

Advancing the Teaching of Soft Skills Through Third Space Thinking

Abstract: *Soft skills have been described as the interpersonal, analytical, and communication skills that are of growing importance according to 21st century, U.S. employers. Given this increased need, educators continue to grapple with how best to teach reflective practices and critical thinking for the purposes of individual development and group collaboration. Based on data collected from a multi-session educational program for high school students, this study details how Third Space Thinking (TST), along with other key attributes of soft skills development, are taught. More specifically, this paper presents a pedagogical approach that combines the foundations of active learning and social-emotional learning (SEL) to empower youth for success in the classroom and future workplaces.*

Keywords: soft skills, social-emotional learning (SEL), active learning, teaching pedagogy

Introduction

As K-12 schools and institutions of higher education across the nation manage the complexities of a global pandemic, there are grave concerns about both the short-term and long-term impacts on student learning, connection, and success. Across the K-12 sector, studies indicate concerns related to learning loss, referenced as the “COVID-19 slide,” in subjects like reading and even greater losses in math (Kuhfeld & Tarasawa, 2020). Similarly, colleges and universities foresee changes and drops in enrollment, such as students electing to attend two-year rather than four-year institutions as well as lower retention rates (Simpson Scarborough, 2020).

Understandably, educators are worried about the impact of COVID-19 on students’ academic performance and progress. In support of students’ academic advancement, research about the simultaneous need for social-emotional learning (SEL) efforts underlines the importance of ensuring that tending to academic concerns does not occur at the exclusion of students’ well-being, growth, and life skill development (Schlund & Weissberg, 2020; Walker, 2020). Not only are social-emotional supports necessary given the increased stress and anxiety that individuals are experiencing (Grubic et al., 2020; Torales et al., 2020), but they can also help keep students engaged with their educational environments in ways that enhance learning (Schlund & Weissberg, 2020; Vega, 2012). As a result, the division between hard, technical skills and soft, interpersonal skills are blurring as educators work to create meaningful learning experiences that help students develop both skill sets, especially with attention to the transition to virtual learning.

The data for this study is based on a multi-session¹ educational program that served racially and economically minoritized² high school students who identify as Latinx or Black,

¹ The program included six, 90-minute sessions. The goal of the Center for Third Space Thinking is to continue working with many of the program participants by following along with their journey during and after high school to track their progress.

² The term “minoritized” refers to those who face the “ongoing social experience of marginalization,” (Chase et al., 2014, p. 671) even if they are numerically the majority within a given space.

come from working class backgrounds, and for whom the majority of participants will be in the first generation of their family to pursue a college degree. This study details how Third Space Thinking (TST), which describes the key attributes of soft skills development, are taught. More specifically, this paper presents a pedagogical approach that combines the foundations of active learning and social-emotional learning (SEL) to empower youth for success in the classroom and future workplaces. While the program began as an in-person experience, the onset of a global pandemic required its organizers to remain adaptable to translate lessons into virtual platforms and support a blended learning experience. Though many educators and education programs have struggled to maintain students' engagement during the pandemic for a variety of reasons, the majority of high school participants remained involved and completed their learning modules. While challenges inevitably arose, this study provides an example of a pedagogical teaching approach that can be implemented in-person and online to provide students with the traditionally referenced "soft skills" needed for college and their future careers. Therefore, the research question at the center of this study is: how do high school students engage with a program to develop soft skills that are relevant for college and workplace readiness? Based upon survey results, the findings offer both how the program was implemented, including its online transition as a result of the COVID-19 global pandemic, as well as how participants assessed the sessions.

Review of Literature

The following review of literature defines soft skills and offers the extant research aimed at examining how soft skills are taught and learned. The review then provides a summary of how the Center for Third Space Thinking defines soft skills in their own work through the presentation of five core attributes.

Defining Soft Skills

Extant literature describes soft skills as traits, goals, motivations, and preferences that tend to be valued in educational and professional environments such as independence, creativity, communication, and cooperation (Balcar, 2014; Heckman & Kautz, 2012). Ultimately, the process for attaining and strengthening soft skills require knowledge of self as well as knowledge of how to interact and connect with others through context-dependent opportunities for practice, reflection, and improvement. As such, soft skills commonly reference behaviors that can be acquired through personal and interpersonal experiences.

Soft skills are often mentioned in opposition to hard skills, also known as high knowledge technical skill sets that are traditionally more easily taught and measured in educational and working environments (Chell & Athayde, 2017). Given the assumption that hard skills are more easily measurable (Balcar, 2014; Marques & Dhiman, 2016), the underlying argument is that once an individual can show a deep understanding of, and proficiency in, a particular knowledge domain, they are then capable of practicing that particular hard skill (Chell & Athayde, 2017). Hard skills, such as those related to literacy, numeracy, and analysis, like multilingualism and statistical analysis, continue to be important in educational and professional spaces (Chell & Athayde, 2017; Doyle, 2013). Soft skills, which have traditionally been

considered “intangible” abilities (Balcar, 2014), can compliment hard skills rather than work in opposing or siloed ways. For example, a software engineer needs strong communication skills at critical points throughout the design and production process. She will use her creativity and technical skills to propose and design a new program and she must also convince her engineering colleagues that her idea is valuable to garner their support. If the company wants many people to utilize their product, they must find innovative and effective ways to communicate the program’s benefits to potential users in ways that are empathetic and culturally competent. In this instance, the soft skills associated with abilities related to creativity, communication, empathy, and cultural competence can advance the technical skill set of a software engineer.

While hard skills matter, the soft skills gap has also been prominent in the media (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2020; U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, 2017). The *McKinsey Global Institute (MGI)* (2018) notes that industries have a stronger sense of how to train and retrain employees for STEM skills, for example, but far less understanding of how to impart soft skills related to communication, management, and critical thinking. They go on to suggest that the growing need for professionals with soft skills is not only a problem for the industry but also a concern for educational, credentialing institutions. Valued by employers across industries and sectors, the *Wall Street Journal* found that of the 900 executives they surveyed, 92% rated soft skills as equally important or more important than technical skills and 89% expressed having a very or somewhat difficult time finding employees with adequate soft skills (U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, 2017). Educational institutions are critiqued for not considering or prioritizing soft skills development (U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, 2017). Part of the difficulty comes from concerns across disciplinary fields (Whitehurst, 2016) that soft skills are challenging to define, teach, measure, and apply.³ In his research, Professor Ernest Wilson, the Director of the Center for Third Space Thinking, explicitly identifies the lack of understanding of these dimensions as barriers to scholarship and practice (2016a; 2016b). To eliminate such barriers, he has worked with his Center colleagues to carefully define, teach, measure, and apply these skills, thus making soft skills activities more rigorous.

Research About Soft Skills

Recent literature has started to offer not only experimental studies that show the importance and value of soft skills (Connolly & Reinicke, 2017), but also provide pedagogical strategies (Connolly & Reinicke, 2017), course assignments (Pulko & Parikh, 2003), and evaluation tools for student learning (Russell et al., 2005). Some studies have explored integrating soft skills teaching into service-learning and capstone courses in computer science and information systems programs at the undergraduate level (Carter, 2011; Russell et al., 2005). Others have presented skill development for secondary students through teaching internships related to engineering (Rigden, 2019). Extant studies have also emphasized the importance of active learning (Connolly & Reinicke, 2017) and suggest that effective approaches include activities such as guest speaker presentations (Anthony & Garner, 2016) and teaching through

³ See “[Third Space Thinking: A New Pedagogy](#)” for a white paper report that details how soft skills are being defined, taught, measured, and applied by the Center for Third Space Thinking.

facilitation rather than lecturing (Pulko & Parikh, 2003). While each of these studies contributes key practices, the theoretical framework presented in this piece offers a comprehensive approach for teaching soft skills, described in greater detail next, in learner-centered ways. Ultimately, research concerning soft skills is expanding both in the academy (Balcar, 2014; Jackson et al., 2020; Stalp & Hill, 2019) and in practice (Georgia Department of Labor, 2011; The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2020).

The Five Core Attributes of Soft Skills

In the Center for Third Space Thinking's collective effort to put hard edges on soft skills, they conducted a study based on information gathered from two phases of data collection. In Phase one, they conducted in-person interviews with 75 senior executives that spanned across a range of sectors. Initial analysis indicated that there were five talent attributes referenced throughout these interviews. To test the validity of these Phase one insights, they then tested these attributes against the larger Korn-Ferry database which included data from 1,847 executives in engineering, business, and communication fields. They confirmed and refined five attributes, referred to as ACE-IT, which is defined as the essential skills needed in educational spaces and workplaces of the future. These five core attributes that describe the key elements of the Center's approach to soft skill development include: (1) adaptability, (2) cultural competency, (3) empathy, (4) intellectual curiosity, and (5) 360-degree thinking.

To provide greater detail of each attribute, adaptability refers to one's ability to demonstrate mental agility and remain comfortable with ambiguous, unstructured environments and flexible when facing continual change. This core attribute also speaks to an individual's willingness to adjust their thinking and approach in response to new, unexpected, or changing conditions and information. The second attribute, cultural competency, references how one demonstrates emotional and cross-cultural intelligence as well as their capabilities working inclusively, respectfully, and effectively across cultures or organizations that have different values, norms, customs, and language or terminology. Those with growing cultural competence demonstrate broad, cross-functional thinking, shunning the limitations of structural, geographic, departmental, or other organizational boundaries. Empathy depends upon one's ability to understand and recognize others' needs, goals, feelings, priorities, and perspectives by engaging in active listening and focusing on reflective responses that clarify and strengthen dialogue. Developing this attribute also requires that the individual is able to effectively interpret others' viewpoints and integrate these insights into more effective approaches for problem-solving and need fulfillment. The fourth attribute, intellectual curiosity, includes those who possess a hunger for new knowledge, information, and understanding that fuels ever-higher levels of learning and performance. They engage in novel opportunities and experiences, strive for measurable growth, and demonstrate emotional intelligence and savvy. The final core competency, 360-degree thinking, takes a holistic, multi-dimensional, analytical approach to problem-solving. Individuals who strive to master this competency are able to convert information into insights, infer implications from data, extrapolate from data to real-world applications, and engage in sense-making by connecting the dots across these stages of inquiry.

Collectively, these core attributes specify the essential soft skills needed in today's classrooms and places of work, as well as the multitude of spaces in between to foster broader societal goals of interpersonal understanding, community empowerment, and leadership development.

Theoretical Framework: A Pedagogical Approach to Teaching Soft Skills

To contribute to understanding how soft skills can be taught, the Center for Third Space Thinking has created a pedagogical teaching model informed by both research and previous learning experiences based upon prior program implementation. As a result, there are two key elements that inform how the Center approaches teaching soft skills including (1) alignment with the goals of social and emotional learning (SEL) and (2) facilitation of active learning practices that support classroom engagement. By using SEL and active learning approaches, the Center's work aims to empower participants with the ACE-IT, soft skill competencies as described previously.

Social and Emotional Learning

With growing concerns about character education and the mental health of the public, especially increasing rates of anxiety and depression among teenagers in particular, social and emotional learning (SEL) is now a major topic of conversation in and beyond education (Tate, 2019). SEL is defined as, "the competencies that underscore our ability to be available to learn and available to teach" (Tate, 2019) as well as "the critical role of positive relationships and emotional connections in the learning process [that] helps students develop a range of skills they need for school and life" (California Department of Education, 2019). Relatedly, much of SEL work comes out of emotional intelligence science (Tate, 2019; Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, 2013).

As a result of extensive SEL research and programs, state and local entities have started to embrace the charge to support students' development in the holistic ways that SEL requires. For example, California's Department of Education has an initiative focused on increasing the presence of SEL across districts and schools. The state departments' guiding principles include (1) adopt whole child development as the goal of education, (2) commit to equity, (3) build capacity, (4) partner with families and communities, and (5) learn and improve. In our local context, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) has established four competencies as the focus for their SEL initiatives: (1) growth mindset, (2) self-efficacy, (3) self-management, and (4) social awareness (Los Angeles Unified School District, 2019). Though the department and the district frame the importance of SEL as connected to academic achievement, the Center for Third Space Thinking has committed to advocating for the importance of SEL broadly, and soft skills in particular, as an integral means of preparation for college and future careers. Though SEL informs the foundation for *why* the Center teaches soft skills, active learning describes *how* they teach various program participants to acquire and develop ACE-IT, soft skill attributes.

Active Learning

“Active learning,” often associated with the “flipped classroom approach,” refers to moving traditional content, such as background reading, to work that students do at home which leaves space for engaging higher-order learning during class meetings through instructor facilitation. Active learning has been defined as when “students engage with the material, participate in the class, and collaborate with each other” (Stanford Teaching Commons, 2019) as well as “any instructional method that actively engages students in the learning process while in the classroom” (Crimmins & Midkiff, 2017). Authors have described active learning activities and approaches as inclusive of group problem solving, problem-based learning, and studio format classrooms (Crimmins & Midkiff, 2017). Additionally, there has been extensive research that active learning practices are associated with stronger learning outcomes (Crimmins & Midkiff, 2017; Freeman, et al., 2014) as well as improved cognitive outcomes (Michel, Cater, & Varela, 2009). While much of the active learning literature has focused on traditional in-person classes, as a result of COVID-19, the Center had to adapt an active learning approach to an online environment.

In summary, the Center for Third Space Thinking’s teaching model leverages SEL and active learning pedagogies to facilitate their approach to teaching soft skills. More specifically their teaching process includes: defining and describing each attribute, facilitating intrapersonal and interpersonal development, evaluating participant understanding, and applying attributes to real-world dilemmas. This teaching and learning process is based upon the Center’s prior experience teaching soft skills to executive professionals, college students, and now- high school youth.

Applying the Approach

Both the development of the practical pedagogy and the ideas behind it emerged from the Center’s teaching over several years at the University of Southern California with undergraduates and through their work with corporate professionals, but most especially with youth from similar low-income and first-generation backgrounds across an array of regions (i.e., urban and rural) and academic levels (i.e., a range of GPAs). More specifically, over the last three years the Annenberg Center for Third Space Thinking has provided soft skills development workshops to 1,639 high school youth, college students, and career professionals. Sixty students from the Los Angeles and Riverside county’s Migrant Education Program participated in the Third Space Youth Institute. This underserved population is deemed most at-risk of failing to meet state content and performance standards as a result of structural impediments. Thus, soft skills training is an essential complement to the Common Core curriculum. To help address this need, the Third Space Youth Institute met Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) and Riverside County Office of Education (RCOE) goals for migrant student assistance. As a result, LACOE and RCOE have asked the Center to expand the program from 60 to 90 students in 2020.

By working with students from a variety of backgrounds who experience a lack of structural access to soft skill development, the Center and their staff developed the tools necessary to support the learning of Hybrid High youth- the focus of this current study. The goal

is to address the needs of groups at key moments in the life cycle of leadership across the talent pipeline such that the needs of corporate executives are shared with and developed by college and high school students. The following methods section details how this blended learning experience was planned, implemented, and received by high school participants.

Methods

Case Study

This research endeavor uses a case study approach to understand how high school student participants engaged with the program aimed to develop their soft skills, especially the abilities that are most relevant for college and workplace readiness. Case studies are an ideal fit for research that seeks to conduct an in-depth analysis of a particular case- which in this study involves the evaluation of a multi-session program based upon data from student participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Given the bounding by time and event as well as the use of multiple forms of data including quantitative and qualitative survey responses in addition to instructor observations, a case study is the best suited methodological approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Data Collection

The soft skills program was offered through a partnership between the Center for Third Space Thinking and USC Hybrid High, a local charter high school. The curriculum, lesson plans, and workshop activities were created collaboratively based upon previous programs that had been offered over the years to 1,639 executive leaders, college students, and other high school youth. The Center's staff and partners also made adjustments to the program based upon the needs of the high school partner and the students. Members of the Center for Third Space Thinking led all six of the workshop experiences, which started in January and ended in May. Each session was 90-minutes long and covered the following topics and activities: an overview of Third Space Thinking, adaptability and assessment results, empathy and cultural competency, intellectual curiosity, 360-degree thinking, and final group presentations. In an effort to bring the teaching pedagogy to fruition, each workshop lesson infused SEL and active learning approaches. For example, students were provided with two options for civic engagement projects as their final assignment. Working in groups, students were tasked with either exploring the importance of voting or detailing the value of gender and racial equality in the workplace. Using the ACE-IT framework, participants provided their insights and potential solutions that could help address these societal challenges. In prior youth workshops, participants determined their own area of interest based on the challenges facing their communities which added a new opportunity for civic empowerment. When the in-person program began, there were 29 student participants. They were all given and completed a pre-class survey questionnaire, which they completed via Qualtrics. The last two sessions transitioned to virtual learning environments that were conducted via Zoom. By the end of the workshop experience, 25 students remained actively engaged. Yet, all 29 original participants were given and completed a post-course survey questionnaire, also administered via Qualtrics. The surveys asked questions about the attributes needed for college and career readiness, which of the ACE-IT attributes in particular students

would need to respond to certain scenarios, as well as questions about their confidence in doing a range of activities, like addressing conflict in a group.

Data Analysis

As mentioned, the data sources include 29 pre-course and 29 post-course survey responses from high school participants in the soft-skill, ACE-IT workshops. In their post-course survey responses, students provided some qualitative data when answering one open-ended question at the end asking what they learned from the workshops and how they might apply these lessons to their futures. The Center staff also conducted a 30-minute individual interview with one Hybrid High student to get their perspective on the workshops following the workshops. Since there is only one interview, this data is simply used to help validate the primary data sources, which are the survey responses. To analyze the data, I used Microsoft Excel to analyze average responses for the quantitative data and to code themes across the open-ended, qualitative responses.

Limitations

The Center for Third Space Thinking is engaged in the difficult work of applying extant research to the practical needs of youth and their soft skill development. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic made the reality of such an endeavor even more difficult in terms of the team's transition to virtual learning as well as participants' capacities to engage with an online format. Reflecting upon the workshop process, a practical limitation was students' ability to access the internet. One student even had to leave his home to go to his grandmother's house to get online. Keeping this challenge in mind, future efforts should consider how strategies used by schools and businesses, such as providing mobile hotspots, could be used by the Center to address technology needs.

To address the concern about how much time is needed to have an impact on students' soft skill development and ACE-IT attributes, the Center aims to continue partnering with students from Hybrid High School to provide continued programming and support. While the data indicate that students benefited from the multi-session workshops, longer sessions and additional workshops over time would better promote students' soft skill development and could potentially be measured using quantitative and qualitative surveys with more participants for a more robust sample size.

Findings

After analyzing the pre-course and post-course survey data, three themes emerged. The first is that participants gained insight into the ACE-IT attributes through the workshop presentations and activities. For example, when asked to pick five attributes they deemed most valuable to college and career readiness, they had the options of the five ACE-IT attributes as well as 10 others (ie., intelligence/IQ, kindness, punctuality, etc.). When looking at their post course responses, students selected the ACE-IT attributes at rates of 93%, 69%, 62%, 66% and 79% which far outpaced their original pre-course responses of 79%, 3%, 10% 41%, and 38% respective to the ACE-IT acronym. While the value of adaptability remained high from the pre to the post course survey, all other attributes were selected at much higher rates in the post-course

survey as students not only gained familiarity, but also learned about their value through the workshop lectures and activities.

The second finding is that participants self-reported greater confidence in themselves following their participation in the series of soft skills workshops. When asked about their confidence in their abilities related to a variety of domains, participants were overwhelmingly positive. In reference to their ability to communicate with peers and superiors, 79% of participants responded that the course “Definitely helps in developing knowledge and skills for this situation,” the highest possible rating. When asked the same type of question related to their confidence working on teams with new people, 72% responded with the highest possible rating. This descriptive finding is purely based on observing an increase in students’ responses related to their confidence so this finding does not claim causation. Yet, this trend is positive and provides evidence for further exploring the impact of the Center’s programming on students’ soft skill development in more quantitatively rigorous ways in future studies.

Finally, the third finding is related to the specific attribute of 360-degree thinking. As mentioned in the first finding, only 38% of pre-course survey respondents listed 360-degree thinking as one of their top five attributes out of 15 that they believed were most valuable to college and career readiness. This can be compared to 79% who included it in their post-course survey response. The workshops helped make students more aware of the term and the importance of the attribute. In the open-ended, qualitative responses, 7 participants mentioned 360-degree thinking as being particularly valuable in their soft skill learning process throughout the workshops- making it the attribute that was mentioned the most. While this indicates that students felt connected to this concept, their descriptions of 360-degree thinking were surface-level in that students did not define it consistently and rarely provided concrete examples of what this attribute meant for their own lives. For example, their 360-degree comments included, “I did not know about 360 thinking so I will be applying that in the future” and “I learned that 360 Thinking is the ability to organize yourself, taking action, and time to complete future tasks.” Additionally, while the one qualitative interview was not a primary source of data, the participant’s perspectives on this topic align with this finding. She spoke about the value of 360-degree thinking when asked what skills she believes she needs to achieve her dreams and goals. In her own words, “360 helps a lot because you look at a problem in different ways and you can try to find different solutions with it and solutions that will not just benefit you but the people around you.” When asked how 360-degree thinking might specifically help her in the college process, she responded, “How it’s going to help my future and how with me completing those mini-goals that I will be able to help change the future.” While creating “mini-goals” and making “time to complete future tasks” are important skills, the participants struggled to name specifically how the concept related specifically to their life experiences. Future workshops might consider ways to concretize 360-degree thinking by encouraging students to consider prior experiences where this approach might have helped. Of the core attributes, 360-degree thinking might be the least recognizable early-on, but it may also be the characteristic that students feel most connected to given its popularity in their post-course survey responses. Making this feature

more relevant to the current lives of students may advance the work of the Center for Third Space Thinking and their potential impact on marginalized participants' soft skill development.

Future Research

As mentioned earlier, the Center plans to continue their direct-service work with marginalized student populations by supporting them with their soft skills development, especially as it relates to college and career readiness. Through their efforts, the Center will contribute to the topic of soft skills development through both theory and application as detailed in the sections that follow.

Theory

While the term “soft skills” is used for the purposes of this piece, the concept has wide range applicability to the lives of minoritized students today. Older concepts of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1990) delineated how inequities persisted based upon the differences in social circles of the wealthy compared to working class groups. Those who were not aware of upper-class pastimes and those who did not have access to people in positions of power were less likely to find success. In the U.S. context, Carter (2005) looked at the experiences of economically and racially marginalized youth to uncover the importance of dominant (qualities of the elite) and nondominant (qualities of the historically marginalized) capital in contributing to educational inequities. She found that “cultural straddlers,” students who engaged both dominant and nondominant capital, could bridge varied sociocultural environments. More recent scholarship, such as Yosso’s (2005) concept of community cultural wealth, pushes back against the assumption that marginalized students need to assimilate to dominant norms. In their future work, the Center is critically considering how extant scholarship contributes to their perspectives on soft skills, especially for marginalized youth. They will continue to do the challenging work of both reminding students of the value they and their communities bring, while also empowering them with the unwritten rules of today’s elite spaces in higher education and future careers.

Application

The Center’s greatest contribution to the soft skills field has been in their application of theory to practical workshops offered to professionals, undergraduates, and most recently- high school youth. In their work with each of these groups they have emphasized applying the ACE-IT attributes to real-world problems. As mentioned, the Hybrid High students had the option of exploring final projects related to one of two major societal concerns: voting rights or gender and racial equity in the workplace. The goal is to help learners discern how Third Space Thinking can help address challenges by engaging with real-world scenarios through the course workshops. Future research should strengthen the relationship between making connections to students’ lives and its impact on their understanding of key concepts- like Third Space Thinking.

The onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic also forced the Center to transition their workshops into a virtual platform. Moving forward, the Center has already started to improve the structure and approach of their online programming. In their search to determine how to translate their traditionally face-to-face instruction, they have turned their workshops into modules. They

have also created a learning flow for each module including an opening with posed questions, an informational lecture, an individual or group activity with check-in follow up, and a journal reflection. Future research will assess how a virtual approach compares to face-to-face experiences when teaching soft skills attributes.

In addition to exploring what is gained and lost in a transition from a fully in-person to a fully virtual experience, the Center is also looking long-term at the timeline of their model. Their current life-cycle of leadership moves from high school aged youth, to undergraduates, and then to business professionals. Moving forward, the Center wants to explore the following question: throughout the high school, college, and workforce stages, what skill sets do individuals need at particular points in time and what are the most appropriate interventions that should be made? As it relates to youth for the purposes of this study, gaps in soft skills attainment exist at each grade-level in the K-12 system as a result of systemic inequality. Thus, the future work of the Center for Third Space Thinking is to determine how they can have the greatest impact on minoritized students and their opportunities for success at the moments that matter most.

Conclusion

In summary, this study unites the prior work of soft skills research by applying its principals to the empowerment of high school youth. Based on data collected from a multi-session educational program for students at Hybrid High, a charter school in Los Angeles, this study details how Third Space Thinking (TST), along with other key attributes of soft skills development, are taught. More specifically, this paper presents a pedagogical approach that combines the foundations of active learning and social-emotional learning (SEL) to empower youth for success in the classroom and future workplaces to advance marginalized students' college and career readiness.

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