work-based learning continued, but changed very little until the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 which encouraged the creation of learning environments for students at work. A study of work-based employment programs found that successful programs must have three components:

a trained mentor who supervises the student, a skilled student who is prepared to work, and educational training in soft skills necessary for successful employment (Hamilton, 1997).

The origin of these soft skills lies in the fact that students and employers needed to identify the skills necessary for a successful work experience program. SCANS (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills was appointed by the Secretary of Labor to determine what skills our young adults needed to succeed at work. The Commission's principal purpose was to create a high-performance economy through high-skill, high-wage employment. Basically, this report detailed what schools needed to teach their students to provide a workers with a solid foundation in soft interpersonal skills, thinking skills, basic literacy and computational skills, and personal qualities to make workers dedicated and trustworthy. This initiative was employer driven, not school motivated. Published and released in June, 1991, SCANS clearly identified skills through a three-part foundation (Secretary, 1997). These skills addressed reading, writing, performance of arithmetic and mathematical operations, listening, and speaking. It is essential that an employee locates, understands, and interprets written information in prose and in documents such as manuals, graphs, and schedules. A student employee also needs to communicate thoughts, ideas, information, and messages in writing; and create documents such as letters, directions, manuals, reports, graphs, and flow charts. In addition, this student worker must successfully perform basic computations and approach practical problems by choosing appropriately form a variety of mathematical techniques. Listening and speaking are also identified as basic skills under this heading.

Thinking skills are also identified as essential to every successful employee. Creative thinking, decision making, problem solving, knowing how to learn, and reasoning are all very essential to entry level employees. Also necessary to be a efficient and competent entry-level

employee are personal qualities which display responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity and honesty.

Finally, five workplace competencies were identified. These included resource in which an individual can identify, organize, plan, and allocate resources such as time, money, material and facilities, and human resources. Interpersonal skills included being able to work with others, participating as a member of the team, teaching others new skills, exercising leadership, negotiating, and working with diversity. Those identified under the heading of information require an employee to acquire and use information, acquire and evaluate information, organize and maintain information, interpret and communicate information, and use computers to process information. A knowledge of systems dictates that an employee understand complex inter-relationships, understand systems, monitor and correct performance, and improve or design systems. Those under the umbrella of technology expect that an entry level employee will be able to work with a variety of technology, select technology, apply technology to task, and maintain and troubleshoot equipment.

However, there was a major problem once these competencies were published and released to employers and schools. Previously, schools had determined curriculum content for students. Now, schools were facing a set of competencies which they had not previously addressed to a great degree. Schools were being "told" by an outside force what needed to be taught in order to provide workers for the American work force. Students were suddenly faced with a new set of expectations, expectations which they could somewhat understand, but not in the context of what they were doing. Students had been going to work, but not been basically instructed in what skills they needed to be successful. Leaving the restrained, traditional

confines of the school, earning money for cars and other luxuries, and the freedom to mingle with individuals outside of the school were their perceptions of what work-experience should be.

Employers were looking more specifically for the SCANS competencies. What resulted was a mix of expectations on the part of the employer and the part of the student taking place in a work experience program. Obviously the perceptions of the partners in work-based learning, more specifically work experience programs varied somewhat as each of them participated in these programs.

Statement of the Problem

A review of literature shows that students who are involved in a work experience program have expectations which they hope to achieve. Studies have also shown that employers who are providing a work experience for students have expectations, which they hope to achieve. Therefore, the research hypothesis for this study is that both the student and employer have differing expectations when approaching a work experience program.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to describe the level of difference between employer's expectations of a work experience program, and a student's expectations while involved in a work experience program through a broad review of literature.

This study will focus on the following objectives:

1. Determine the employers' expectations of a work experience program through ranking of skills as determined by SCANS.
2. Determine the students' expectations of a work experience program through ranking of skills determined by SCANS.

3. Describe the differences between the employers' expectations of a work experience program and the students' expectations of a work experience program.
4. Critique the literature on the subject and draw implications and conclusions related to the work experience program for school programming in Princeton.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

Basically, the issue is the differences of expectations that an employer has as compared to the expectations that a student has when entering a work experience program as part of an expanding School-to-Work high school work-based curriculum. While work-experience programs have become an integral part of high school curriculums since 1994, these programs seem to falter due to a lack of understanding from both the student's prospective and the employer's prospective. Therefore, this literature review is attempting to investigate both sides of this issue: student and employer. First, employer expectations as found in the literature will be reviewed. Second, student expectations as found in literature will be reviewed. Reviewed. Last, literature which directly addresses the perceived differences between these two partners will be reviewed. Before these expectations are reviewed, it is necessary to review literature regarding SCANS (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills) and its relationship to the necessary employment skills perceived on the part of employers and students.

SCANS and its Relationship to Work-Based Learning

The SCANS report notes that if students are taught in a real-world context, they will bridge that gap between classroom learning and necessary job skills to succeed in employment. Jobs really are joint ventures between employers with problems to be solved and workers who have the skills to solve those problems. Identified in the SCANS report is a three part foundation skills section which includes 1)basic skills, 2)thinking skills, and 3)personal qualities. Ideally these skills would be integrated into the teaching curriculum design process. However, the third area which includes personal skills are difficult to integrate since the SCANS report fails to define in a functional manner the nature of personal qualities. Schools have reported difficulty in defining these skills and often develop lessons by using a model designed to have

students list activities for acquiring these personal skills in order to accomplish a task or project. Students articulating these behaviors as listed by SCANS is the desired outcome to prepare them for employment. Historically, it has always been very difficult for our society to arrive at a concensus on the definitions and levels of acceptance of such behaviors as responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity/honest (McNabb, 1995).

Wisconsin businesses were interviewed and asked "What skills and/or characteristics do you want potential employers to have when they interview for a position in your business?" SCANS competencies identified included honesty, good personal appearance, attendance, straight-forward attitude, accepting criticism, and a positive attitude. All of these would have been taught by parents at one time. However, there has been a fundamental shift in our society. Major shifts in the routines and realities of family life have made it financially impossible for many families to supervise, educate, and nature their children. Some children grow up in families where is there is no adult working role model. Therefore, many educators feel employability skills such as those identified by SCANS need to be taught in American schools (Poole, 1993). A study by Poole listed skills schools need to teach such as understanding how to apply and interview for a job, possessing good work habits and attitudes, adapting to change and learning new skills, solving problems, and developing thinking skills (1993).

Many of these skills are often relegated to the vocational programs as many feel that general employability skills and career decision-making skills are the responsibility of vocational education (Jennings, 1995). However, since vocational programs are often limited to those not going on to postsecondary education, it lies in the area of general curriculum to integrate these skills into school curriculums. The directive from businesses is that high school education has to prepare students with broad-based core academic and general employability skills, deferring

job-specific skills training to postsecondary education. According to Lovejoy, a balance is needed between learning the general workplace and employability skills demanded by all employers today and into the future. Lovejoy states the need for vocational-technical curriculums to address SCANS-like competencies along with job-specific skills (Lovejoy, 1996).

High-tech skills have increased dramatically since the SCANS report was first released. SCANS skills such as using a computer to locate, process or communicate information are identified as more necessary today to solve work problems. Today, SCANS clearly defines for workers high-performance job competencies such as safeguarding information and valuables; self-scheduling of work activities; prioritizing work jobs; judging the importance, quality, and accuracy of information; and listening to instructions from or concerns of supervisors or co-workers. Other advanced skills determined as relevant include working with people in other departments to accomplish goals, coordinating individual work activities with the activities of others, and communicating the right amount of information to the right people (Feller, 1996).

Reviewed literature clearly focuses on society's failure to provide a well prepared workforce and America's need to recognize that the workforce possesses basic literacy deficiencies which need to be addressed in today's high schools to provide a competent future workforce. According to Taylor, the legacy of ill-prepared workers has been passed on. America should have planned ahead. Basic skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic are still needed for productive job performance; however, the technological workplace is in need of critical thinking skills, integrity, self-management, honesty, self-esteem, and interpersonal skills. Thus, SCANS linked to project-based instruction in schools is necessary to keep America from choking on its chalk dust in schools with antiquated curriculums which do little to prepare workers for the real life work experience they will encounter(Taylor, 1997). SCANS has helped

to highlight the importance of employability skills, but it is the present economy which has highlighted students' needs to be prepared for the increasingly technical jobs of the future. Vocational technical education and the general core curriculums in high schools have commenced the teaching of SCANS skills, eliminating irrelevant programs, and replacing them with ones in which job demand is strong (Brand, 1999). Livingston Technical Academy, a charter school, in Michigan made intangible skills such showing up on time and taking directions a big part of their curriculums. Their philosophy was to incorporate SCANS skills into every part of their curriculum: in school and at work-based learning sites. Business leaders have praised Livingston for their work-ready students when they show up at job sites (Litvin, 1997). Renee Lerche, director for the Ford Motor Company emphasized the need for SCANS competencies before the Committee on Education and the Workforce in the U.S. House of Representatives. He reiterated Ford Motor Company's involvement in the school-to-work program through the Ford Academy of Manufacturing Sciences (FAMS). FAMS is a rigorous academic and work-based high school program designed to introduce students to skills they will need to succeed in the world of work. FAMS provides an opportunity to learn technology, science, math, and communications skills in real-life settings (Lerche, 1999). This review of SCANS-related literature points to the necessity of such skills for the successful employment of employees—be they postsecondary students or high school students involved in work-based learning.

Employers' Expectations

Vocational education has always been the focal point of any work experience program, especially in the 1980s when it became a national priority. However, employers began to realize that well-prepared workers would also be needed for continued competition in a technologically-

driven society. Part of the need to provide experience workers lied in the fact that continued slow population growth dictated a smaller pool of potential workers, but a pool which needed to be more ready to work. With fewer employees, industry foresaw a need for workers who could perform better than previous generations of workers. In order to compete globally and domestically, we needed a more sophisticated work force (Imel, 1989).

Employers believed that vocational education needed to focus much more on developing applied basic skills such as math, reading, and writing; problem-solving and decision-making skills; and the skills necessary to obtain a job and then keep that job. They further recommended that close articulation between in-school educational experiences and on-the-job experiences be expanded (Imel,1989).

A study in 1993 conducted by Raymond and McNabb found that business school graduates and employers had slightly different perceptions regarding the highest rank skills and abilities desired by employers. Almost 40% of the employers ranked communications skills at the top, followed by 21% identifying interpersonal skills, and 12% targeting enthusiasm as the most important. When employers were questioned as to their second most important desired employee skill, they mentioned oral communication the most frequently, followed by self-starter skills and dependability. Employers labeled dependability as the most third most important skill (Raymond, 1993).

Employers note that students deficient in basic skills also lack job-keeping and interpersonal skills and self-esteem. A survey of 2000 corporate employers regarding the portion of curriculum which should be devoted to general education, 51% felt that general education should comprise approximately 30% of the curriculum and that communication, critical thinking, and employability skills should also be emphasized. Interpersonal skills were clearly identified

as needed skills, not often possessed to any great extent by entry level employees (Armistead, 1989).

The National Employer Survey was designed by the Institute of Higher Education and administered by the U. S. Bureau of the Census. This study documented a fundamental rift between employers and schools (Shapiro, 1989). This national study in 1994 lamented that "young people lack discipline; they expect to be catered to; they don't want to do the dirty jobs; they don't respect authority…they are either numerate nor literate; they can't make change; they don't understand the importance of providing customer service" (Zemsky, 1994). When the National Employer Survey was conducted in 1997, employers were asked how they felt schools had changed in preparing better workers. They placed their answers in the middle of the scale [62 percent] with the remaining employers almost evenly split between the two extremes: 20 percent felt school preparation was excellent and 19 percent felt that it was barely unacceptable or totally unacceptable (Shapiro, 1998). A skills gap between employer needs and worker skills was also perceived by 69.4% of employers in a North Carolina Study (Vasu and Frazier, 1989).

Very strong emotions seem to arise when employers are asked how well their student employers are faring on the job. Many feel that teenagers rarely come into the workplace with a clear understanding of work is all about. "I've heard it expressed that you're not just teaching teenagers the job—you're really teaching them how to work," says Libby Pidgeon, PHR, vice president of human resources for Delaware North Companies, Inc, which provides food service and guest services for major league venues, national parks, and airports. The National Alliance of Business reported that countless young people leave school unequipped with the knowledge and skills they need to perform the jobs of a modern, competitive economy (Grensin, 1999).

"Ten to 15 years ago," J. D. Hoye former school-to-work director at the U. S. Department of Education says, "there were a lot of employers who just wanted employees who could show up on time and be drug free. Now not only is it 'Show up on time' and 'Be drug free,' it's technical skills, it's a world view, it's a much higher level of world understanding." Hoye continues to reiterate the fact softer skills are also lacking among younger employees. Employers expressed concerns about promptness, personal appearance, communication skills, problem solving, and team work on the part of their teenage workers (Grensin, 1999).

Employers in service-related industries, often those in most need of student employees express concerns for tardiness and absenteeism which runs quite high. They perceive many of their student workers as unreliable, so scheduling employees for different shifts can turn into a major nightmare. They also perceive many students as being rude towards their customers, which really are the foundation of their business. Reliable quality, price, and speed are the core competencies which influence customer satisfaction and loyalty. Thus employers worry about work-based learning as adding to customer dissatisfaction, leading to lower profits for them (Davis, 1999). According to Lewis, "There is a self-fulfilling prophesy in that employers view youths as unreliable and, therefore, employ them in jobs requiring on tenuous attachment with a single employer or with the labor market (Lewis, 1998).

Focus group interviews conducted by Valentin of Wisconsin businesses who were involved in work-based learning revealed perceived barriers to such experiences. They stated that too many students had unrealistic expectations and were unwilling to perform entry level tasks, expecting to promoted rapidly and failing to realize that the road to the top typically starts near the bottom. They further lamented students' lack of commitment and knowledge of workplace demands, resulting in egocentric, undependable, and unaccommodating employees.

They identified technical skill development as a lesser problem than social skill development (Valentin, 1997).

There is another view on the part of employers which is quite interesting. Some employers feel that it is impossible for schools to ever be able to totally prepare students for work. They see their role as training workers in technology and other such hard skills upon employment. However, they view school's best role as enhancing student's critical thinking abilities and providing baseline communication and technical skills. Therefore, some business are connecting younger employees to learning resources to build basic skills and creating an environment that encourages continued growth while on the job further learning. Thus they feel that employees need to possess life-long learning skills, the ability to think critically, the skills to work as a team member, and good oral and written communication skills (Atkinson, 1994).

Employers also often shy away from participating in work-based learning, not due to the lack of perceived skills of their future employees, but due to other perceived barriers. Cost is one barrier. Training a new student employee, freeing time for a mentor to work with the student, and subsequent follow-ups with the school are clearly monetary issues which employers perceive as a barrier. Attitude is also a major barrier. Some employers have expressed a lack of confidence that their participation in such work-based learning will be cost effective, reaping them rewards in reduced hiring costs, and greater productivity. They are discouraged by the costs of bring students into the organization and then allotting time for skilled workers to work side by side with these students. They also have expressed concerns about laws regarding child labor and safety, by insurance costs for general liability and worker compensation, and by management and employee resistance itself to having students at the job site (Brown, 1998).

A study conducted by Stern revealed some very valid reasons employers identified as to their reluctance to participate in providing work-based learning. Employers reported profitability as the key issue. While many did state that they employed students for inexpensive labor, they felt this would be jeopardized if they had to provide mentors, linkage with the school, and other necessary paper work. They cited the costs of supervising young students was considerably more than for full-time workers. Many surveyed companies believed that students could not contribute enough to justify the effort needed to supervise them. Employers also identified high school students as often being less productive and less predictable over older employees. Fewer than one-third of American employers in 1991 believed that high school students were even capable of holding jobs in their companies. Furthermore, their perception is that the quality of students in such work-based programs is lower, that is, that the programs themselves are targeted at students of lesser intelligence. Unfortunately the government exacerbated that perception by the Targeted Job Tax Credit which provided tax credits only for those students who were on welfare or who suffered from so other identified disadvantage. If employers did participate in work-based learning, it was due to a collective self-interest identified in employers in a given industry preparing a shared pool of skilled workers (Stern, 1998). According to the U.S. General Accounting Office, the major obstacle to employers' participation is educating employers about work based learning and its advantages (Ascher, 1994). Others have stated that schools and employers just don't trust each other. Thus the National Center on the Educational Quality of the Workforce recommends that interactions between schools and businesses be more "direct, substantive, and business-like" to overcome this resistance (National Center, 1995).

Using data from the National Employer Survey in 1998, it become apparent what perceptions exist of participating employers in work-based learning when they supplied the

reasons for their participation in such programs. Early pilot studies indicated that employers cited their desire to improve their communities as one of the principal reasons for their involvement in work-based learning. A second motive was the practical economic benefits. Positive public relations, inexpensive supply of labor by employing students, and short-term of agreement (during school year) were all identified as reasons. Almost 50 percent of employers who participated in work-based learning, hired those students upon graduation from high school. Almost two-thirds of employers surveyed considered recruitment goals the most important reason for their involvement in work-based learning. By employing students, corporations felt that they were potentially making an investment in their firm and, in the same motion, reducing their recruitment expenditures. Collective motivation was once again cited because if employers work together and participate in such work programs, they will help to create a skilled work force for the region or the broader economy. A poll conducted by Louis Harris in1991 discovered that, of corporations who employed students, 48 percent believed their company's involvement would result in producing a skilled labor force (Osterman, 1995). Employers also identified an improvement in employee morale as a result of hiring young high school students in a work-based program. Employees in such businesses genuinely enjoyed working with students, took an increased pride in their own work when they see students' interests in their work, and often times better understand their jobs by teaching it to a student employee (Capelli, 1998).

In addition to these perceptions, there is an identified further incentive through tax incentives in such states as Michigan, Oregon, and Wisconsin (Hershey, 1997). The School to Work Opportunities Act (STWOA) empowered states to facilitate the development of school-to-work programs, and by 1996, the federal government had granted $643 million dollars to help with incentives for employers. Unfortunately this financial incentive is not enough as businesses

have a considerable upfront financial commitment. ProTech in Boston which placed high school students in work-based learning calculated that it spent $5678 per student on the program in addition to wages paid to the students (Osterman, 1995). Printing businesses in Wisconsin estimated the cost to be as high as $15,000 per apprenticeship. Many businesses believed that additional funding would allow more employers to become involved as well as increase the number of openings (Scribner, 1998).

Students' Expectations

Locating literature which directly reflects student expectations is not as abundant as literature involving employers' expectations. Even though the student is directly involved, most literature seems to revolve around employers expectations and concerns, the schools addressing of curriculum changes to accommodate work-based learning, and the set up and scheduling of such programs by schools.

Some literature did directly address students involved in youth apprenticeship programs, which are work-based learning. Most students saw their experiences as an effective way to gain skills for competitive work after high school. In a related study, Schneider stated, "Most young people are not interested in running a Ferris wheel. This is not a long-term job for them" (Schneider, 1999). They perceived such low-skills jobs as working in a supermarket, restaurant, or fast food establishment as ways to earn spending money, not as means to later employment. Schneider felt that if students understood more about the business side of the organizations for which they work—the management, the industry, and other decision-making processes, they would then see the connections between this work and possible careers related to their job (1999).

When this career focus is an integral part of work-based learning, the majority of students recognized the value of integrating school and work-based learning. Students seemed to be more motivated to engage in this work experience because of the career focus. They also expressed appreciation for the opportunity to translate theoretical knowledge into practical application (Phelps, 1995).

When involved in work-based learning which necessitated more higher level technological skills, students generally found their work-based experiences to not only be rich in opportunities to practice, but were providers of increased skills in problem-solving, critical thinking, and teamwork skills. A survey conducted by Scribner in 1998 found that 92 percent of apprentices and recent graduates rated their work-based learning experience as excellent. Much enthusiasm stemmed from opportunities to perform hands-on learning at work which was not possible in the school setting. They also reported that these experiences strengthened their math skills and introduced them to the latest technologies not available in the school setting. Students expected to be required to use their writing and reading skills. They saw their work-based experiences as an effective way to gain many of the skills needed to succeed in an ever-increasing technological workplace. They found their work-based learning provided opportunities to practice and acquire problem-solving, critical thinking, and teamwork skills, as well as other soft skills such as working as part of a team. Students perceived work-based learning as providing an increase in their math skills and the introduction to the latest technologies not available in the school setting. However, they reported very low opportunities to apply writing and reading skills at the workplace (Scribner, 1998).

A study in 1993 conducted by Raymond and McNabb found that 41% of the students ranked oral communication skills as the most important, 20% identified written skills, and 13%

considered interpersonal skills as the most important. Students mentioned interpersonal skills most often, followed by oral communication skills and motivation. Students labeled dependability as the most third most important skill (Raymond, 1993).

Some students offered criticism of both the type of instruction and content they received while at work. They felt that after mastering certain skills, they spent too much time in one work area rather than experiencing many different departments on a work-site. Others felt that they were merely doing mundane, routine tasks rather than technically skilled tasks. Here is a clearly defined perception of young employees; they don't always realize that entry level jobs often are mundane. One student said, "you have to stand up for yourself and keep reminding them, 'I'm here, but I'm here to train" (Scribner, 1998). Service related work-based experiences are dependent upon performing mundane, routine tasks and customer satisfaction. Students often perceive these jobs as tedious and boring, thus absenteeism and tardiness run high. Negative employee attitude affects customer satisfaction. Customers have clear expectations of politeness and cordiality while students' perceptions of these qualities often clash. When an employee does an unsatisfactory job, the customers are quick to register their disapproval. Other service attributes such as physical appearances, responsiveness, and empathy can also cause difficulty when they do not achieve minimal levels (Davis, 1999).

Mentor expectations also can be an issue of work-based learning. Students perceived that their mentor at the workplace would be constantly available for consultation. When on the site, they often found the opposite. They never developed a significant relationship with their mentor, and instead, obtained assistance from other co-workers who were more helpful and approachable. Students clearly identified the need for mentors to be trained more thoroughly how to deal with teenagers, be less biased, and more open to questions. Students expressed

concern that they had either experienced or witnessed attitudes which reflected gender and occupational biases among some mentors (Scribner, 1998).

Soft skills such as dependability are perceived as important by students. Students at Westbury High School in Brookville, New York, learned that they must arrive at work on time and that the people who move up in companies are the people who have degrees and good work skills (Post, 2000*).* Literature which addresses the assessment of personal transferable skills during work-based employment on the college level indicated students perceived an increase in their proficiency in all skills better at the end of their placements than at the beginning. Substantial increases in using appropriate communication channels for motivating others, problem solving, and prioritizing. Students' rating of job related vocational skills revealed a similar picture of development to that of general soft skills. Information technology, report writing, and business presentations were all reported as improving dramatically from the beginning to the end of placement (Smith, 1992).

How students approach work-based learning also profoundly affects their perceptions. If their only intent is to earn money, their satisfaction with work-based learning is much lower. If their intent is to learn skills which will benefit them in the future, their success is far greater. When students could see the connection between vocational classes, academic classes, and their work experiences, they quickly could see the transferability of such skills to a number of future careers (Scribner, 1998).

In summation, it becomes apparent by this review of literature that employers consider SCANS skills necessary to create a national workforce which will compete in a global economy. It also is clear that these skills are necessary for an employee to achieve success and promotion—be it after education or as a part of high school education through a work-based

learning experience. However, these skills, especially the personal skills, are not clearly understood in the same context by students and employers. Nor are the SCANS skills clearly being successfully mastered by students as an integral part of core curriculum in many schools Therefore, this review of literature points to existing disparencies between employers and students in their perceptions of employability skills, namely SCANS skills. In order to successfully prepare students for work-based learning, certain steps must be undertaken by employers and students.

CHAPTER III

Critiques, Conclusions, and Recommendations

From the literature reviewed, it can be drawn that the perceptions of participating in work-based learning programs on the part of employers and employees are both divergent and similar. Until their perceptions are more similar, work-based learning will not be the true learning experience it is intended to be. There are several identified issues that arose as a result of the literature review: issues which need to be resolved.

SCANS identifies the need for a three-part skills foundation for successful employment: basic skills, thinking skills, and personal qualities. While the basic skills including reading, writing, mathematics, and oral communications are clearly defined and understood by both parties, personal qualities including dependability; responsibility; self-esteem; sociability; self-management; and integrity and honesty are quite abstract and not clearly identified or understood. While an employer might define "dependability" as coming to work every day on time, an employee might define "dependability" as coming to work when extracurricular activities and other personal commitments don't interfere. As the family structure has fundamentally changed over the past decades, many children do not personally witness someone going to work every day of the week on time, do not see honesty modeled at home, nor do all children see a positive personal appearance often modeled. As a result, many students come to high school not clearly understanding these personal qualities. Subsequently, when they are part of a work-based experience, these short-comings of students are perceived as a deterrent to a positive learning experience by employers. All of these qualities are essential to create an employee who will be of value to an employer while helping to build a quality American work force. The literature review points to the employer not understanding why their student

employees lack these personal qualities. A concentrated effort on the part of school to communicate more clearly the characteristics of teenage workers today to employers would help to start the process of working together at school and the employment scene. This effort to assess these skills, evaluate their mastery, and chart the application of these skills would ensure understanding both on the part of the employer and the student worker.

This review of literature has discovered that employers realize that schools can not totally prepare a student for work. Employers consider it more of their duty to technologically train students for work, but feel that schools need to concentrate more on teaching critical thinking skills, problem solving, teamwork, and communication. Schools will need to incorporate and integrate higher thinking skills into the curriculum if this is to occur. Hands-on curriculum revisions which address these skills are necessary to provide an employee who will be increasingly valued in a work-based learning experience.

Employers seek employees who are valuable workers and who will work towards the common goal of the business while turning a profit and expanding the business. There appears to be a fundamental misunderstanding in work-based learning in as much as employers see primarily student only at workplace. They don't often understand that this student is still attending school for the majority of the day, participating in extracurricular activities, and socializing with peers as part of the growing-up process. This mis-perception of their student employees leads to breakdowns in communication, often lending a negative overtone to work-based learning. There needs to be an understanding on the part of the employer that the high school student is an adolescent who has needs somewhat different than the adult employees. However, the student also needs to comprehend the importance of developing work ethics to order to become a future employee who will be able to balance a personal life with employment.

Other identified barriers to work-based learning also need to be overcome. Financial concerns for training, mentoring, and supervision need to be addressed in order to build the comfort level for work-based learning for employers. Targeted tax credits for work-based learning would be a definite incentive to help build participation because the bottom line of businesses is profit. According to the literature reviewed, additional funding to businesses who provide work-based learning would definitely increase their participation.

The perceptions of students are also an identified barrier to work-based learning. This literature review found that often students perceive work-based learning as a money-making opportunity rather than a step in their career ladder. They are concerned with paying for cars, entertainment, and saving for college. If they could understand the connection between work-based experiences, present school learning, and future career goals, students would be able to better adjust to the workplace. Many work-based students see mundane, every-day routine job duties as boring. Also they fail to understand that employment skills need to be sequentially built. Students must understand the fundamental concepts of a business in order to comprehend how every individual and co-operative task builds the profit structure which drives all businesses.

Students often do not clearly understand personal qualities such as courtesy and a positive attitude. With the high number of service type businesses participating in work-based learning, it is essential that students recognize the need to smile, empathize, communicate effectively, and work together as a team in order to please customers. Schools will need to place greater value on teaching them personal qualities since these skills and values are not often modeled in the home. Therefore, school curriculums will need to clearly define these skills and values, incorporate them into learning plans, and clearly assess their mastery.

If work-based learning is to become a successful program in the Princeton School District, several recommendations are necessary. Currently there is a sophomore course, Future Focus, which is a combination of careers and work skills course. At present, Princeton has not fully incorporated SCANS skills into its course content. It is recommended that Future Focus incorporate the teaching of these basic skills into its course. Then, follow-up teaching and mastery of these skills should be included in the Citizenship course (a junior graduation requirement) and Social Problems course (a senior graduation requirement). Currently, all students are graded on the district's nine core ability skills. While these somewhat parallel SCANS, these skills need to be more clearly aligned to SCANS in order for Princeton's students to see the connection between school learning and future employment.

A comprehensive planned mentoring program to educate mentors who hire and supervise work-based students is necessary to help employers to better understand the adolescent employee, to establish a successful work-based learning program, and to communicate more effectively among the students, school, and the employment scene.

In addition, teacher mentors need to understand the complexity of differences between school and the workplace. A summer job shadowing program for mentoring teachers through Goals 2000 monies will help teachers better supervise students in Princeton's work-based learning programs since they themselves have been on the job site for a period of two to five days.

With the addition of mentoring programs for students, teachers, and employers as well as the curriculum revisions integrating SCANS skills into Princeton's curriculum, work-based learning will be more comprehensive and successful. It is also recommended is that the Princeton School District clearly define the soft skill job skills such as dependability,

responsibility, and sociability; devise a means to chart their introduction, mastery, and application; and, clearly communicate this skill development to students, teachers, and employers involved in work-based learning. A final recommendation is that a committee comprised of employers, school personnel, and past and present work-based learning students be formed to assist the district in planning and evaluating the program and to be a recommending advisory committee to the district administration. With careful monitoring of these recommendations, it is felt that the Princeton School District will have in the future an exemplary work-based learning program.

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