

## ABSTRACT

### LEARN FROM YESTERDAY, LIVE FOR TODAY, HOPE FOR TOMORROW: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A LIFE SKILLS SCALE

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The purpose of this study was to develop a life skills scale that assesses 5 life skills: communication, time management, coping skills, goal setting, and leadership in youth ages 11-16 years old. To develop the Youth Life Skills Scale, a mixed methods approach was used. Interviews were conducted with coaches, teachers, and parents, to identify the meaning of the five life skills. Based on the results, items were generated and aided in the development of the Youth Life Skills Scale. The YLSS was administered to middle school students (n=261) and high school students (n=722) from a Midwestern public school. The participants were 11-16 years in age (M=13.1, SD= 1.5). Using an iterative factor analytic method and a jackknifing procedure, the resulting YLSS scales represented four of the five life skills. One of the hypothesized life skills split and a new constructs were developed. The scale structure was confirmed using structural equation modeling techniques in the confirmatory sample.

LEARN FROM YESTERDAY, LIVE FOR TODAY, HOPE FOR TOMORROW:  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF A LIFE SKILLS SCALE

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## Chapter One

### **General Introduction**

Since the 1960's changes have occurred in the style of parenting, and teaching as well as their expectations of adolescents. It is believed now that adolescents are now able to be a vital part of their own process of development. This change in development is now labeled positive youth development. The adding of positive to the term development emphasized the change. This positive approach signifies how youth are now a part of their growth, how development extends beyond preventing problems, and how adults will have a more successful influence on youth development when they are positive and supportive (Larson, 2006).

Adults still have the mindset of wanting to control and shape youth, but are accepting the challenge of supporting their youth to take control and encourage themselves. This change in development hopes to help motivate youth to grow and develop. Although there has been a change in the study of development, their still remains a negative tone in youth development. Many researchers in the field of adolescent development are still focusing on the problem behaviors in youth (Larson, 2006). Focusing on the problem behaviors does not aid in youth learning skills needed to succeed in life. Some educators and programs have tried to take the negative problem behaviors and apply a more positive approach to teaching. Since this paradigm shift in adolescent development, many programs have been developed to aid in positive youth development.

Positive youth development (PYD) programs have been implemented in multiple areas, such as schools, sports, extracurricular programs, and community based programs. PYD in schools specifically focus on assisting adolescents in enhancing areas of competence, confidence, social connections, personal character, and contributing to society. These areas are commonly referred to as the six Cs. The schools focus on these areas because if they are achieved the adolescent will enhance psychosocial well-being, as well as societal well-being (Catalano et al, 2004). Schools have various opportunities to incorporate the six Cs through out the day. These areas have been implemented during the structured school day, after school extracurricular activities, sports, as well as social-emotional learning efforts in the classroom (Gomez & Ang). A PYD experience is critical in adolescents today. In order for the experience to be excellent the program has to be carefully planned, and also promote life skill development when introducing topic areas. The experience also has to have a goal in mind in order to achieve

results. The PYD experience should state the intent of the program in order for the experience to be evaluated effectively (Hendricks, 1998). PYD has increased in adolescents lives today. One of the main components of a successful positive youth development experience is having the topic areas enhance life skills development. PYD experiences are not the only program increasing in importance for adolescents. Life skill programs have also been increasing and this could be due to the importance of positive youth development.

Life skill programs have been increasing in importance and utilization since the 1960's. Life skill programs were created to impact the growth and development of the individual. The purpose of these programs is to provide knowledge of skills that can be transferred to multiple areas of an individual's life. Life skill programs are implemented in multiple areas. For example, they have been implemented in the areas of antipoverty, educational settings, multiple sport settings, assertiveness training, and individuals with development disabilities (Husted & Garland, 1977). The importance of enhancing life skills in individuals has increased across time, and programs have been created to help the development of life skills in youth, adolescents, and adults. These programs focus on different life skills and are implemented in different venues. Life skill programs have been employed in schools, communities, mental health agencies, and sport settings. The life skill programs employed in different venues might have focused on different life skills and were implemented in different aspects of an individual's life, but each program focused on the same outcome goal, to provide an education to an individual with the focus on life skills which then aided in the growth and development of the individual. With this goal individuals would hopefully lead a successful and fulfilling life.

#### *Examples of Life Skills That Have Been Targeted*

Through out one's life a person might take on multiple roles. Some examples of these roles might include being a student, daughter, brother, athlete, musician, and artist. During these roles, one will be taught specific skills that pertain to the specific role or general life skills. The life skills that they are taught in each domain can be transferred to other roles in their life. Sport is one example that has been a venue in which life skill programs have been initiated. Recently, there has been an increased interest in using sport as a vehicle in developing life skills. The programs are focusing on enhancing life skills in an individual that can be taught in sport and transferred to other areas in their life, such as school and work (Gould et. al, 2006). For example an individual can learn communication skills in sport by learning how to talk to other players on



the field. A player can also enhance their communication skills by learning how to talk to the coach about things. The athlete who learned the importance of communicating on the field could then practice communicating daily and work on this skill outside of sport. The life skill, communication, would then be considered a transferable skill because the individual would have learned how to become more comfortable communicating and practice and use this skill in the sport setting and then practice and use this skill outside of the sport setting in school or at work.

The purpose of sport is to build a powerful educational establishment for physical and mental skills. Sports are an ideal example of an interscholastic activity that a student can participate in to enhance educational, physical, social, and personal development and growth (Gould et al., 2006). Goudas, Danish, and Theodorakis (2005) identify with the effectiveness of implementing a program that is focusing on enhancing an individual's life skills through sport. It is believed that life skills taught in sport are transferable to other domains in life. Some examples of transferable life skills learned through sport are: an individual is able to perform under a pressure situation, is able to problem solve, is able to time manage to meet deadlines, is able to set to goals, can communicate effectively, is able to manage successes and failures, can work well with others, and is able to use the feedback they receive. These examples of life skills coincide with the proposed studies 5 life skill constructs: communication, time management, coping skills, goal setting, and leadership.

The increase in enhancing life skills in youth focuses on developing after school physical activity programs that are designed to educate underprivileged youth in areas of life skills focusing on social and personal responsibility (Gould et al., 2006). Danish et al. (2004) believes in the importance of using sport as a way to teach life skills to youth, and emphasizes the importance of how and individual can succeed in life and why applying certain skills are important. It is also important that these skills and values are reinforced in multiple areas of an individual's life. Danish et al. (2004) states that skills whether they be related to athletic performance or succeeding in life are taught in the same manner. Skills are taught through demonstration, modeling, and practice (Danish and Hale, 1981).

Danish, Forneris, and Wallace (2005) discuss the idea of using sport to promote personal growth of an individual. Although there is an increase in implementing programs focusing on enhancing personal development and growth through life skills, there are few that are sport based. Sport alone can not and will not enhance one's development, but the values an individual

can learn through sport and apply to other areas in their life could potentially enhance personal growth and development. Teamwork, ethics, hard work, goal setting and time management are examples of skills that a child can learn through sport and transfer to other domains in life such as school, and work. This process can be a reciprocal cycle as a teacher or parent can teach these skills and a child can use them in sport. This reciprocal cycle is important and parents, coaches, teachers, and youth need to be educated on what life skills are being taught and how to transfer these skills in order to create positive youth development (Danish et. al, 2005).

Although sport has been a venue where life skill programs have increased it is not the only place for positive youth development programs to exist. Physical training programs have shown to positively affect at-risk youth. These programs increase a youth's self esteem, well-being, and learning of life skills. Specific life skills such as; goal setting, and increased value development (Collingwood, 1997). Collingwood (1997) researched how a physical fitness program can be a way to enhance life skills and lower negative behaviors at-risk youth partake in. It is believed that a physical fitness program can develop or enhance responsible behaviors and help youth choose positive behaviors over negative life choices. In order for the program to create life skills and value development, the program should be organized and plan on implementing life skills. Alongside of being organized and having a plan of implementing life skills, the program should be able to be measured and validated. Implementing a program has been demonstrated that it is important to many areas of an individual's life; however one can not just implement a program and expect it to help aid in the growth and development of the individual, just like one can not assume playing a sport will automatically build character. The practitioner of the program needs to have the understanding on what the purpose of the program is and what life skills are being enhanced. The need for these programs exists, but alongside of that need is a need for evaluating these programs.

#### *Examples of Life Skill Programs*

*Teaching Responsibility through Physical Activity* (Hellison, 1995) was developed for coaches and teachers to educate youth on responsibility. Coaches and teachers purpose was to educate youth on the topic of responsibility by using physical activity as a teaching mechanism. This model educates youth on what responsibility means, and in what ways youth should be responsible. Hellison's program defines responsibility as respecting others rights and feelings, being aware of one's role to put forth effort to progress and develop in physical activity and life,

developing independence and being self-sufficient and accountable for one's personal well-being, being receptive to others well-being, and being able to apply other valuable lessons one has learned in non sport or physical activity settings (Hellison, 1995). This program focuses on responsibility and developing autonomy in one's life alongside of applying lessons outside of physical activity to ones life, as well as having respect for others.

The *Hokowhitu Program* (Heke, 2001) is a sport based program that uses sport to teach life skills such as decision-making, time management, task-related discipline and goal setting. This program uses two of the life skills this proposed study is focusing on, time management, and goal setting. Another program that implements goal setting as an important life skill is the *Sports United to Promote Education and Recreation (SUPER)* (Danish, 2002). The goal of SUPER is to allow an individual to understand how life skills translate from sport to non sport activities. One can use the same skills in sport as they do in life. SUPER emphasizes goal setting and this construct is also used in the proposed study.

Danish (2002) created SUPER which focuses on using the athletic field for a place to learn and apply a variety of skills that will enhance athletic performance. For example, athletes are asked to identify their strengths and weakness. They are educated on the importance of recognizing the difference and similarities among their teammates. Athletes are also educated on understanding these differences and then appreciating them. Athletes are explained that in sport and in life individuals can benefit from working with people who have different skills. Athletes are taught to identify situations that are in and out of the sport setting and be able to apply these skills they learned to both the sports environment and other non sport environments.

The goal of SUPER is for each individual participating in the program to end the program with the understanding that there is an association between succeeding in sport and succeeding in life. Participants are to be able to understand that mental skills can improve sport and personal performance. Participants understand the importance of setting and attaining goals in sport and life. Participants will be able to identify obstacles in their path of completing a goal and be able to realize that these obstacles can be overcome to obtain one's goal. Lastly, participants will understand the importance of being physically fit and healthy while participating in sport (Danish et al., 2005)

Danish et al (1992b) created another sport based life skill program, the Going for the Goal program (GOAL). GOAL is taught by trained high school students. These high school

students teach 10 sessions, approximately 1 hour in length to middle school or junior high students. The purpose of this program is to educate adolescents on developing a sense of personal control and increasing an individual's confidence about their future. By increasing personal control and confidence an individual will be able to make better decisions and become better citizens in society.

Botvin (2007) developed the LifeSkills Training program with the purpose to target adolescents and risky behaviors. The program does not educate adolescents on tobacco, alcohol, and drugs, but rather promotes healthy alternatives to risky behaviors. The LifeSkills Training program is designed to be a flexible and interactive program that uses multiple learning strategies such as; coaching, lectures, classroom discussions, peer interactions, and provider-led activities to enhance adolescents' skills (Botvin, 2007)

The LifeSkills Training program is implemented in multiple age groups targeting specific skills to educate and enhance particularly to the targeted audience. The program can be taught in schools, community, or after-school settings. The LifeSkills Training program is implemented to elementary school children in grades 3-6, middle school children in grades 6-9, and high school children in grades 9-10. The LifeSkills Training program educates middle school children on effective problem solving, managing anger, and communicating clearly. These three skills are similar to coping skills and communication in the proposed study. The high school program also focuses on similar life skills as the proposed study. For example the high school program educates students on decision-making, reducing stress, and communication. These skills relate to coping skills, and communication (Botvin, 2007). This program provides support for the importance of the proposed five life skill constructs communication, time management, coping skills, goal setting, and leadership.

#### *Evaluations of Life Skill Programs*

Since there has been an increase in developing life skill programs in schools, and sport based settings, it is important that there is an evaluation of these programs. Newly developed school based programs have a difficult time gaining approval and acceptance because the programs are in need of an accurate evaluation. The creators of these programs want to evaluate their programs, but the research is not always accurate or relevant. Some programs have an evaluation that is created specifically for their life skill program, but the evaluation does not always measure every life skill they have implemented. This creates a problem because one can

not say that their program is enhancing life skills if the evaluation only measures two out of five life skills that are implemented in the program. Another significant problem in the evaluation of new life skill programs is that the evaluation misses the significance of connecting science and practice (Danish et. al, 2005). Creators of life skill programs are able to state that their life skill programs are enhancing the development of life skills in the participants, because they are interacting with the participants' one on one and can see the results. However, since it is not scientifically measured, and there is no data reporting the increase in a participant's life skills. Having a measurable evaluation can potentially lead to an examination of a cause and effect relationship between the implementation of the life skills program and the increase in the life skills development of the participant.

Beyond program evaluation process evaluation is essential. It is important that the multiple venues are implementing life skill programs that are effective, and actually achieving the purpose of the program. Is the program enhancing the life skills it proposes to enhance in participants? When researchers implement a program, they are interested in finding if the program is effective by looking at changes in behaviors, and attitudes of their participants. These results focus on a creation of an evaluation of outcomes. A process evaluation goes beyond the outcome and provides researchers with understanding of the outcomes. For researchers or practitioners to determine if a program is effective both implementation and evaluation are significant (Danish et. al, 2005).

A process evaluation of the GOAL program established that participants did learn the information the program taught, participants were able to obtain the goals they had set in the program, and participants felt the process was easier than expected (Danish, 1997). This evaluation states that there were positive effects of the program, but can researchers say for sure that what they implemented was the reason for the participants to obtain goals, or did they just mature and develop ways to improve goals on their own? Furthermore, some programs that currently exist have very little evaluation on their effectiveness to enhance an individual's life skills, the SUPER program is an example of a program that has little evaluation of its effectiveness (Goudas et al, 2005). How many other programs exist and are being implemented because the thought is that these programs will develop certain life skills? There needs to be research based support validating the program in order for the program to be implemented and effective.

Hendricks (1998) developed the Targeting Life Skills Model (TLS). The purpose of the TLS is to measure life skill program outcomes. This is a useful guide in developing a program, implementing the program, and creating a measurable and valid evaluation of a specific life skills program. The TLS uses key steps when developing the desired program. Program creators are provided with four worksheets. Each worksheet represents one of the four quadrants used in the model. The original model used 4-H's clover's logo which focuses on four areas to develop life skills, head, heart, hands, and health. The four quadrants embody a holistic approach to youth development. Each quadrant has two main life skill headings that coincide with the quadrant. For example the two life skill categories that fall under head are managing and thinking. The two life skill categories that fall under heart are relating and caring. The two life skill categories that fall under hands are giving and working. The two life skill categories that fall under health are living and being. Within these four quadrants and the two life skill categories Hendricks identified 35 life skills (See Figure 1) that 4-H Youth development programs taught (Hendricks, 2006).

The Life Skills Evaluation System uses eight of the thirty five life skills identified by Hendricks (1998) that are essential for an individual to live a productive and fulfilling life. The eight skills identified in the Life Skills Evaluation system are: decision making, wise use of resources, communication, accepting differences, leadership, marketable skills, healthy life style choices, and self responsibility. The proposed study overlaps with three of the eight life skills identified in the Life Skills Evaluation System. The proposed study constructs that overlap are: communication, coping skills, leadership.

The Life Skills Evaluation System was developed to assess life skills that Cooperative Extension programs are teaching. The Life Skills Evaluation System was a piloted study with limitations. One limitation of the piloted study is that the results can not be generalized. The Life Skills Evaluation System can only be applied to programs focusing on 6<sup>th</sup> grade and up. Researchers can not obtain data on the programs effectiveness in implementing life skills across all Cooperative Extension programs because the Life Skills Evaluation System is voluntary and practitioners at Cooperative Extension programs are not required to use the Life Skills Evaluation System to evaluate their life skills program (Bailey & Deen, 2002). The Life Skills Evaluation System is a good example of an initial start in developing an evaluation that will be useful to researchers and practitioners in assessing the life skills in a program which will aid in the enhancement of the program's validity.



**Figure 2** Targeting Life Skills Model

Figure taken from: Targeting Life Skills Model by Patricia A. Hendricks, Ph.D., Iowa State University Extension, 1998.

The Life-Skills Development Inventory-College Form (LSDI-CF) is a developmental evaluation instrument created to evaluate life skills mastery for individuals ranging in age 17-24. The LSDI-CF was developed to identify problem areas in individuals. This evaluation was important for practitioners developing programs (Picklesimer, 1998). The LSDI-CF includes “seven components of human development: (a) psychosocial, (b) physical-sexual, (c) vocational, (d) cognitive, (e) ego, (f) moral, and (g) affective” (Picklesimer, 1998, p. 2). The LSDI-CF has undergone four stages of development. The first stage of development was items deemed significant for traditional college aged students were selected. This selection resulted in a 90-item inventory which also included demographic items: gender, class standing, marital status, age, ethnicity, and grade point average. The second stage of development involved the revision of the instrument using results from the initial reliability analysis. The inventory was revised to 84 items and one demographic item was added. The third stage of development goal was to obtain normative data and establish reliability and validity for the revised inventory. The last stage of development involved selected items and subscales of the inventory were revised and

the age range was extended to 24 years. One of the most noticeable changes in the fourth stage was the expansion of the subscale from 8 items to 20 items. At the end of the four stages the LSDI-CF was developed and used. The LSDI-CF proves to be effective in identifying life skills individuals lack and provides information to practitioners and educators on what life skill programs should implement (Picklesimer, 1998).

The LSDI-CF is a good example of an evaluation that was created to identify life skills that individuals lack supporting the belief that life skills are essential in developing in an individual. Practitioners have an instrument to inform them what life skills they should implement in their program, but there is still a need for an evaluation of programs that are implementing life skills. Just because one is aware of what life skills to implement does not provide evidence that the program is enhancing an individuals life skills.

The LSDI-CF is a good example of an evaluation tool that could be used in assessing life skill programs in adolescents between the ages 17-24. Life skills are deemed important in adolescents and the LSDI-CF suggests that it is important in college students because college students are expected to transfer their learning from school to the real world upon graduation. The LSDI-CF was developed to aid in the programs capacity to assist in the development of students (Picklesimer, 1998). The proposed study can gain knowledge from this inventory on how to develop a valid and reliable scale and also signify the importance of developing a life skills scale for youth.

The Life-Skills Development Scale-Adolescent Form (LSDS-B) was developed to evaluate adolescent's perceptions of their personal life skills development. The LSDS-B was constructed to approach individual's evaluation from a multivariate perspective. The multivariate perspective is a good because it allows for a more comprehensive awareness of the individual. By adolescents identifying their personal life skills development practitioners will be able to identify the need for life skill developmental programs (Darden et al., 1996).

Darden et al. (1996) studied the evidence of construct validity for the LSDS-B. The LSDS-B was developed for youth ages 13-20. The LSDS-B does not provide individual distinctions but is useful for group comparison. For example, a school based life skill program could use the LSDS-B to identify who received the life skills training, but the LSDS-B lacks the ability to identify which individuals received the specific life skills the program implemented. This limitation could be due to the teaching of the skills and not necessarily the LSDS-B.



Although the LSDS-B proves to be a valid measure the proposed study suggests steps to take to make the LSDS-B a more useful evaluation tool (Darden et al., 1996).

The LSDS-B provides an example of an evaluation to assess an individual's perceptions of their life skill development and identifies life skills practitioners could enhance by implementing programs focusing on life skill areas individuals perceive they are lacking in. The LSDS-B supports the belief of enhancing life skills, and provides support of the need of a valid evaluation of life skills in current programs. The LSDS-B has been recommended to limit the use of the measurement to individuals ages 13-18 that attend a traditional middle school or high school (Darden et al., 1996). The 13-18 age range targeting students in traditional middle school and high school is limited population and more youth and adolescents could benefit from participating in a life skills program and having a valid assessment of their life skills. The proposed study intends to develop a set of life skills scale from ages 11-16 years in age. This range will hopefully target more children and adolescents and assess five life skill constructs: communication, time management, coping skills, goal setting, and leadership.

The Youth Experience Survey (YES) was created to assess high school aged adolescents about their personal development in the experiences they may have gained in extracurricular activities or community based programs (The YES Survey Instrument, 2003). The YES instrument is a self reported scale that uses 18 different scales to measure the experience of adolescents' extracurricular activity or program. The assessment is based on 6 conceptual domains of development. The YES assesses an adolescent's time management, goal setting, communication, leadership and responsibility, stress and group process skills. The YES identifies life skill constructs that are found in multiple life skill programs. Adolescents use the YES to evaluate their skills (The YES Survey Instrument, 2003). YES provides support for the proposed scale because five of the domains in the YES instrument coincide with the proposed studies which are: communication, time management, coping skills, goal setting, and leadership.

### *Conclusion*

Currently, life skill programs are being evaluated by the practitioners that implement the program based on their clinical opinion. However, a systematic evaluation system is needed that researchers will be able to use to help track life skill development (Baily & Dean, 2002). Many school programs focus on life skills enhancement, but unfortunately, programs have minimal resources for evaluations of their programs, and limited resources makes it difficult to have a

valid evaluation. The purpose of the current study is to develop a life skills scale that will assess 5 life skills, communication, time management, coping skills, goal setting, and leadership in youth ages 11-16 years old. The five life skills are established in multiple programs that exist currently and coincide with Hendricks (1998) 35 life skills. Hendricks (1998) found that using more than 8 life skills in an evaluation was unmanageably and ineffective. Therefore the presented study focuses on evaluating five life skills.

The current project's focus is on the development of a life skills scale for youth 11-16 years of age. The overall purpose is to develop a valid and reliable set of scales to measure life skills. The life skills scales can be used to evaluate programs and aid in the development of the programs targeting the desired life skills. The goal of the scale is to be able to assess five life skill constructs; communication, time management, coping skills, goal setting, and leadership. These five life skills were chosen because of their frequency in multiple life skill programs currently. Alongside of these five life skills being taught in multiple programs, it was hypothesized that each of these skills would correlate with each other. The intent of choosing these five life skills is for the hope that each of these life skills would overlap and build off of each other. One may use multiple life skills to enhance a specific life skill. The purpose of life skill programs is to aid in the growth and development of adolescents in the life skills program.

This growth and development can occur physically and mentally for the participant. In order for one to assess the growth and development of life skills, it is necessary for a clear, concise, and definite understanding of the basic life skills implemented in each program. Life skills are broad and can not be defined in one specific category as they are a variety of skills one learns to be able to function effectively in society (Bailey & Deen, 2002). The purpose of the qualitative component of this study is to develop and conceptualize the meaning of life skills, communication, time management, coping, goal setting, and leadership. Alongside of developing a general understanding of these concepts it was also important to know how the participants assess these concepts in youth 11-16. The qualitative component aided in the process of the scale's development. The second component includes a quantitative approach. The quantitative component's aim was to develop a valid and reliable scale measuring the five hypothesized life skills.

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## Chapter Two

### **Listening and Learning the Life Lesson: The Development of a Life Skills Scale**

Life skill programs have been employed in multiple venues. Some examples of these venues include educational settings, sport settings, community settings, and at home setting. Each venue focuses on different life skills to implement based on the aim of the program. Life skill programs focus on enhancing youth development in a positive manner by implementing multiple life skills that can be transferred from setting to setting. This growth and development can occur physically and mentally for the participant. For example life skills can be implemented by teaching, modeling and demonstrating the skill mentally or physically. These skills can be implemented in a setting such as sport where one will use a physical skill and connect the mental life skill with the sport skill. Not only have the programs been applied to a variety of settings the life skill programs focus on multiple age groups ranging from youth through adulthood. Although the importance and utilization of life skills programs has increased from youth through adulthood it is difficult to clarify or identify what life skills are.

Life skills are broad and can not be defined in one specific category as they are a variety of skills one learns to be able to function effectively in society (Bailey & Deen, 2002). In order for one to assess the growth and development of life skills, it is necessary for a clear, concise, and definite understanding of the basic life skills implemented in each program. The current study's purpose is to understand the meaning of life skills and the definitions of five life skill constructs; communication, time management, coping, goal setting, and leadership. Identifying the meaning of life skills and how the proposed life skill constructs are assess in life skill programs are a critical step in the development of the Youth Life Skills Scale (YLSS). The YLSS purpose is to be used to asses the levels of the life skills and aid in the development of the program targeting the desired life skills.

### **Literature Review**

#### *Life Skill Definitions*

There are many accepted definitions for the broad category of life skills. For this study life skills will be defined as a skill one can learn through verbal instruction, modeling, and demonstration. This skill can be used day to day and transferred in a variety of settings which will aid in positive growth and development of the person and hopefully aid in living a

successful life. This definition was created based on many researchers definitions of life skills (See Table 1).

For the purpose of this study the definition of life skills was developed based on the collaboration of previous researchers' definition of life skills. The five life skills in which this study focuses on are consistent with the aforementioned life skill definition. Each of these skills are tools that can be learned through instruction, modeling, and demonstration as well used day to day and most importantly transferred to a variety of settings. Each of the five life skills also aid in the positive growth and development because each skill can build off of each other and enhance the development of the individual skill by using other skills. For example the life skill leadership can be enhanced in a person when someone also utilizes the life skill goal setting when they are in a leadership role. Alongside of defining life skills it is important to define the five life skills presented in this study; communication, time management, coping, goal setting, and leadership.

#### *Definitions of Life Skill Constructs*

*Communication* is defined as one having the ability to express meaning clearly and having the ability to comprehend what others say. It has been shown that if one possesses good interpersonal communication skills they will be more likely to have positive social behavior, a more positive mental and physical well-being, achieve in education, and further in life potential job opportunities (BT Education Program, 2006)

*Time management* is defined as one having the ability to acquire techniques and tools that will help schedule, plan and prioritized daily and future activities in one's life. Life skill programs emphasis time management strategies for the individual. This new knowledge could aid them in creating their own time management strategies that work well for them. It is important to emphasis that everyone is different and one time management strategy might work well for one person but not well for another.

*Coping* can be behavioral or cognitive. Coping skills are techniques one might use to deal with stressful, unexpected, or unmanageable situations. Using coping skills will allow a person to cognitively or behaviorally handle the situation effectively. Coping skills can also coincide with problem solving life skills. A person will be able to identify the problem and then using the coping skills they have acquired to overcome the situation effectively.

There are two main categories of coping. Once a person identifies the problem the person could use a problem-focused coping skill which entails a person to learn about the problem then change or modify their behavior to help manage the situation. Alongside of problem-focused coping skills a person could use emotional- focused coping skills. Emotional-focused coping skill entails a person to change the way they cognitively think about a situation. A person changes the way they think about a situation by modifying their goals and managing the situation.

*Goal setting* allows a person to develop effective ways to reach their goals or passions. Goal setting is a process that will allow a person to identify ways to state what they want, develop a plan on how they will achieve what they want, and then work towards their objective.

*Leadership* is important because it requires a person to use the life skills they possess in the most effective way. Leadership is having the ability to use communication, goal setting, problem solving skills, coping strategies, and time management, to accomplish a broader objective. Leadership usually requires one person to take an initiative to help direct others. Leadership includes the use of all four life skills mentioned in this study. It is important to enhance individual life skills with the use of other life skills. Alongside of leadership being a life skill that uses multiple life skills to strengthen it, goal setting also benefits from the use of other life skills with its utilization.

Goal setting coincides with other life skills, such as coping skills, problem solving, communication and time management. An individual might use goal setting as part of their coping skills. For example, if a player did not reach a goal they had previously set instead of being extremely disappointed and cope ineffectively, an individual will use goal setting to reevaluate the previous goal and then redefine or create a new goal.

Communication is an important aspect of goal setting because an individual should communicate with their coaches, teammates, friends, or parents on their goals. Using communication allows the individual to state what the goal is aloud and make it a tangible real task. Using communication alongside of goal setting helps others become aware of the individuals goals and could help them reach them by support and other training techniques.

Time management could be used alongside of goal setting when creating a goal map. Identifying when the individual would like to reach the goal is an important aspect of goal setting and in order to be able to create an effective goal map one could use time management

techniques. One might need to use all of these skills during the goal setting process. Goal setting can focus on day to day goals, or goals that require time and commitment to reach. It is important to educate someone on the process of goal setting so they can reach their desired goals through out their life. The five life skills in this study were chosen due to their relationships with each other as well as their prevalence within life skill programs. Life skill programs utilize a wide variety of life skills but these five life skills are seen through out many life skill programs that are implemented in many settings specifically for youth and adolescence.

### *Lessons Learned*

The importance of enhancing life skills in individuals has increased across time, and programs have been created to help the development of life skills in youth, adolescents, and adults. These programs focus on different life skills and are implemented in different venues. Life skill programs have been employed in schools, communities, mental health agencies, and sport settings. The life skill programs employed in different venues might have focused on different life skills and were implemented in different aspects of an individual's life, but each program focused on the same outcome goal, to provide an education to an individual with the focus on life skills which then aided in the growth and development of the individual. With this goal individuals would hopefully lead a successful and fulfilling life.

In order for the program to create life skills and positive youth development, the program should be organized and plan on implementing life skills. Alongside of being organized and having a plan of implementing life skills, the program should be able to be measured and validated. However, one can not just implement a program and expect it to help aid in the growth and development of the individual. The practitioner of the program needs to have the understanding on what the purpose of the program is and what life skills are being enhanced. The need for these programs exists, but alongside of that need is a need for evaluating these programs.

Currently, life skill programs are being evaluated by the practitioners that implement the program based on their clinical opinion. However, a systematic evaluation system is needed that researchers will be able to use to help track life skill development (Baily & Dean, 2002). Many school programs focus on life skills enhancement, but unfortunately, programs have minimal resources for evaluations of their programs, and limited resources makes it difficult to have a valid evaluation. The purpose of the current study is to understand the meaning of life skills, the



five life skill constructs; communication, time management, coping skills, goal setting, and leadership and the assessment of life skills in youth ages 11-16 years old. To aid in the understanding of life skills and the assessment of the life skill constructs a qualitative method will be used. The qualitative interviews with coaches, teachers, and parents will aid in the development of items which assess life skills in five areas; communication, time management, coping, goal setting, and leadership.

### **Methods**

This study's purpose is to develop a valid and reliable scale to measure five life skills: communication, time management, coping skills, goal setting, and leadership. The Youth Life Skills Scale (YLSS) could be used to evaluate current life skill programs that focus on educating participants on the desired five life skill concepts.

#### *Participants*

The participant's in this study included coaches, teachers and parents. All participation was voluntary (Please refer to table 2 on the demographics of the participants in this study).

#### *Research Design*

The study uses a qualitative approach to aid in the development of the YLSS that assesses five life skills, communication, time management, coping skills, goal setting, and leadership.

#### *Measures*

Semi structured questions were asked that provided the researcher with information that aided in the development of the items that helped create a scale that assesses communication, time management, coping skills, goal setting, and leadership. The semi structured questions focused on globally defining life skills, the five life skill constructs, and how the participants assess these five life skills in youth 10-16 years in age. The semi structured focus groups and interviews provided validity to the researchers generated definitions of life skills and the five life skill constructs. Alongside of validating the life skill and each individual life skill construct definitions the participants provided information about how they assess these five life skills in youth. Based on the feedback from the focus groups and interviews about the assessment of the five life skills items were generated for the next phase of the project.

## *Procedure*

### *Focus Groups*

The two focus groups (n=2), that consisted of parents and teachers, were essential in the development of the YLSS. The focus groups were able to provide information on the needs of children ages 10-16 and allowed the researcher to further generate and develop items. The focus groups and interviews consisted of parents and teachers that were recruited via emails through personal contacts of the researchers. The focus groups required certain amount of experience to participate in the study. A parent who participated in the study was required to have a child playing a sport for a minimum of 2-3 years and be between the ages of 10-16 years. Teachers who participated in the study must have 2-3 years of experience working as a professional in a school educating children between the ages 10-16 years. Teachers were required to have 2-3 years of experience because they will have already identified their teaching philosophy along with having the opportunity to gain experience working with the specified age group.

The focus groups and interviews were split into two different meeting times. The first focus group consisted of parents (n=2). The parents were recruited from the Midwest. The focus groups were run in a local conference room. The focus group lasted approximately one hour in duration.

The second focus group consisted of teachers (n=2). The teachers were recruited from the Northeast United States. The focus groups were conducted in a local conference room located in a central location. The focus group lasted approximately 45 minutes in duration.

### *Interviews*

Two semi structured interviews were conducted with youth coaches (n=2) Coaches who participated in the study were required to have 2-3 years of experience coaching youth between the ages 10-16 years. This 2-3 time period was required for coaches because they will have already identified their coaching philosophy along with having the opportunity to gain experience working with the specified age group.

The participants for the interviews were both recruited from the Midwest. The location of each interview was held in a central location for both participants. The interviews were held in a local conference room. The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes in duration.

## *Analysis*

The results of the semi structured interviews and focus groups were analyzed using a research a phenomenological approach. The phenomenological research approach allowed the researcher to understanding the meaning of the lived experience of a small group of people from the viewpoint of a concept of phenomenon. Alongside of using the phenomenological approach, the results were interpreted using an interpretive lens. The interpretive lens assumes that the things that people know and believe to be true about the world develop based on the interactions people have with one another throughout life and the specific social settings in which they interact. The interpretive lens fits with the aim of the study which is to identify and understand life skills based on those who use them and instruct them. The interpretive lens aims to understand the complex and constructed reality based on the point of view of the people who live in it.

The phenomenological approach and interpretive lens aided in the analysis of the focus groups and interviews. Using this approach and lens the researcher then analyze the transcribed interviews and selected words or phrases that were stated multiple times through out the focus groups or interviews. The interviews were audio taped and transcribed which aided in the analysis. The selected items were then analyzed and paired or grouped together and themes were created based on the meaning of the paired or grouped items.

## *Results*

Prior to the semi structured interviews and focus groups life skills were defined by the researcher as a skill one can learn through verbal instruction, modeling, and demonstration. This skill can be used day to day and transferred in a variety of settings which will aid in positive growth and development of the person and hopefully aid in living a successful life. This definition was created based on many researchers definitions of life skills.

The participants were asked to define the concept life skills. Based on the interviews, the participants defined life skills as, a skill one learns and uses in other areas during their life time. This definition only agrees with half of the researcher's definition of life skills. It does not describe what the use of the skill is and how the person will learn the skill. It is important to note that the definition of life skills was defined as something that can be transferred and used in other areas through out ones life time.

The participants in this study were asked to identify any non physical skills (life skills) that adolescents 10-16 could learn in sports, at home, or in schools (See Table 3). The participants identified 10 non physical skills (life skills) that youth 10-16 could learn in sports, at home, or in school. Based on their responses 4 out of 10 (showing up on time, leadership, goal setting, and interacting with new people) coincided with the studies examples of life skills, communication, time management, coping, goal setting and leadership.

The participants in this study were also asked to define communication, time management, coping, goal setting and leadership. While defining these life skills they were also asked to give examples of how they assessed these skills in youth 10-16 (See Table 4). Based on the results it is evident that the participants in this study had a difficult time defining or identifying communication, time management, coping, goal setting, and leadership. It seemed that there were small pieces of the participants' definition that coincided with the researchers but from a broader perspective, it was hard for the participants to clearly define each life skill concept as well as agree on each life skill concept.

Alongside of being asked to define life skills, and the five life skill concepts in this study participants were asked to provide examples of how they assess communication, time management, coping, goal setting, and leadership in youth 10-16 years in age (Table 5, Table 6, Table 7, Table 8, Table 9).

The results also showed that communication can be nonverbal and verbal. Participants' responses indicate that body language is a factor in assessing their communication skills which would be the nonverbal piece of communication. Examples of nonverbal communication skills would be cramp up, tense up, and changing their body language. Technology was also an indicator of communication skills. The use of email and cell phones seem to have an impact on youth's spelling and ability to communicate with peers and adults.

The participants' responses indicate that in order for youth 10-16 to be effective time management skills they must be organized, plan ahead, prepared, and set up schedules. If youth 10-16 are able to do those things than the result would lead to showing up on time, finishing homework on time, and getting good grades.

Participants' responses to how they assess coping in youth 10-16 showed that showing emotion in your words, or face is a way to assess coping. Along with facial expressions that show a person is upset it is important to notice when someone is ignoring a situation or quitting.

Positive views of coping would be addressing the situation, seeking help, and trying to settle an issue.

The participants' responses to how they assess goal setting show that in order to have goal setting one should write down goals, and verbalize their goals. It was also stated that showing emotion on whether they did or did not reach their goal was an indicator of goal setting in youth as well as persevering towards a goal.

The results from the participants on how they assess leadership in youth 10-16 can be broken down into four categories; skills and popularity and communication and emotions. This shows that youth need to be able to communicate as well as be socially accepted by peers. As well as being popular and having the ability to communicate youth need to also have the ability to model and demonstrate behaviors in order to identify them as a leader.

### *Discussion*

Based on the results of the semi structured interviews significant information was found and items were generated and added to the YLSS. The semi structure interviews were important because the six participants were all in day to day contact with youth 10-16. It is interesting to note that defining life skills is difficult, and there was not one set definition for what a life skill is or the five life skill concepts; communication, time management, coping, goal setting, and leadership.

Although there was not one standard definition identified for life skills or the five life skill concepts in this study the participants and researcher had similar ideas and views of what they were. From the results of this study definitions could be generated and perhaps create a standard definition of life skills, communication, time management, coping, goal setting, and leadership. Not only should people agree or be aware of the definition of life skills but also how to identify life skills in youth 10-16. Once people become aware of what these skills are and how to assess then perhaps they will be able to instruct and enhance life skills in youth 10-16.

### *Future Direction/ Limitations*

Although it was important to conduct semi structured interviews and focus groups with coaches, parents, and teachers it could be beneficial to interview actual youth in the age range. Youth who are between the ages 11-16 could aid in defining the concept life skills as well as the five life skill constructs; communication, time management, coping, goal setting, and leadership. Not only could they aid in the understanding of the concepts but also in what life skills they

learn. Youth could potential inform us of what skills they are learning and how. With this information practitioners could change or refocus their life skill program to fit the need of the youth. It would be recommended that semi structured interviews and focus groups were conducted with a larger population and add youth to the participants.

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Table 1 Researchers definitions of life skills

<b>Researchers</b>	<b>Definition of Life Skills</b>
Landman et. al (1980)	One having the ability that is essential for an individual to function effectively and knowledgably in their day to day lives.
Powell (1985) & Bailey & Deen (2002)	Tools that work alongside of the expansion and knowledge through out the human development process. Specifically, life skills that are needed to execute the tasks for a particular age and gender in the subsequent parts of the human development process: physical-sexual, psychosocial, cognitive, ethical, character, emotional and professional
Hendricks (1998)	“the abilities individuals can learn that will help them to be successful in living a productive and satisfying life” (p.4).
Danish et. al. (2004) & Danish, Taylor, Hodge, & Heke (2004)	When a skills purpose is to learn valuable life lessons then these skills are thought of as life skills. Life skills are skills one learns that allows them to excel in diverse settings. These diverse settings include: living arrangements, educational settings, and their community



Table 2 Demographics of qualitative participants

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Recruited Location</b>	<b>Recruitment</b>	<b>Mean Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>
Coaches (n=2)	Midwest	Via email through a personal contact	31.5	Male (n=1) Female (n=1)
Teachers (n=2)	Northeast	Via email through a personal contact	52	Male (n=1) Female (n=1)
Parents (n=2)	Midwest	Via email through a personal contact	50	Male (n=1) Female (n=1)

Table 3 Participants' responses of life skills

<b>Participants responses: Non Physical Skills</b>	<b>Percentage of participant responses:</b>
Respect	83.3%
Team work	50%
Responsibility	33.3%
Work ethic	33.3%
Leadership	33.3%
Showing up on time	16.6%
Sportsmanship	16.6%
Goal setting	16.6%
Civic duty	16.6%
Interacting with new people	16.6%

Table 4 Definitions of Life Skill Concepts

Researchers Definition of Life Skill Concepts	Participants Definition of Life Skill Concepts
<p><b>Communication</b> is defined as one having the ability to express meaning clearly and having the ability to comprehend what others say.</p>	<p><b>Communication</b> is defined as being able to express oneself so others can understand you and the clarity that someone understands another person.</p>
<p><b>Time Management</b> is defined as one having the ability to acquire techniques and tools that will be most efficient to help schedule, plan and prioritized daily and future activities in one's life.</p>	<p><b>Time Management</b> is defined as properly used time to be able to complete a task.</p>
<p><b>Coping</b> are techniques one might use to deal with stressful, unexpected, or unmanageable situations.</p>	<p><b>Coping</b> is defined as a way to get past something that is somewhat a deficiency or something that you are lacking.</p>
<p><b>Goal Setting</b> is a process that will allow a person to identify ways to state what they want, develop a plan on how they will achieve what they want, and then work towards their objective</p>	<p><b>Goal Setting</b> is defined as striving for a set purpose one has set for themselves and others.</p>
<p><b>Leadership</b> is having the ability to use communication, goal setting, problem solving skills, coping strategies, and time management, to accomplish a broader objective. Leadership usually requires one person to take an initiative to help direct others.</p>	<p><b>Leadership</b> is defined as the ability to take charge of a group, mentor and motivate others to get people to follow you and perhaps strive for your conceptual goals or the team.</p>

Table 5 Participants responses to how they assess communication

<b>Participants responses on Communication Skills</b>	<b>Percentage of participant responses:</b>	<b>Participant's quote :</b>
Communicate more with peers than adults	66.6%	"...more so with their peers then with adults in a lot of cases" t2
Body Language	66.6%	"Picking up on their nonverbal communication their body language" c1
Cramp up	50%	"...did not communicate well when they did not like something, so whenever they would cramp tense up..." c2
Stop talking when upset	50%	"when they did not like something...stop talking to you..."c2
Girls have been better communicators	33.3%	"I think the girls together have been better communicators with their parents than with our son" p2
Technology has influenced their ability to communicate	33.3%	"I feel that technology has definitely taking over and taken away from their ability to communicate" p2
Communicate very well through email and cell phones	33.3%	"they communicate very well through email on their laptops through various instruments their parents may have bought them so they communicate very well" t2
Interested in learning slang	33.3%	"In the use of the words they use. They are interested in learning the slang..."t1
Spelling as a result of texting has affected their writing	33.3%	"...spelling as a result of texting, the shorthand...it is affecting their writing ..."t1
Poor spellers and writers	33.3%	"...they are poor spellers and writers" t1
Get off topic	33.3%	"when they did not like something...you know get way off topic."c2
Verbal and nonverbal	16.6%	"There's verbal and nonverbal aspects of it...communicating with out seeing..." c1

Table 6 Participants responses to how they assess time management

<b>Participants responses on Time Management</b>	<b>Percentage of participants responses</b>	<b>Participant's quote :</b>
Finishing homework on time	100%	"...have homework usually every for every class that is using time management to get that done as well as their other work."t1
Plan ahead	83.3%	"Having them see what their day is going to be like and have them plan ahead" p1
Prepared	66.6%	"...she doesn't always prepare you know she waits till the last minute..."c1
Organize their time	66.6%	"...how to organize their time and look future in order to get things done..."p2
Showing up on time	50%	"you have to be at practice at a certain time or at a game at a certain time..."c1
Setting up schedules	50%	"they have their planners open they have written it down...you have to set a schedule..."t1
Getting good grades	50%	Assess time management by, "...if they are getting good grades." C2

Table 7 Participants responses to how they assess coping

<b>Participants responses on Coping Skills</b>	<b>Percentage of participants responses</b>	<b>Participant's quote :</b>
Quitting	83.3%	"They like I said wanted to quit..."c2
Brushing it to the side	66.6%	"...it might not be just brushing it to the side and that's there way of coping..."p1
Ignore it	66.6%	"that's just like ignore it and then it comes up again."p2
Being able to cope with failure	50%	"to cope with failure not being able to perhaps meet a goal that you set for yourself"p2
Verbalize they are having problems	50%	"Some verbalize it saying I can't do this but..."t1
Facial expressions, show discontent and upset	50%	"you can really see it in their faces..."t2
Addressing the situation	50%	"They are using coping skills to get through an uncomfortable situation..."c1
Showing an emotions to a situation	50%	"it was more like that were really upset that they were losing..."c2
Showing frustration by yelling	50%	"I found a couple of situations they would yell at each other..."c2
Trying to settle issues	33.3%	"we talk about problems they may be having and trying to settle issues."t2

Table 8 Participants responses to how they assess goal setting

<b>Participants responses on Goal setting</b>	<b>Percentage of participants responses</b>	<b>Participant's quote :</b>
Writing goals down	66.6%	"every week they had to write down their own personal goal..."c2
Showing emotion if they did or did not reach their goal	66.6%	"They still are checking those papers tells me they care."t2
Verbalizing goals	66.6%	"some of them do it consciously and will say ok I want to score so many goals..."c1
Setting realistic goals	33.3%	"with sports they have been able to set realistic goals..."p2

Table 9 Participants responses to how they assess leadership

<b>Participants responses on Leadership</b>	<b>Percentage of participants responses</b>	<b>Participant's quote :</b>
Good Communication skills	83.3%	“Good communication skills you can tell they are going to be a leader” t2
Popularity	50%	“She will never become a leader because unfortunately she is not socially accepted”t1
Modeling behaviors	50%	“You can show that you are working hard...motivating by demonstrating...modeling”c1
Speak well	33.3%	“They are strong academically...they can speak well.”t2
Empathy	33.3%	“Empathy too, you have to have those experiences yourself to be a good leader.”p2
Motivator	33.3%	“I would describe motivation as a leadership skill...motivate by verbally motivating” c1
Cognitively aware of surroundings	33.3%	“That they are cognitively aware if what is going on around them.”c1



## CHAPTER THREE

### **Life Lessons Learned**

#### **The Development of a Life Skills Scale**

Educators, parents, and coaches can play a significant role in children and adolescents lives. Their role is to enhance one's life by providing children and adolescents with the proper education and tools. These tools, also known as, life skills will hopefully allow the child and adolescent to succeed in society. There has been an increased emphasis on the importance of life skills development (Hahn, Lanspery, & Leavitt, 2006). Life skills are viewed as vital assets for many domains of a child and adolescents life, specifically when the youth's intent is to excel. Life skills can aid in the success in school, the workplace, contributing to their community, social interactions, practice healthy behaviors, or aid in their development (Hahn, Lanspery, & Leavitt, 2006). Life skill programs were developed due to their significance in youths' lives. For approximately 50 years, life skill programs have been increasing in importance and utilization. The purpose of this study was to develop a valid and reliable life skills scale that assesses 5 life skills: communication, time management, coping skills, goal setting, and leadership in youth ages 11-16 years old.

Life skill programs have been created to help the development of life skills in youth, adolescents, and adults. Life skill programs focus on different life skills and are implemented in different venues including schools, communities, mental health agencies, and sport settings. The life skill programs employed in different venues might focus on different life skills, but each program focuses on the same outcome goal, to provide an education to an individual with the focus on life skills which then aids in the growth and development of the individual. With these skills, individuals will hopefully lead a successful and fulfilling life.

#### *Life Skill Definitions and Concepts*

It has been established that there are many similar accepted definitions for life skills. Landman et. al (1980) has defined life skills as one having the ability that is essential for an individual to function effectively and knowledgably in his or her day to day life. Specifically, one is to obtain the skills to work well with others, communicate effectively, have the ability to manage finances and other resources, and make competent decisions that affect their life and other's lives (Bailey & Deen, 2002). Similarly, life skills have been referred to as a large set of

interpersonal and psycho-social skills which can aid in a person's communication skills, allowing them to communicate more effectively, informed decision making, develop coping and self-management skills. Once a person learns these life skills, it may help them live a healthy and productive life (UNICEF, 2008,). Life skills can be defined as those skills used in everyday living, working situations, and for lifestyle maintenance (Murphy & Williams, 1999). Although these definitions differ slightly, they all state how life skills are important for the person to function effectively daily. Researchers have agreed that life skills should be learned and used through out his or her lifetime in hopes of maintaining and living a healthy and productive life (See Table 1).

### *Why Life Skills*

Many researcher, practitioners, educators and parents are in agreement that children and adolescents should learn life skills. Children and adolescents can be taught life skills in a variety of venues. Although some children and adolescents have the opportunity to gain knowledge of life skills, many do not (Schultz, J. 1994). It has been found that whether youth are planning on attending college, or entering the workforce fulltime, some children leave high school unprepared for the challenges and responsibilities adults face. In order to help better prepare youth and adolescents for their adult world, many middle schools and high schools introduced courses on life skills (Schultz, 1994). These courses allow an individual to start thinking about how to live successfully in the adult world. Schools are just one example of where youth can learn life skills. Sports, community centers, or home settings are other examples of venues that offer life skill programs. These life skill programs also emphasize skills that are important for youth to acquire to become functional and self-sufficient adults (Aviles, & Helfrich, 2004).

An example of a life skills program is the Life-Skills Based Education (LSBE). LSBE is implemented around the world and aids in the development of youth. LSBE enables youth to obtain knowledge and to develop attitudes and skills which support the adoption of healthy behaviors. Youth in this program are taught ways to handle challenging situations. This program is particularly geared to educate young girls on health education. This program teaches youth life skills about human rights, social issues, violence prevention, peace building, and sexual disease prevention (UNICEF, 2008). The importance of life skills education in youth and adolescents has been agreed upon around the world. There are many reasons why life skills are vital assets

children and adolescents should obtain. The main reason why life skills are significant tools to learn is because they aid in the development of children and adolescents.

Life skills are also viewed as tools that allow a person to function in society. Once life skills are acquired, children and adolescents should be able to make sufficient decisions with respect to challenges they may face. Life skills also aid in youth adopting healthy behaviors in life. Research has found that life skills development can: delay the onset of drug use, avoid high risk sexual behaviors, improve academic performance, enhance anger management skills, enhance positive social interactions (Mangrulkar, Whitman, & Posner, 2001). Some life skill programs were initiated due to the amount of youth partaking in high risk activities. These high risk activities include: heavy alcohol, drug or tobacco use, poor school performance, or lack of attendance and unprotected sexual activities which results in pregnancies. It's estimated that 25% of the nation's youth partake in high risk activities and another 25% engage in what is considered moderate risk behaviors (Boyd, Herring, & Briers, 1992). It has been stated that high risk activities that youth partake in enables youth to become a burden to society instead of contributors (Boyd, Herring, & Briers, 1992). This being noted, it is a necessity for youth to learn life skills throughout their child and adolescent years. By learning life skills youth will hopefully be able to make appropriate decisions. The importance of life skills education has increased and it is important that researchers, educators, and practitioners have valid measurements of life skills.

#### *Why Measurement is Important*

Currently, life skill programs are being evaluated by the clinical opinion of the practitioners. However, a systematic evaluation system is needed to help track life skill development (Baily & Dean, 2002). Many programs focus on life skills enhancement, but unfortunately, programs have minimal resources for evaluations of their programs, and limited resources makes it difficult to have a valid evaluation. Life skill programs should be able to provide evidence that youth are increasing in healthy behaviors and utilizing the skills the program has intended to enhance. The purpose of this study is to develop a life skills scale in youth ages 11-16 years old. These proposed life skills are also established in multiple programs that exist currently and coincide with Hendricks (1998) 35 life skills. Hendricks (1998) found that using more than 8 life skills in an evaluation was unmanageably and ineffective. Therefore,

the current study focuses on evaluating five life skills; communication, time management, coping skills, goal setting, and leadership.

The current study is focusing on five life skills that have been prevalent in many life skills programs. As mentioned previously there are many venues that intend to enhance life skill development in adolescents. Sport is one example of a venue where life skills can be implemented. Papacharisis, Goudas, Danish, and Theodorakis (2005) identify with the effectiveness of implementing a program that is focusing on enhancing an individual's life skills through sport, and believe that life skills taught in sport are transferable to other domains in life. Some examples of transferable life skills learned through sport are: an individual is able to perform under a pressure situation, is able to problem solve, is able to time manage to meet deadlines, is able to set goals, can communicate effectively, is able to manage successes and failures, can work well with others, and is able to use the feedback they receive. These examples of life skills coincide with the current study's 5 life skill constructs: communication, time management, coping skills, goal setting, and leadership. Another example of a life skill program that focuses on similar constructs as this study is the LifeSkills Training program.

Botvin (2007) developed the LifeSkills Training program with the purpose to target adolescents and risky behaviors. The program does not educate adolescents on tobacco, alcohol, and drugs, but rather promotes healthy alternatives to risky behaviors. The LifeSkills Training program is designed to be a flexible and interactive program that uses multiple learning strategies such as; coaching, lectures, classroom discussions, peer interactions, and provider-led activities to enhance adolescents' skills (Botvin, 2007)

The LifeSkills Training program is implemented in multiple age groups targeting specific skills to educate and enhance particularly to the targeted audience. The program can be taught in schools, community, or after-school settings. The LifeSkills Training program educates middle school children on effective problem solving, managing anger, and communicating clearly. These three skills are similar to coping skills and communication in the proposed study. The high school program also focuses on similar life skills as the current study. For example the high school program educates students on decision-making, reducing stress, and communication. These skills relate to coping skills, and communication (Botvin, 2007). This program provides support for the importance of the five life skill constructs communication, time management, coping skills, goal setting, and leadership.

Although the programs differ, it is evident that the five life skill concepts are significant due to their implementation in multiple programs. The current study will develop a scale that could be used as an evaluation for multiple programs and will be beneficial for further programs with the focus to enhance and individuals on communication, time management, coping skills, goal setting, and leadership.

### **Methods**

This study's purpose is to develop a valid and reliable scale to measure five life skills: communication, time management, coping skills, goal setting, and leadership.

#### *Participants and Procedure*

Approximately 980 middle school (n=722) and high school (n=261) students ranging from 11-16 years in age were recruited from a Midwest public middle and high school for participation in a measure development study (See Table 2 for demographics). All materials and procedures were approved by the primary author's institutional review board. Parents or guardians received a letter stating what the study entailed and passive consent was given prior to the children participating in the study. If the parents had any questions related to the measure development they were able to contact the primary researcher. If the parents did not want their child to participate in the study, they were asked to sign the passive consent form and return it to the main office of the school. Only one participant declined participation. During the day of data collection the child were informed that they could refuse to participate if they desired. All participation was voluntary. Groups of participants completed an anonymous, paper-based survey in a 30 minute time block during their school day. The middle school participants completed the survey during the first 30 minutes of their Language Arts period. The high school students completed the survey during the 30 minute enrichment period. The surveys were administered on two separate days. One day the researcher collected data at the high school location, and the second data collection occurred two weeks later at the middle school location. Along with the given items on the YLSS participants were asked demographic questions, and other scales items for convergent validity

#### *Measure Development Process*

The current study is to develop a life skills scale. The items were created by running focus groups with coaches, parents, and teachers. During this process questions were asked that

provided the researcher with information to develop the items that helped create a scale that will assess communication, time management, coping skills, goal setting, and leadership.

Based on the feedback from the focus groups items were generated (please refer to chapter two for the development of these items). Additional items were taken from valid and reliable life skills evaluations.

#### *Item Generation*

During the first phase, items were written based on the current literature, Youth Evaluation Scale (YES), Proactive Coping Inventory (PCI), COPE inventory, and Leadership Scale for Sports (LSS) and the authors' research experience. Each item was checked for consistency of wording, applicability to response options, and phrasing. Items were re-written at this stage if they were unclear. An initial pool of 124 items was generated.

#### *Item Categorization*

Initial subscales were determined by the literature and natural groupings in the items. A panel of trained raters, familiar with the topic of life skills sorted the initial items into construct groups. Raters were instructed to look at the items for redundancy, comprehension, clarity, and fit into specified groupings. Items were sorted into the initial groupings of communication, time management, coping, goal setting and leadership. These groupings were developed to stand for five separate life skills. Items were discussed by the panel of raters if the items did not cleanly fit into the categories or were unclear. If consensus was not reached by the panel, the items would be removed.

#### *Cognitive Testing*

After the expert sorting of items, the items were formatted into a general survey. The intent was to place the items into a questionnaire packet similar to the packet that would be used in the final administration and to gain access to some of the participants' thoughts during the survey process. Once the items were properly formatted, two participants who fit the sample criteria for the final administration were recruited. Participants were asked to read the survey and survey items aloud. They were instructed not to answer the survey items, but to think aloud about the items. The purpose of this process was to determine if prospective participants understood the item wording (e.g., terminology regarding communication, time management, coping, goal setting, and leadership), response choices, and phrasing of the items. Information obtained through each interview was used in any following interviews.

### *Data Collection*

Items were clarified by providing examples when needed and re-worded based on the results of the cognitive interviews. After the cognitive interviews, the survey was formatted into its finalized form. The final survey contained 112 items. Data collection occurred two separate times, once at the high school and the second at the middle school. Participants completed the survey anonymously in large groups.

### *Analysis*

After data collection was complete SPSS 15.0 was used to randomly split the data. The process of splitting the data allows for exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses and structural equation models to be developed. Item selection was decided with the use of the exploratory half. The current study selected items based on the information gained from theory, descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis), principal components analysis, Cronbach's alpha, and structural equation modeling techniques. During the first phase of analysis, items were removed if their means and standard deviations showed that they did not differ across participants or represent the full range of response options. Items were also examined for normality using kurtosis and skew. The second phase used a principal component analysis (PCA). The number of concepts kept was decided by using a varimax rotation and parallel analysis. Items remained on concepts if they were fully saturated (loadings  $>.5$ ) and not complex (difference of loadings on each component  $>.2$ ). During this same phase of analysis items were removed if they suppressed the Cronbach's alpha. If the items were loading on a concept that was not theoretically consistent they would also be removed. Once the items were removed (based on the PCA and alpha), another PCA was conducted on the remaining items. This process continued until the PCA, alpha, and theory provided a constant structure. The third phase examined the relationship between the subscales and allowed for a higher-order structure. The process was using a structural equation model fit to the resulting data structure. The final step in the measure development was testing the confirmatory half with the final model. The five theoretically derived concepts previously mentioned, were supported by the statistical analyses based on the exploratory half. The resulting subscales were named Goal Setting, Leadership, Time Management, Verbal Communication, and Technology Communication. The subscales show that higher scores indicate higher life skills for the five subscales; goal setting, leadership, and time management, verbal communication, and technology communication.

### *Life Skill Constructs*

*Communication* is defined as one having the ability to express meaning clearly and having the ability to comprehend what others say. It has been shown that if one possesses good interpersonal communication skills he or she will be more likely to have positive social behavior, a more positive mental and physical well-being, achieve in education, and further in life potential job opportunities (BT Education Program, 2006). For the communication construct three of the items were selected from the Youth Experience Survey (YES).

*Time management* is defined as one having the ability to acquire techniques and tools that will be most efficient to help schedule, plan and prioritized daily and future activities in one's life. For the time management construct three of items were selected from the YES.

*Coping skills* can be behavioral or cognitive. Coping skills are techniques one might use to deal with stressful, unexpected, or unmanageable situations. Using coping skills will allow a person to cognitively or behaviorally handle the situation effectively. Coping skills can also coincide with problem solving life skills. A person will be able to identify the problem and then using the coping skills they have acquired to overcome the situation effectively. The coping skills constructed selected seven of the items from the Proactive Coping Inventory (PCI) and eight of the items from the COPE inventory.

*Goal setting* allows a person to develop effective ways to reach their goals or passions. Goal setting is a process that will allow a person to identify ways to state what he or she wants, develop a plan on how he or she will achieve what they want, and then work towards his or her objective. The goal setting construct selected two of the items from the YES.

*Leadership* is important because it requires a person to use the life skills they possess in the most effective way. Leadership usually requires one person to take an initiative to help direct others. Acquiring the skill as a leader one must learn to use his or her life skills effectively. The leadership construct selected three of the items from YES, and two of the items were selected from the Leadership Scale for Sport (LSS).

Since there is a small amount of evaluations that assess these proposed life skill constructs multiple items were developed and generated based on literature to measure the five life skill constructs: communication, time management, coping skills, goal setting, and leadership.



## *Results*

Based on the results of the measure development process the items were reduced from 122 to 24. There were multiple structural equation models evaluated. This included the five factor model (correlated), a three factor model (correlated) and a two factor model (correlated). The Cronbach's alphas for the exploratory sample were .85, .78, .59, .69, and .73 respectively (See Table 3 for Factor Loading). The intent was to have the subscales significantly correlate. It was found that three of the subscales significantly correlated together and two of the subscales correlated with each other. Goal setting, leadership and time management were significantly correlated with each other and verbal communication and technology communication correlated with each other.

### *Exploratory Half*

Table 3 presents the parameter loadings from the final PCA. The third subscale, Verbal Communication, was kept in the final structure even though the Cronbach's alpha was below the desired .80 because it is believed to be a prominent life skill for youth. The alpha could be low due to the lack of studies conducted on verbal communication. The items on this subscale represent are theoretically important and the authors decided to maintain them in the final version of the YLSS. Figure 1 shows the model of the life skills subscales for the exploratory half with the factors fully correlated. The model fit the data,  $\chi^2$  (n = 489, 248) = 659.239 CFI = .855, TLI = .839, RMSEA = .058 (CI90 = .053 - .064). (Figure 1 presents the exploratory model).

After further analysis, the results showed that just the construct of goal setting, leadership, and time management were a better fit than the hypothesized model. All three factors correlate with each other and were good indicators of measuring life skills. The model fit the data,  $\chi^2$  (n=489,116) = 311.175, CFI = .909, TLI = .893, RMSEA = .059 (CI90 = .051-.067) (Figure 2 presents the 3 factor exploratory model). The last model provides evidence of the best fit model being goal setting and leadership. The model fit the data well,  $\chi^2$  (n=489, 64) = 202.086, CFI = .923, TLI = .906, RMSEA = .066 (CI90 = .056- .077) (Figure 3 presents the two factor correlated exploratory model).

### *Confirmatory Half*

The hypothesized confirmatory model fit the data,  $\chi^2$  (n = 495, 248) = 630.702, CFI = .879, TLI = .865, RMSEA = .056 (CI90 = .050-.061) (Figure 5 presents the hypothesized confirmatory model). Removing the communication life skill subscales the confirmatory model

fit the data,  $\chi^2$  (n = 495, 116) = 334.268, CFI = .911, TLI = .896 RMSEA = .062 (CI90 = .054 - .069) (Figure 6 presents the 3 factor confirmatory model). The last model analyzed was the goal setting and leadership model. The model fit the data well,  $\chi^2$  (n= 495, 64) = 224.213, CFI = .922, TLI = .905, RMSEA = .071 (CI90 = .061-.081) (Figure 7 presents the two factor confirmatory model). A Summary of fit indices for confirmatory models is presented in Table 4.

#### *Validity Analysis*

The YES was developed as a measure for high school aged students. YES is a self reported measure and assessed the developmental experiences youth might have experienced in during an organized activity, extracurricular activity or a community-based program (Hansen, & Larson, 2005). The Yes has been revised on two occasions. The measure focuses on positive youth development. Items were taken from the YES for four of this projects scale. As mentioned previously the communication subscale used three items from the YES. The time management subscale used three items from the YES. The goal setting subscale used two items from the YES, and the leadership subscale used three items from the YES.

Correlations were conducted to test the validity of the YLSS four subscales. The communication subscale for the YLSS split into verbal communication and technology communication. The YES communication items significantly correlated with the YLSS verbal communication items,  $r$  (650) = .199,  $p < .001$ . The YES communication items do not correlated with the YLSS technology communication items,  $r$  (614) = .057,  $p .159$ . When combining the YLSS communication items there was a correlation with the YES communication items,  $r$  (581) = .158,  $p < .001$ . The YES time management items significantly correlate with the YLSS time management items  $r$  (700) = .501,  $p < .001$ . The YES goal setting items significantly correlated with the YLSS goal setting items  $r$  (524) = .684,  $p < .001$ . The YES leadership items significantly correlated significantly with the YLSS leadership items  $r$  (528) = .610,  $p < .001$ . These results provide validity that the YLSS is in fact measuring communication, time management, goal setting, and leadership (See Table 5 for correlations amongst subscales).

A cross-tabs analysis was also conducted to find who learned life skills more males or females. The results indicate that 76% of the sample learned life skills. 47.1% of males learned life skills and 52.9% of females reported learning life skills before. The results are significant,  $p > .001$ . A T-Test was conducted with children that reported learning life skills before compared to the YLSS items. It was originally hypothesized that those that had learned life skills

previously would score higher on the YLSS. The results indicated, on the YLSS leadership items, that those who reported no previous experience of learning life skills ( $M = 12.26$ ,  $SD = 3.99$ ) scored significantly higher than those who reported learning life skills previously ( $M = 10.88$ ,  $SD = 3.65$ ),  $t(692) = -3.97$ ,  $p < .001$ , two-tailed. Those that reported no previous experience of learning life skills ( $M = 11.43$ ,  $SD = 3.17$ ), scored significantly higher than those who reported learning life skills on the YLSS time management items ( $M = 10.24$ ,  $SD = 3.33$ ),  $t(808) = -4.24$ ,  $p < .001$ , two-tailed. Participants that reported no previous experience of learning life skills ( $M = 8.68$ ,  $SD = 2.94$ ) scored significantly higher than those who reported learning life skills on the YLSS verbal communication items ( $M = 8.17$ ,  $SD = 2.88$ ),  $t(824) = -2.09$ ,  $p = .04$ . Participants who reported no previous experience of learning life skills ( $M = 22.03$ ,  $SD = 6.53$ ) scored higher than those who reported learning life skills previously on the YLSS goal setting items ( $M = 21.49$ ,  $SD = 6.60$ ),  $t(539) = -.772$ ,  $p = .44$ . Those that reported learning life skills ( $M = 9.58$ ,  $SD = 4.60$ ) scored higher than those that reported no previous experience in learning life skills on the YLSS technology communication items ( $M = 9.33$ ,  $SD = 4.16$ ),  $t(775) = .617$ ,  $p = .51$ . Those that reported no previous experience on learning life skills ( $M = 18.01$ ,  $SD = 5.47$ ) scored higher than those that reported learning life skills previously on the YLSS combined communication scores ( $M = 17.68$ ,  $SD = 5.57$ ),  $t(713) = .661$ ,  $p = .51$ .

### **Discussion**

Based on the results the most effective model included only two correlated factors: goal setting and leadership. The goal setting and leadership factors reflect the most prominent life skills. Although goal setting and leadership had the strongest correlation the time management factor was also retained. The time management factor provides supplemental information in regards to life skills found in youth. Verbal communication and technology communication were the other two subscales predicted in this study. The results provided evidence that these two subscales were life skills, but they did not correlate with the three other factors. These two subscales may impact the levels of communication but they were not a strong predictor or indicator of life skills for youth especially in regards to having each life skill build off of each other.

The Youth Life Skills Scale (YLSS) will be a useful evaluation of life skill programs that currently educate participants who are 11-16 years in age on the three life skills constructs: time management, goal setting, and leadership. The YLSS could benefit multiple programs that use

one or all of the three life skill concepts because a current life skill program will have an evaluation that will assess life skills which will allow the program to enhance its validity and potentially more organizations will want to use the life skills program because results will show that the life skills program does in fact educate and enhance one's life skills in the three life skill concepts.

The YLSS hypothesized five subscales; communication, time management, coping, goal setting, and leadership. After analysis five life skill subscales were kept. The five subscales were named, goal setting, leadership, time management, verbal communication, and technology communication. It is important to take notice that the hypothesized coping subscale was eliminated and the communication subscale was split into two separate subscales; verbal communication and technology communication. Although coping was eliminated it could be due to the fact that youth in today's society are using communication as a coping skill. It is important to study coping skills further and identify in what ways youth cope.

The validity analysis results indicated that the YLSS items were measuring the hypothesized constructs based on the correlations with the YES. Out of the 24 items on the YLSS only one item was from the YES. This item was retained on the YLSS time management subscale; *I do not procrastinate (putting things off)*. The other 23 items on the YLSS are found to significantly measure the five areas as well adding to the area of life skills. The items were generated based on the knowledge of the researchers and the information obtained from parents, teachers, and coaches (please refer to chapter two).

The goal setting subscale retained the most items after the analysis. The goal setting subscale has eight items on the YLSS. This measure is a valid measure of goal setting and by having the word goal or goals in each items allows for easier clarification when a child between the ages of 11-16 is taken the scale. The leadership subscale has five items on the YLSS. Most of the items on this subscale refer to a person directing or helping people solve problems. By wording items in this manners allows for the targeted population to easily understand what the question means. As mentioned previously goal setting and leadership correlated the best with each other. This result fit with one of the hypothesis. It was believed that a leader would have high goal setting skills personally and able to direct or aid in a teams goal setting ability. The YLSS could aid in sports life skill program or in a sports program as valid evaluation of leadership and goal setting.

The YLSS time management subscale has four items and one item was retained from the YES. As mentioned previously, about the first two subscales, this subscale also is suited to the targeted population. Each time management item has the word time or is referring to time. This allows for understanding of the items as well as creating a valid measurement. The communication subscale was originally hypothesized as one subscale. After the addition of technology questions the results indicated that technology communication was its own subscale and verbal communication became its own.

Communication has been viewed as a life skill in many life skill programs and a part of the definition is using verbal skills. It is not surprising that the verbal communication subscale was created. It is interesting that the technology communication subscale was retained. This subscale provides evidence that the generations have changed and that technology is a prominent factor in youth's worlds. In this study verbal and technology communication did not correlate with the other three subscales but it was found to be a life skill. It is believed that the communication questions might not have been developed fully and therefore the correlation for all five of the life skills could not exist. Another reason why communication might not correlate is the way the youth are taught life skills. It has been shown in previously stated research that all five of the predicted life skills were in life skill programs but perhaps youth are taught the three concepts together. For example a youth might participate in a life skills program and learn how to set time manageable goals. This would be an example of using the two skills together. At the same time using goal setting could lead to leadership skills. Perhaps the youth are not learning the life skill communication in the same sense as the other three life skills. Future research should consider studying the life skill, communication, more in depth.

Communication should also be looked at as a coping mechanism. If communication is in fact a way for youth to cope then future studies could develop a measurement for this life skill. It is important to further study the technology component of communication. Technology is growing and developing everyday and the youth are using technology in many more aspects of their lives then previously. Not only would studying technology communication enhance life skills programs but perhaps youth development research.

The YLSS is an important development in life skills because it is a valid measure of five life skills and can be used in multiple venues such as: school, sports, community based programs, and home settings. This scale could be easily accessible for practitioners, coaches, teachers, or

parents because it does measure vital life skills. Not only have researchers stated that these five life skills were essential for youth to learn but also parents, teachers, and coaches have reported the importance of these five life skills (please refer to chapter two). This scale is a step further in the life skills development because it is a measurement of essential skills used in multiple domains and targets a very specific population. Youth 11-16 is a specific age group that could be par taking in life skill programs but even if they are not this is a critical stage of their development. The implementation of life skill programs has become prevalent interest for researchers, practitioners, educators, coaches, and parents in today's society. These programs are being implemented to enhance youth's positive youth development. If this area is of such importance it would be vital to have a valid measure. The YLSS could be great importance for multiple programs because of its adaptability.

#### *Limitations/Future Direction*

Although the hypothesis was not entirely confirmed it is important to note that this study was a piloted study for a youth life skills scale. There are many aspects of this study that will aid in the enhancement of life skills programs and research, but there is always room for growth. Although the sample size was large, the research was conducted with one Midwest middle school and high school. It would be important to further the location and amount of schools in future studies.

In addition to furthering the location of the population it is also important to get diverse sample. Most of the participants in this study were Caucasian and attending a public school. A more diverse sample of participants could aid in the life skills research. Although there was a 76% report of children learning life skills previously the majority of participants did not score higher on the five subscales of the YLSS. These results stated that most of the participants who reported no previous learning of life skills scored higher on the YLSS. Perhaps students who reported learning life skills actually learned life skills other than the five presented in this study. Another factor could be that youth between the ages of 11-16 do not know what life skills are. Only 36% of the participants reported participating in a life skills program. Therefore, the people who did score higher on the YLSS could be the 36% of the participants that reported participating in a life skills program. Participants who reported no previous experience in learning life skills might have learned the five life skills presented in this study, but were not aware of it because it was never clarified to them.

These results indicate that more research should be conducted on youth's perceptions of life skills, and their understanding of the five life skills presented in this study. Due to this being a piloted study future research should expand on this topic. More studies could be conducted validating the YLSS and aiding in the research of youth and life skills. As well as having a valid measure it would be beneficial to have a life skills program developed focusing on enhancing these five life skills specifically in youth 11-16 years in age.

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Table 1. Example of Life Skills

Researchers	Examples of Life Skills
Bailey & Deen (2002)	Work well with others <b>Communication</b> Manage finances and other resources Competent decision making
Hendricks (2006) *	<b>Leadership</b> Teamwork Self-discipline Stress management Problem solving <b>Goal setting</b> <b>Communication</b>
Rubin, Chan, & Thomas (2003)	Empathy Self care skills (bath oneself, dress oneself) Mobility skills (drive a car, use public transport) <b>Communication (maintain conversation)</b> Interpersonal skills (make new friends) Health Management skills (maintain healthy diet) Job Seeking skills (write a resume) Vocational Adjustment skills (show up regularly for work)
(Unicef. <i>Life Skills, Definition of Terms</i> . Retrieved February 23, 2008, from the <a href="http://www.unicef.org">http://www.unicef.org</a> .)	<b>Communication</b> Decision making Coping Self management

\*Has identified 35 skills, broken down into 8 categories, one example from each category

\* Bolded items are life skills covered in this study.

Table 2 Demographics

<b>Demographics</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
High school participants	261	26.6%
Middle school participants	722	73.4%
Age-M = 13.5, SD = 4.5	245	25.1%
Caucasian	882	90%
Participated in life skills program	342	36%
Learned life skills	725	76%
At Home	526	53.7%
At School	426	43.4%
In Sports	221	22.6%
In Music	81	8.3%
In Art	29	3%
Other	170	17.4%
Uses Life Skills		
At Home	537	54.7%
In Sports	276	28.1%
At School	401	40.9%
Other	312	31.8%

Table 3 Factor loadings for YLSS subscales from the exploratory half of the dataset.

	Cronbach's Alpha=	GS	L	VCM	TM	TCM
<b>YLSS 19</b> I write down my goals so I can see them	.699	.855	.782	.599	.692	.732
<b>YLSS 20</b> I set goals that I can measure	.703					
<b>YLSS 26</b> I set goals that I can reach on a specific time line	.621					
<b>YLSS 36</b> I set new goals once I reached my goal	.735					
<b>YLSS 50</b> I set specific goals	.758					
<b>YLSS 65</b> I reevaluate my goals	.735					
<b>YLSS 76</b> I set goals I know I can achieve	.642					
<b>YLSS106</b> I set detailed goals	.754					
<b>YLSS 5</b> Help members of the group settle their conflicts			.502			
<b>YLSS 17</b> I can instruct people on things			.774			
<b>YLSS 29</b> I am able to direct people in activities			.789			
<b>YLSS 30</b> I can give directions to group members			.838			
<b>YLSS 81</b> I am able to direct peers in solving a problem			.617			
<b>YLSS 86r</b> I get nervous talking to people I do not know				.731		
<b>YLSS 105r</b> People can not hear me when I talk				.755		
<b>YLSS 107r</b> I get nervous or scared when I have to talk to adults with authority				.750		
<b>YLSS 11</b> I do not procrastinating (not putting things off)					.542	
<b>YLSS 85</b> I always turn my homework in on time					.730	
<b>YLSS 88</b> I finish projects ahead of time					.619	
<b>YLSS 89r</b> I turn in projects late because I forgot to do them					.736	
<b>YLSS 10</b> I use my computer for instant messaging						.795
<b>YLSS 51</b> I use my computer for myspace, or facebook to talk to my friends						.743
<b>YLSS 75</b> I write in abbreviation when sending text						.657
<b>YLSS 89r</b> I use my cell phone for more text messaging then receiving or dialing calls						.699

\* GS = Goal Setting; L = Leadership, VCM = Verbal Communication, TM = Time Management, and TCM = Technology Communication.

Table 4 Fit Indices for Confirmatory Models

<i>Model</i>	$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	$\chi^2/df$	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Figure 5: Five Factor Confirmatory Model	630.70	248	2.54	.879	.865	.056
Figure 6: Three Factor Confirmatory Model	334.27	116	2.88	.911	.896	.062
Figure 7: Two Factor Confirmatory Model	224.21	64	3.50	.922	.905	.071

\*  $\chi^2$  = Chi Square; *df* = degrees of freedom; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = tucker lewis index RMSEA = Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation.

Table 5 Correlations amongst Subscales

Subscale	YESCM 1	YESTM 2	YESGS 3	YESLEAD 4
YLSSGS 1	.516**	.550**	<b>.684**</b>	.427**
YLSSLEAD 2	.561**	.452**	.472**	<b>.610**</b>
YLSSTM 3	.393**	<b>.501**</b>	.381**	.304**
YLSSVC 4	<b>.199**</b>	.072	.048	.140**
YLSSTC 5	<b>.057</b>	-.019*	-.022	.033
YLSSCM 6	<b>.158**</b>	-.053	.000	.092*

\* Bolded items indicate correlations with specific subscales

\*\* represents significance at the  $p < .001$ , two-tailed

Figure 1 Hypothesized 5 Factor Exploratory model

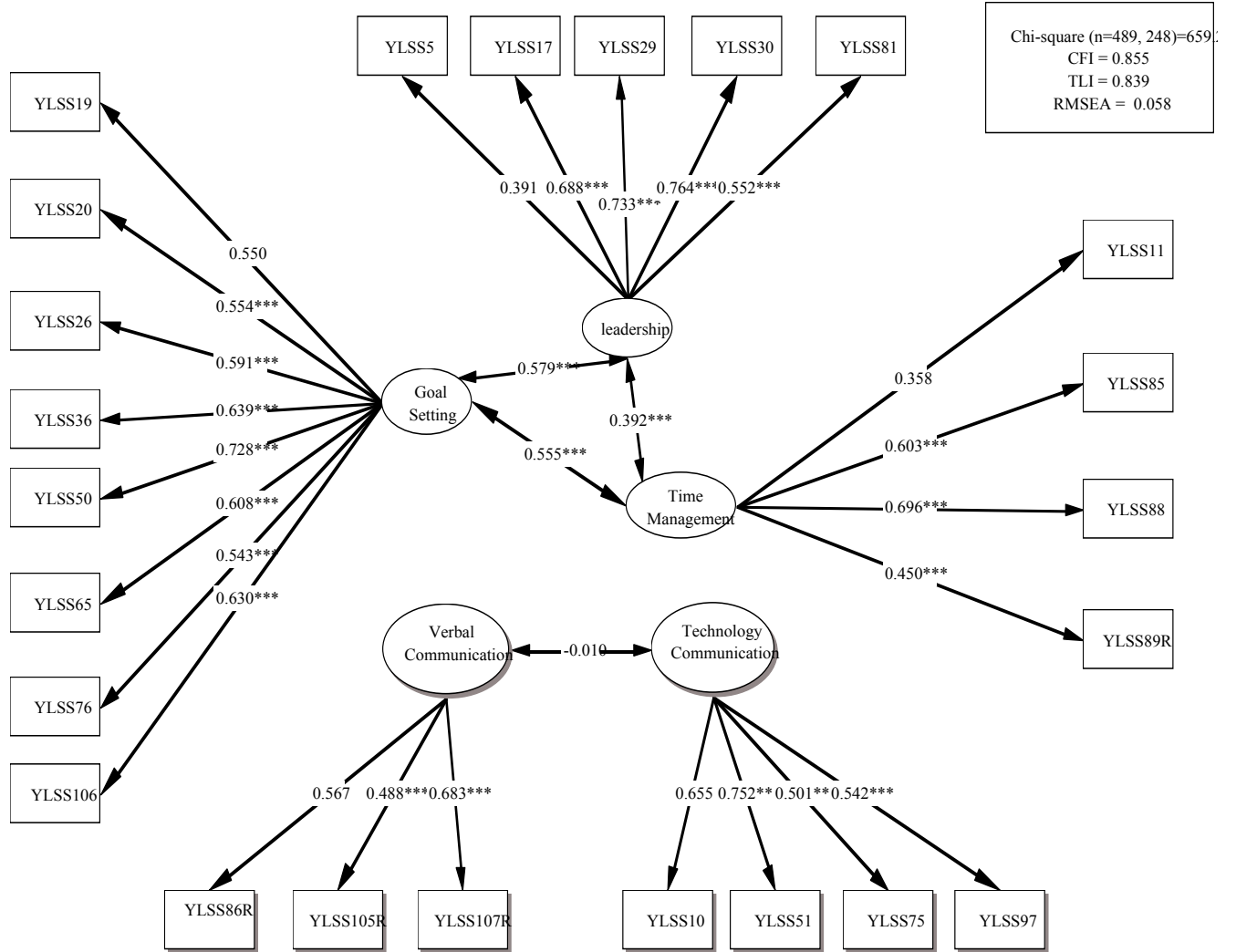


Figure 2 Three Factor Correlated Exploratory Model

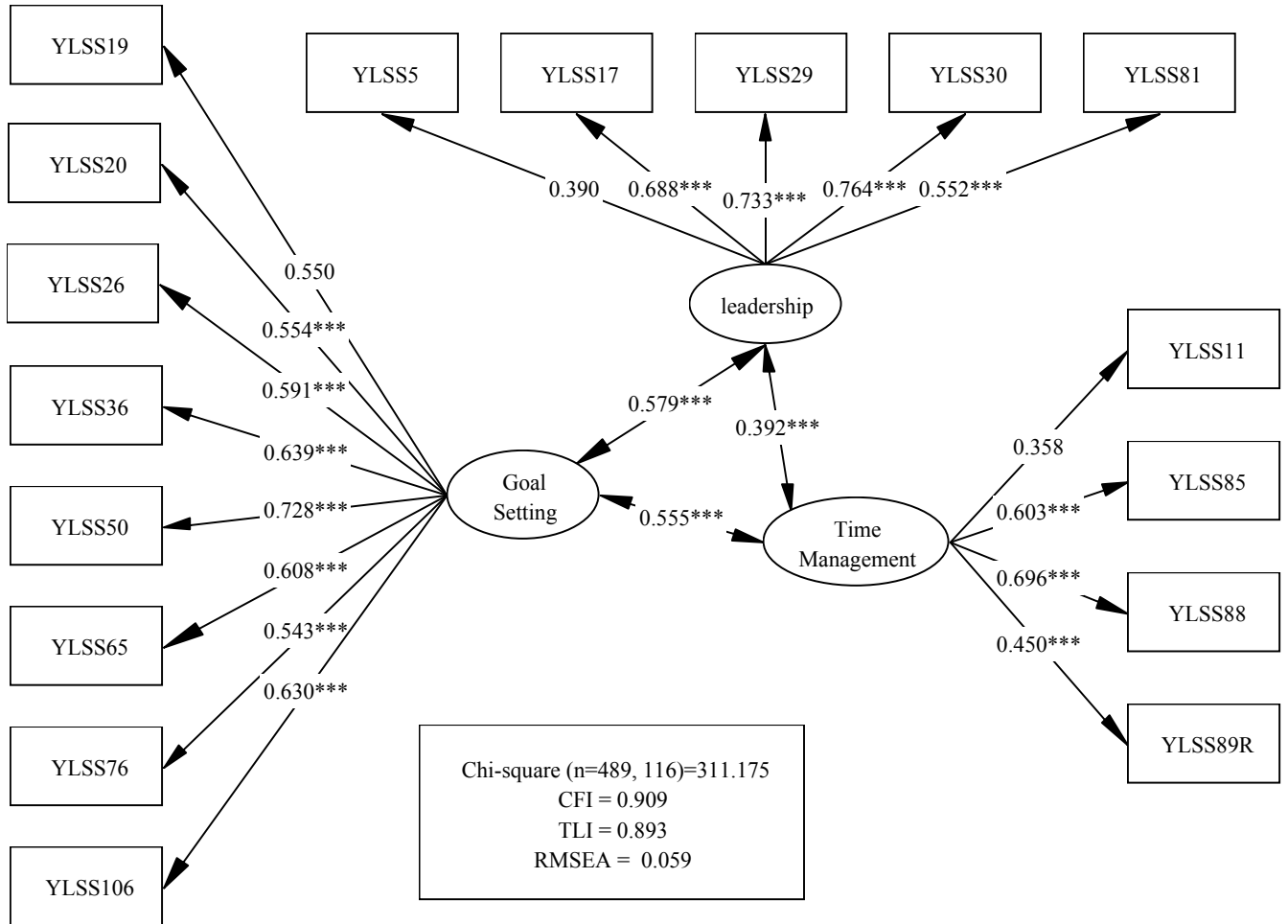




Figure 3 Two Factor Exploratory Model

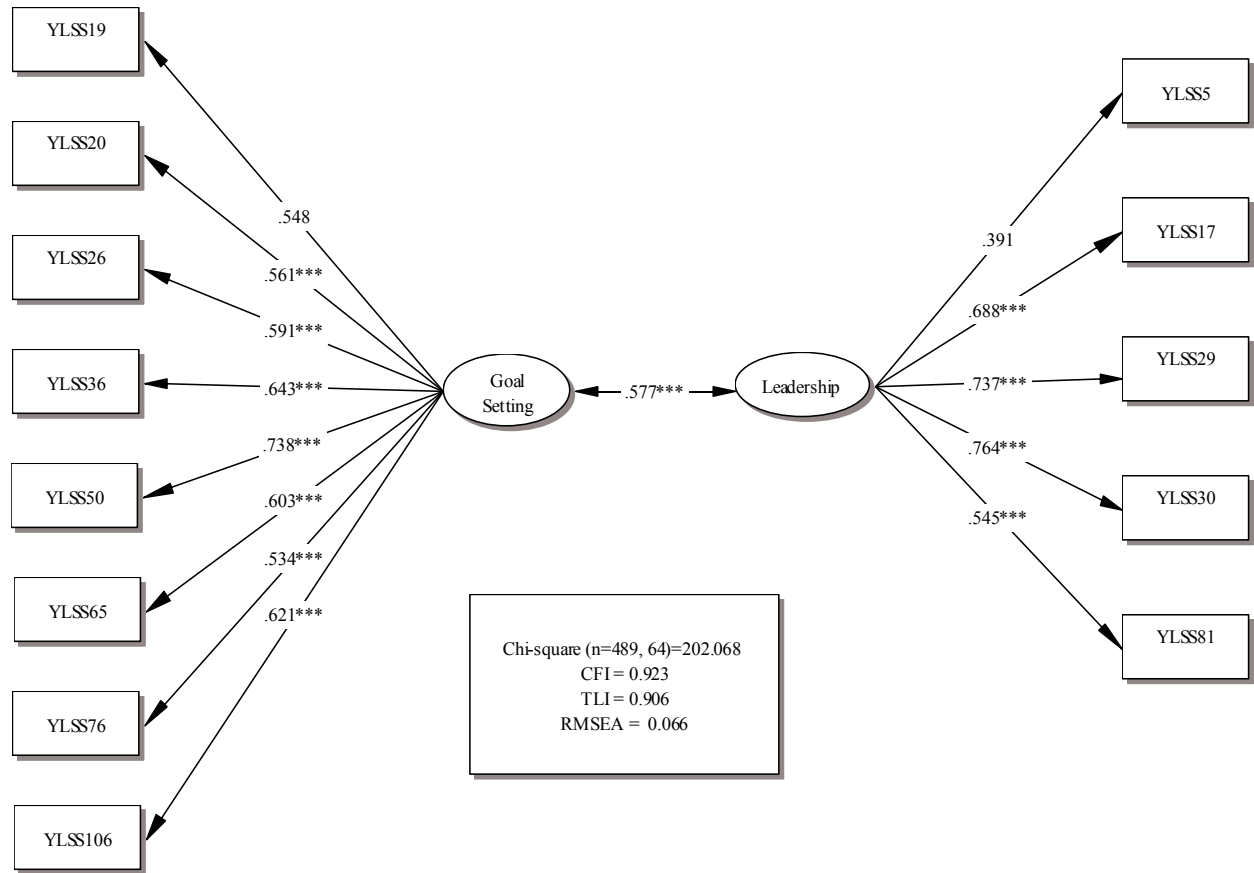


Figure 4 Hypothesized Five Factor Confirmatory Model

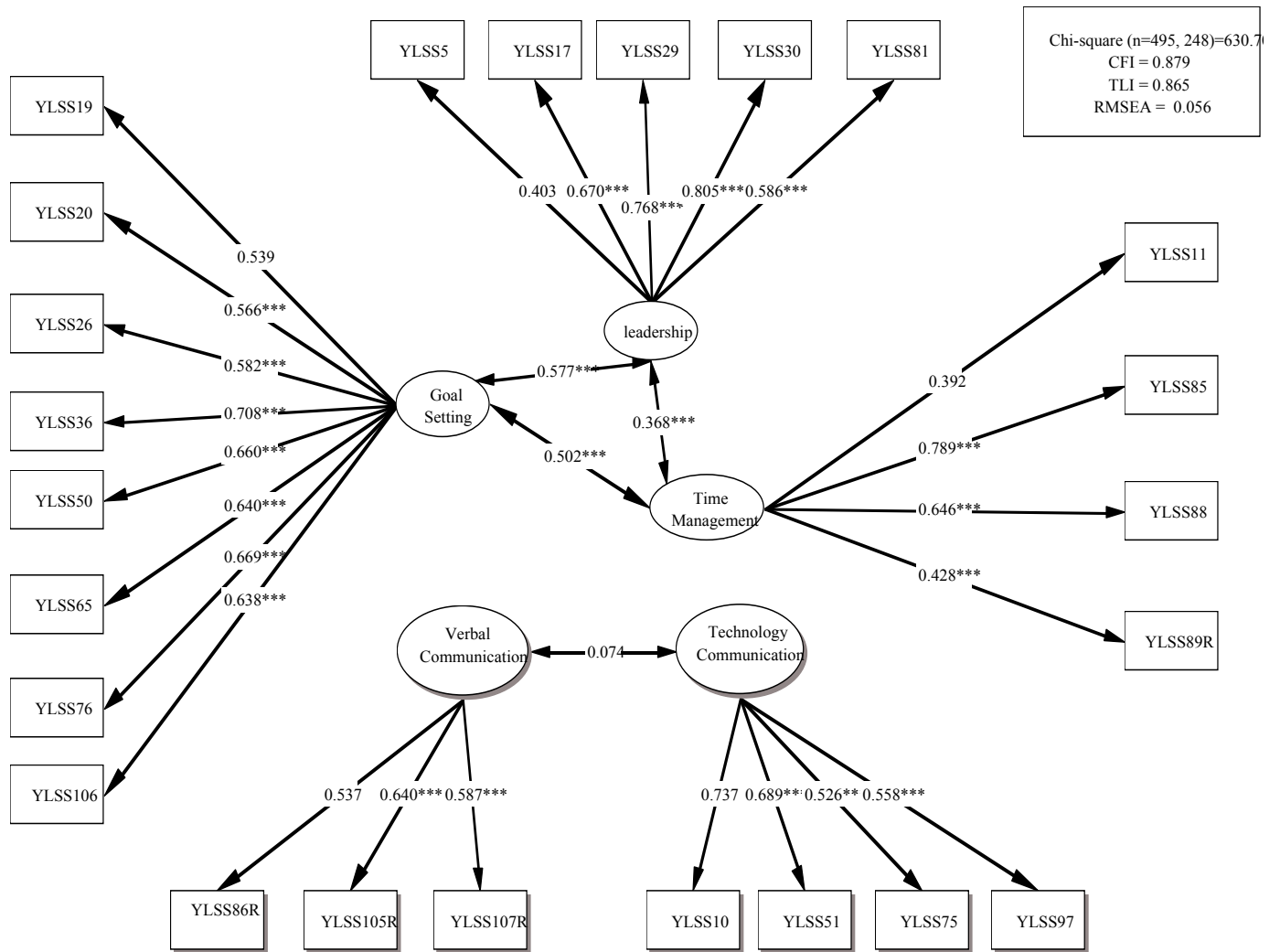


Figure 5 Three Factor Confirmatory Model

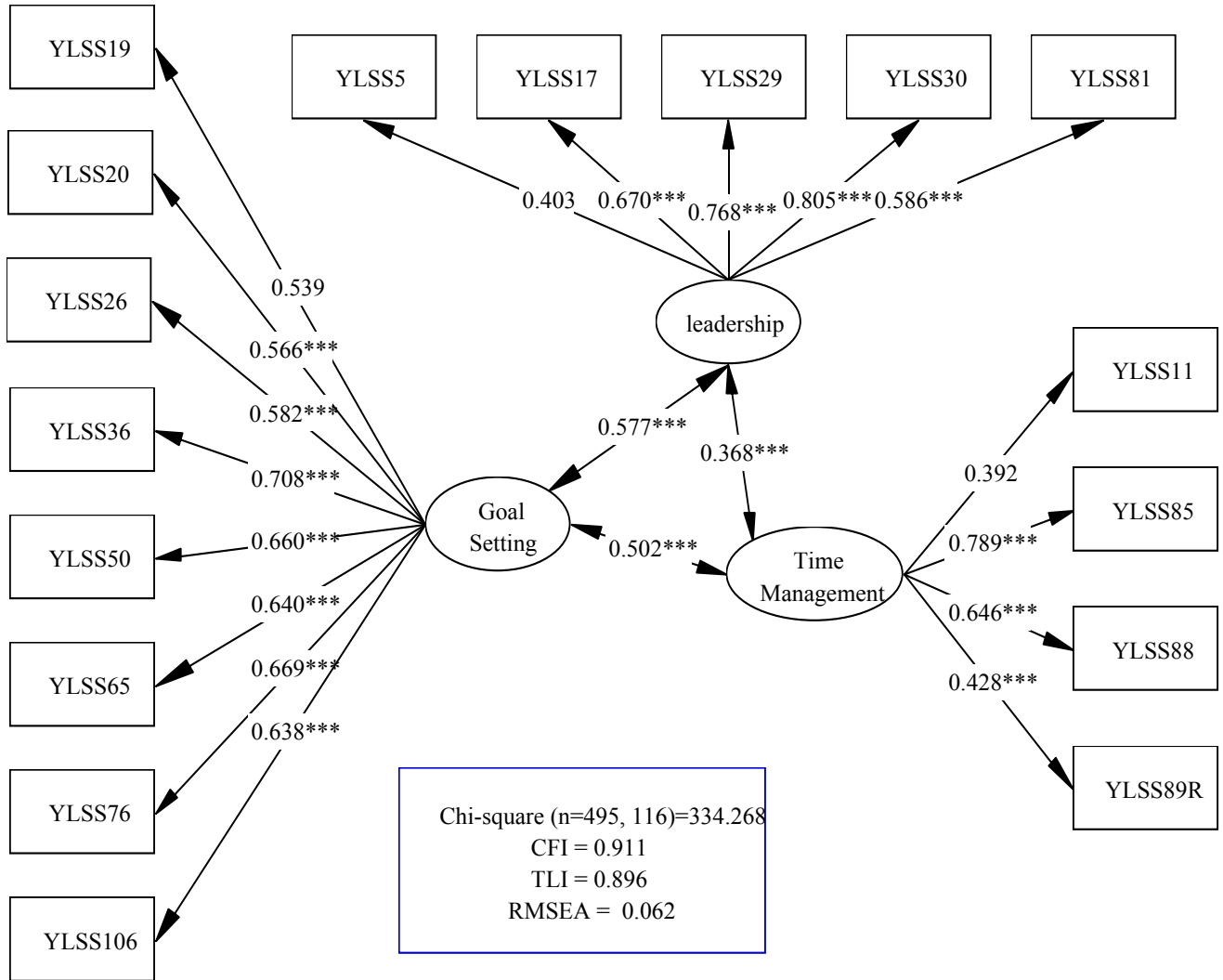
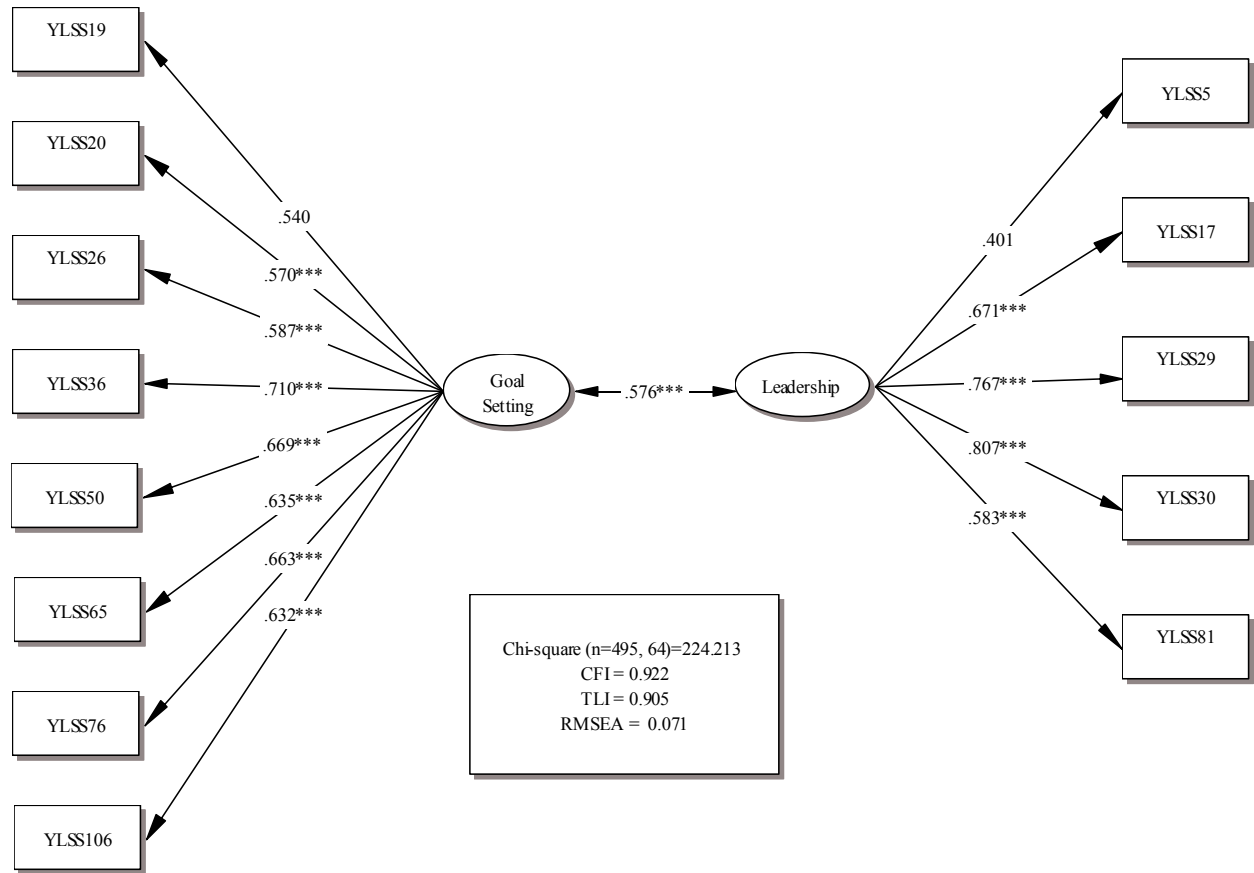


Figure 6 Two Factor Confirmatory Model



## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Overall Discussion**

The results of these two studies provided significant findings. The hypothesized results were not fully found but many interesting and important facts were found. The first component of this study provided evidence and support for the importance of life skills. As previously stated life skill programs have increased in utilization and importance with the intent to enhance positive youth development. Multiple venues have implemented life skill programs. Sport is one domain that promotes positive youth development if the coach is intentionally teaching life skills and creating a positive learning experience (Perkins, & Noam, 2007). In order for this experience to enhance positive youth development three components must be met: create a positive environment for relationships to develop among coaches, athletes, and peers, coaches or educators of the program should identify and target specific knowledge, and skills, for the youth to learn and develop and lastly tailor the program to the needs of the population (Perkins, & Noam, 2007). The results from the qualitative component of this study found that coaches, educators, and parents all agreed on the importance of enhancing youth's life skills within this age group, but they didn't all agree on the same definitions. The intent was to develop an understanding of life skills and the five life skill constructs; communication, time management, coping, goal setting, and leadership. It was particularly important to develop this understanding from adults impacting youth development. If these adults are providing education and impacting youth development it would be helpful for the concepts of life skills to be known as well as the five life skill concepts.

If the understandings of these skills are not synonymous then are our youth receiving the same tools to utilize in their development? The results from the first component of this study provide evidence that this area should be researched more. This area is important to research more because it has been stated that a high quality positive youth development experience is created when the educators have established the skills needed for the population (Perkins, & Noam, 2007). If multiple programs were to implement one of the life skills in this study but the practitioners had different ideas of what the skill was, then the youth might not have the same experience, and might not actually be enhancing their life skill development.

The results from the interviews with the parents, teachers, and coaches provide great support in the area of life skills. The information retained from these interviews allowed researchers to identify the gaps in the definition of life skills. Not only did the definitions of life skills vary across the six participants but also their responses to the five life skill constructs. The participants were able to identify the importance of enhancing life skills and the five life skill areas but they could not fully define what these skills were. The participants were able to provide information on how they assess these five life skills. It seems that the participants were aware of the skill and could identify if a child was utilizing the skill. However, their assessment could differ from other practitioners if their definition of the life skill construct is not the same. Future research should be conducted with more participants with the purpose to develop a standard definition for all of the life skills found in programs as well as the five life skill constructs in this study.

The results with this study coincide with the current challenges in positive youth development. Two challenges found in positive youth development research is establishing a shared definition to significant constructs of positive youth development, as well as developing a way to measure the effectiveness of the programs that intend to enhance positive youth development (Catalano et al, 2004). The purpose of this study was to develop and understanding of some of the concepts found in multiple life skill programs that aid in positive youth development as well as trying to establish an evaluation for life skill programs. Although the results did not develop a shared definition for the five constructs an understanding of the definitions amongst parents, teachers, and coaches was established. The quantitative component of this study focuses on targeting the measurement gap in positive youth development. Although this was a piloted study steps were taken to enhance the field in life skills and positive youth development.

Participants in this study also provided information about specific concepts that allowed for the development of new items. In the area of communication, technology was an area found resulting from the interviews. Items were developed for the YLSS from the interviews in this area. Technology communication was very prominent with in this population and in fact became a life skill concept. These results provide evidence of how our generation has changed and technology is now a prominent tool used in our youth's lives. Technology usage might not be a negative impact for our youth. It seems that one is always reading about how youth are more

obese and less physically active and this is a result of technology. If you take a more positive approach it seems to be an important factor for their communication skills. With this finding it is important that future research studies communication and the technology part of communication. Although the coping concept was not found in this study it could have been, just found in the communication concepts. Perhaps youth today cope by communicating verbally and with technology.

The hypothesized coping subscale originally had seven items taken from the Proactive Coping Inventory (PCI) and eight items taken from the COPE. Both of these scales were valid measurements of coping and it is interesting that the coping subscale was not retained in this study. Further research in coping with youth 11-16 could be beneficial especially since coping is important in positive youth development. Again, it could be due to the way youth are coping in today's society. The coping measures could be out dated and in fact is not a current valid measure of the life skill. Youth today could cope in other ways or the life skill could be grouped under another life skill as it could have been in this study with communication.

The YLSS is a valid measure of life skills in the areas of: goal setting, leadership, time management, verbal communication and technology communication. As the results indicated goal setting, leadership, time management, and verbal communication significantly correlated with previously validated measure (YES). Although technology communication did not correlate, with the YES, it did correlate when technology and verbal communication were added together. The reason technology communication did not correlate could be due to the wording of the questions on the YES. As stated before technology communication could be a new developed area in communication. Previously valid measure of communication might not have questions related to technology.

It was hypothesized that all life skills would correlate with each other. The results indicated that goal setting, leadership, and time management correlated with each other and verbal and technology communicate with each other but not the other three factors. Goal setting, leadership, and time management could have correlated and fit the best due to the prevalence of these life skills in youth 11-16 years in age. These three life skills could be commonly understood amongst the youth and could be found the most in life skill programs together. Communication could be taught to youth in other domains and this could be the reason why it did not correlate with the other three life skills. In addition, goal setting and leadership had the

strongest correlation and represents the strongest model in this study. This could be due to many youth participating in life skill programs enhancing these two areas. Perhaps youth learn goal setting and then when taught leadership skills, goal setting skills are a major part of this process.

These two studies were only a step in the direction to developing a valid measure of life skills. As life skill programs increase and the importance of positive youth development enhances it will be vital that a valid measure is created. The next steps for this process would be interviewing more participants and increasing the age range of the participants. It might be significant to understand the meaning of life skills and life skill programs from youth 11-16. Alongside of that further research could focus on validating the YLSS on life skill programs that exist as well as developing a life skills program focusing on communication; verbal and technology, time management, goal setting, and leadership.



## CHAPTER V

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## **Appendix A:**

### Interview Questions

1. Introduce myself to the participants, pass out consent forms to participants, and ask participants to introduce themselves.
2. Briefly describe your experience as a coach/teacher or parent of a child who participates in a sport for two to three years.
3. Specifically, how long have you been coaching/teaching athletes between 10-16 years old
4. What is your coaching/teaching philosophy?
5. Let's generate a definition for life skills.
6. Do you believe life skills can be taught in your program? Why/ Why Not?
7. Can life skills be transferred from your program to other life experiences in a child's life? If so explain how?
8. Do you implement the teaching of life skills in your program?
9. Briefly describe what life skills you teach?
10. Why do you feel these life skills are important?
11. If you do not teach life skills please explain why you don't?
12. If you had a program that implemented life skills would you use it?
13. Are there any non physical skills you feel adolescents from 10-16 years in age could learn in sport?
14. Let's generate a definition for communication.
15. Do you feel adolescents from 10-16 years in age communicate effectively with peers and adults? If so explain how.
16. How do you assess their communication skills?
17. How would you teach communication skills to adolescents?

18. Do you feel adolescents from 10-16 years in age have time management skills? If so explain how.
19. How do you assess their time management skills?
20. Do you feel time management is a skill that needs to be enhanced in adolescents 10-16 years in age?
21. Do you feel adolescents from 10-16 years in age have coping skills? If so explain how.
22. How do you assess coping skills?
23. Do you feel coping skills are an important skill to be enhanced in adolescents 10-16 years in age?
24. Do you feel adolescents from 10-16 years in age are able to set goals?
25. Do you feel goal setting is a skill that needs to be enhanced in adolescents 10-16 years in age?
26. Do you use goal setting with adolescents from 10-16 years in age?
27. How do you assess goal setting?
28. Do you feel adolescents from 10-16 years in age have leadership skills?
29. How do you define leadership?
30. How do you assess leadership in adolescents 10-16 years in age?
31. Do you feel leadership is a skill that needs to be enhanced in adolescents from 10-16 years in age?

**Appendix B:**  
Youth Life Skills Scale

**This survey is anonymous. Please do not write your name or any identifying information on this survey form. Thank you.**

**Please answer each question as accurately as possible. For this study accuracy is essential, so if you feel that you cannot answer accurately, or do not want to answer the question, please skip to the next question.**

**Before you begin, please review the attached consent form. Completing this survey means that you understand your rights and agree to participate in the survey.**

## Demographics YLSS

<b>1. What is your age?</b> _____ years
<b>2. What is your gender?</b>
<input type="radio"/> Male <span style="margin-left: 200px;"><input type="radio"/> Female</span>
<b>3. What is your ethnicity? (check all that apply)</b>
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 45%;"> <input type="radio"/> American Indian or Alaska Native  <input type="radio"/> Asian or Asian American  <input type="radio"/> Black African American or Haitian  <input type="radio"/> Hispanic or Latino                         </div> <div style="width: 45%;"> <input type="radio"/> Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander  <input type="radio"/> White (Caucasian)  <input type="radio"/> Other                         </div> </div>
<b>4. Where were you born? (If U.S., please write which state you were born in. If another country, please write which country you were born in.)</b> _____
<b>5. Do you participate in extracurricular activities?</b> (Sports, music, art.) _____
<b>6. How long have you participated in extracurricular activities?</b> _____
<b>7. Have you ever participated in a life skills program?</b>
<input type="radio"/> Yes <span style="margin-left: 200px;"><input type="radio"/> No</span>
<b>8. How many years have you participated in a life skills program?</b>
<b>9. Have you learned life skills before?</b>
<input type="radio"/> Yes <span style="margin-left: 200px;"><input type="radio"/> No</span>
<b>10. Where did/do you learn life skills?</b>
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 30%;"> <input type="radio"/> At Home  <input type="radio"/> At School                         </div> <div style="width: 30%;"> <input type="radio"/> In Sports  <input type="radio"/> In Music                         </div> <div style="width: 30%;"> <input type="radio"/> In Art  <input type="radio"/> Other _____                         </div> </div>
<b>11. What life skills have you learned?</b>
<b>12. Do you use the life skills you learned in different places?</b>
<input type="radio"/> At Home <span style="margin-left: 100px;"><input type="radio"/> In Sports</span> <span style="margin-left: 100px;"><input type="radio"/> At School</span> <span style="margin-left: 100px;"><input type="radio"/> Other</span>

## **Life Skill Definitions**

**Communication** is defined as one having the ability to express meaning clearly and having the ability to comprehend what others say.

**Time Management** is defined as one having the ability to acquire techniques and tools that will be most efficient to help schedule, plan and prioritize daily and future activities in one's life.

**Coping** are techniques one might use to deal with stressful, unexpected, or unmanageable situations.

**Goal Setting** is a process that will allow a person to identify ways to state what they want, develop a plan on how they will achieve what they want, and then work towards their objective.

**Leadership** is having the ability to use communication, goal setting, problem solving skills, coping strategies, and time management, to accomplish a broader objective. Leadership usually requires one person to take an initiative to help direct others.



### Youth Life Skills Scale (YLSS)

**Instructions:** Based on your current or recent involvement in a life skills program please rate whether you have had the following experiences.

	Your Experience In...					
	{Life Skills Program}					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	About 50/50	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
1. I try to let things work out on their own	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. I sometimes watch TV and waste time instead of doing homework	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. I believe I can reach all of my goals	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Had an opportunity to be in charge of a group of peers*	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Help members of the group settle their conflicts	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. I break down a problem into smaller parts and do one part at a time	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. I set goals that I can reach	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. People have to wait for me to do things	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. I imagine myself solving a difficult problem before I actually have to face it	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. I use my computer for instant messaging	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. I do not procrastinating (not putting things off)*	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. I do not like the idea of being in charge of a group	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. I usually sit back and wait for someone to take charge	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. I use a calendar to write important events down	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. Learned about the challenges of being a leader*	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. I write positive goal statements	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Strongly Agree	Agree	About 50/50	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
17. I can instruct people on	1	2	3	4	5	6

things						
18. I learned how to set daily goals	1	2	3	4	5	6
19. I write down my goals so I can see them	1	2	3	4	5	6
20. I set goals that I can measure	1	2	3	4	5	6
21. I am able to give feedback*	1	2	3	4	5	6
22. In group settings I like things done my way	1	2	3	4	5	6
23. I usually show up late to class	1	2	3	4	5	6
24. I set small goals that I can reach fast	1	2	3	4	5	6
25. I do not hold conversations very well.	1	2	3	4	5	6
26. I set goals that I can reach on a specific time line	1	2	3	4	5	6
27. I am always the first or second person to class, or practice	1	2	3	4	5	6
28. I have one outlook I always use when I am stressed out	1	2	3	4	5	6
29. I am able to direct people in activities	1	2	3	4	5	6
30. I can give directions to group members	1	2	3	4	5	6
31. I've been saying things to let my unpleasant feelings escape	1	2	3	4	5	6
32. I get excited when talking to people	1	2	3	4	5	6
33. When I'm depressed I get out and talk to others	1	2	3	4	5	6
34. I've been expressing my negative feelings	1	2	3	4	5	6
35. I do not like to be in charge	1	2	3	4	5	6
36. I set new goals once I reached my goal	1	2	3	4	5	6
37. I try to set goals that are easy	1	2	3	4	5	6
38. I write to do lists so I can track things I need to do	1	2	3	4	5	6
	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>About 50/50</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Don't Know</b>
39. I can express my feelings in words	1	2	3	4	5	6
40. I am able to give advice to my friends when they talk to me	1	2	3	4	5	6
41. I know how to organize my time	1	2	3	4	5	6
42. If teachers or parents didn't	1	2	3	4	5	6

tell me when things were due I would forget						
43. My parents set my schedule for me	1	2	3	4	5	6
44. If I did not have a set schedule I would forget things	1	2	3	4	5	6
45. Others in this activity counted on me*	1	2	3	4	5	6
46. I can't express how I feel when something goes wrong	1	2	3	4	5	6
47. I've been doing something to think about it less, such as going to movies, watching TV, reading, daydreaming, sleeping, or shopping	1	2	3	4	5	6
48. I wait until the last minute to do things	1	2	3	4	5	6
49. If I find a problem too difficult sometimes I put it aside until I'm ready to deal with it	1	2	3	4	5	6
50. I set specific goals	1	2	3	4	5	6
51. I use my computer for Myspace, or Facebook to talk to my friends.	1	2	3	4	5	6
52. I don't know how to handle if something bad happened to me	1	2	3	4	5	6
53. My parents check my assignment sheet for me	1	2	3	4	5	6
54. I can not handle conflicts with peers	1	2	3	4	5	6
55. I can talk to an entire group with confidence	1	2	3	4	5	6
56. I look people in the eyes when I am talking to them	1	2	3	4	5	6
57. I forget to do assignments because I didn't write them down	1	2	3	4	5	6
	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>About 50/50</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Don't Know</b>
58. I always try to find a way to work around obstacles; nothing really stops me	1	2	3	4	5	6
59. When I have a problem I like to sleep on it	1	2	3	4	5	6
60. I am able to listen and talk to my friends	1	2	3	4	5	6
61. I tend to write in slang words, or abbreviate words when writing	1	2	3	4	5	6
62. I show people I am listening by head nods and facial						

expressions	1	2	3	4	5	6
63. I set a positive example	1	2	3	4	5	6
64. Get group approval on important matters before going ahead	1	2	3	4	5	6
65. I reevaluate my goals	1	2	3	4	5	6
66. I have a reason to set goals	1	2	3	4	5	6
67. I have a daily routine I follow to make sure I get everything done	1	2	3	4	5	6
68. Parents, teachers, and peers believe I am responsible	1	2	3	4	5	6
69. I practice self discipline*	1	2	3	4	5	6
70. I've been giving up trying to deal with it	1	2	3	4	5	6
71. I try to talk and explain my stress in order to get feedback from my friends	1	2	3	4	5	6
72. I show up to things earlier than the start of the event	1	2	3	4	5	6
73. I am not able to talk with out yelling when I am angry	1	2	3	4	5	6
74. I scream and yell when I am mad	1	2	3	4	5	6
75. I write in abbreviation when sending text	1	2	3	4	5	6
76. I set goals I know I can achieve	1	2	3	4	5	6
77. Learned to find ways to achieve my goals*	1	2	3	4	5	6
78. I have learned ways to manage difficult problems	1	2	3	4	5	6
79. I am able to set priorities*	1	2	3	4	5	6
	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>About 50/50</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Don't Know</b>
80. I set an example for my peers	1	2	3	4	5	6
81. I am able to direct peers in solving a problem	1	2	3	4	5	6
82. I turn obstacles into positive experiences	1	2	3	4	5	6
83. I am not allowed to watch TV or do any extracurricular activities until my homework is done.	1	2	3	4	5	6
84. A leader needs to be liked by all members of the group	1	2	3	4	5	6
85. I always turn my homework in on time	1	2	3	4	5	6
86. I get nervous talking to people I do not know.	1	2	3	4	5	6

87. I use a planner to write assignments in	1	2	3	4	5	6
88. I finish projects ahead of time.	1	2	3	4	5	6
89. I turn in projects late because I forgot to do them	1	2	3	4	5	6
90. I've been refusing to believe that a problem happened	1	2	3	4	5	6
91. I sometimes interrupt others	1	2	3	4	5	6
92. I would lead class projects or discussions with out the teacher asking me to	1	2	3	4	5	6
93. I have one person I can always talk to that will make everything better	1	2	3	4	5	6
94. I am able to take feedback*	1	2	3	4	5	6
95. I set goals that other people tell me are important	1	2	3	4	5	6
96. I do not like to be late to things	1	2	3	4	5	6
97. I use my cell phone for more text messaging then receiving or dialing calls	1	2	3	4	5	6
98. I trust other people will give me advice on how to do things	1	2	3	4	5	6
99. I don't know how to reach goals I set	1	2	3	4	5	6
100. I respect people I work with	1	2	3	4	5	6
	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>About 50/50</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Don't Know</b>
101. I talk to fast and people often tell me to slow down	1	2	3	4	5	6
102. I set new goals if I encounter an obstacle	1	2	3	4	5	6
103. I had good conversations with my parents/guardians because of these activities I have participated in*	1	2	3	4	5	6
104. I set goals that I want to reach in the future.	1	2	3	4	5	6
105. People can not hear me when I talk	1	2	3	4	5	6
106. I set detailed goals	1	2	3	4	5	6
107. I get nervous or scared when I have to talk to adults with authority.	1	2	3	4	5	6
108. If someone is not popular they will not be a leader	1	2	3	4	5	6
109. I am able to have a	1	2	3	4	5	6

conversation with people I just met						
<b>110.</b> Learned to consider possible obstacles when making plans*	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>111.</b> I am a role model	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>112.</b> Rather than acting impulsively, I usually think of various ways to solve a problem	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>

\* Stared items (\*) indicate items that were taken from the YES