Human Skills Survey

A simple, short and deeply instructive activity is to survey your students on these Human Skills. The idea isn't to come up with a definitive list. The debate of whether 'resiliency' is more important than 'empathy' is, in my view, a pointless one. They are both super important. I tend to believe that Creativity is the number one Human Skill. Forbes Magazine published a widely circulated list of 'The Skills You Need to Succeed in 2020' and it begins with Complex Problem Solving, goes through People Management and bottoms out at Service Management (Beckford 2019).

Everyone has their priorities.

What you want to know is which Human Skills do your kids think are the most important and which are the hardest. This will tell you both what they want from you in terms of projects and processes throughout the year, and what they perceive are the hardest skills to master. And this will raise awareness of these Human Skills to your students – this puts these terms and skill sets on their radar.

Administer the Student Questionnaire shown in Figure 2–1, giving the students fifteen or twenty minutes to fill out. If you do this at the start of your year or semester, you will have a nuanced portrait of how your students are thinking; of their perceived obstacles growing up amidst a culture of omnipresent change; and of how your students are glimpsing their 'possible selves'.

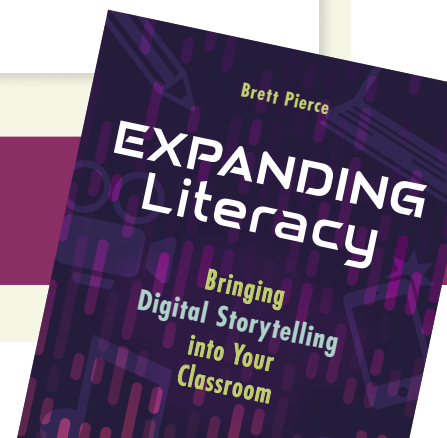**Figure 2–1**

Student Questionnaire

Prioritize this list of Human Skills by numbering your top five skills in the order of importance to you. Then add one of your own, if you notice that something is missing.

Resiliency	Collaboration	Digital Literacy
Creativity	Empathy	Problem Solving
Critical Thinking	Flexibility/Adaptability	Independent Initiative
Presentational Skills/ Public Speaking	Perseverance/Grit	Leadership
Effective Communication	Intellectual Curiosity	Decision Making
[Add Your Own]		

1. Please write two to four sentences explaining your first two choices: why do you believe those skills are the most important for your current and future self?

2. Which of the above Human Skills do you think are the hardest, for you, to master and why? Please answer in two to four sentences.

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I want to share with you a few interesting and thoughtful results from one middle school classroom of twenty-six students who conducted this survey.

- Creativity was by far and away the human skill that was most important to these youth, with eleven citing it as the number one skill and eighteen, or just under 70%, ranking Creativity in their top five most important Human Skills.

- Problem Solving and Intellectual Curiosity followed in terms of the number of times they were cited in the top five, at 57% and 46% respectively.

- Digital Literacy was not mentioned once as an important Human Skill. Why? I can only speculate that either 1) this is a skill over which they believe that they have control and is not one that they believe their teacher can help them master; or 2) this skill doesn't belong in this list: it's perceived as more of a 'hard skill' than a 'soft skill,' and therefore isn't relevant to this activity.

- When asked which of these human skills are the hardest to master, seven cited Presentational Skills/Public Speaking and six cited Decision Making, with the remaining thirteen students spread out over the rest of the skills. Explanations included:

  - "I think public speaking because I get stressed and mess up my words. Also, my head fills up with thoughts."

  - "I get nervous and flustered."

  - "Trying to speak without repeating or saying 'Uh' a lot is hard."

  - "I think that decision-making is the hardest because sometimes I overthink about decisions and sometimes I underthink."

  - "Decision making is very hard for me. I think it's hard for me because I wonder later, 'what if I had done that instead?'"

  - "Presentational skills are some of the hardest for me along with decision making, as I am very indecisive and I also struggle with confidence. Both of these skills will serve me well once I can master them."

As a result of this data, if I am their teacher, I would approach the year with:

- Emphasizing public speaking skills—creating situations that require them to present their work to the class and, possibly, a broader public;

- Creating an awareness about decision making—making those internal mental processes more external—and creating some time to discuss some of the broad parameters around how to make good decisions; and

- Focusing on the role of creativity in all of the projects, whether they demand explicit or implicit creative solutions, while tying that in with fostering intellectual curiosity because I think the one is connected to the other.

Additionally, I would pay attention to the needs of individual students – their perceived strengths and fears as articulated in their choices and comments – and use that information to personalize their course of study.

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