TOWARD A CONCEPTUAL DEFINITION FOR SOCIAL COMPETENCE:
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Graduate Faculty of The University of Akron

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Gail K. Pavliga
May, 2008
TOWARD A CONCEPTUAL DEFINITION FOR SOCIAL COMPETENCE:
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

Gail K. Pavliga
Dissertation

Approved:  
Advisor  Francis S. Broadway
Committee Member  Richard Einsporn
Committee Member  Catharine Knight
Committee Member  Sandra Spickard-Prettyman
Committee Member  Victor Wilburn

Accepted:  
Department Chair  Bridgie Ford
Interim Dean of the College  Cynthia Capers
Dean of the Graduate School  George Newkome
Date  

ii
ABSTRACT

Law, Wong and Song (2004) explain that the study of social competence has its roots in Thorndike (1920) proposition that intelligence has three broad based components. One of three described intelligence in the social arena as the ability to understand and manage men and women, boys and girls-to act wisely in human relations (Law, et al, 2004, p. 484). Since this early work, many conceptual definitions for social competence have been forwarded.

Although social competence has been described by investigators, the field has thus far proceeded in the absence of a conceptual definition. It was Darden and Gintner (1996) who explained that within the social competence literature, many terms and definitions have been used which are often overlapping and contradictory. In addition, many current research articles in the area of social competence report a lack of an accepted conceptual or operational definition for the term (Johns, 2001; Hubbard & Dearing, 2004; Zsolnai, 2002; Smith & Travis, 2001).

This dissertation research utilized mixed methods to collect opinions from experts in the field of social competence to answer the main research question; how do experts conceptually define social competence? Experts were defined as those persons who had published an article between 2002-2007 that included the term social competence in the title. Using a three round Delphi study, the researcher collected both qualitative and
quantitative data by using open as well as closed ended questions to answer the research question how do experts conceptually define social competence?

While information processing perspectives and cultural competencies did not find much support as a conceptualization for social competence in this study, constructs such as social skills, abilities and social goals did resonate from both the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data. Further findings suggested that social competence is a multi-dimensional construct and that experts believe that the research community should move toward consensus for a conceptual definition for social competence.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I could not have completed this major life’s project without the genuine concern and support of many people. I thank my husband, Frank, for his stick-to-itiveness by example and undiminished motivation mixed with lots of love that spurred me on to “mission accomplished.” To my mom, Marlene, my children, Katie and Stevie and all my other family members—the sky has no limits when one is the recipient of “unconditional love” such as I have received from my family and friends.

Dr. Francis Broadway is my mentor and I will be forever grateful for his wisdom, guidance on research and calming demeanor. Dr. Victor Wilburn was without a doubt, my man of the hour. My sincere appreciation goes to him as I would not have achieved so much so soon without his encouragement. I especially thank Dr. Catharine Knight, for helping me to learn and endure the writing process, and to Dr. Sandra Spickard-Prettyman for showing me a new way to view the world. Dr. Rich Einsporn for his help with the data analysis. Finally, my entire doctoral student cohort for all their support during my doctoral program journey and for making me a part of the college’s extended family.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of Subjectivity</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Definitions</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brief History of the Concept of Social Competence</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question Addressed in this Study</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delimitations of the Study</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions and Operational Terms</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Definitions of Social Competence</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confusion Over the Dimensionality of Social Competence</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Perspectives on Social Skills as Part of the Concept of Social Competence . . . 25

Perspectives on Social Perception as Part of the Concept of Social Competence .................................................. 26

Perspectives on Information Processing as Part of the Concept Social Competence .................................................... 27

Perspectives on Motivation as Part of the Concept of Social Competence . . . . . 28

Summary ................................................................. 29

The Delphi Method ................................................... 29

The “Expert” Panel .................................................. 30

Size of Panel, Response Rate and Attrition .................................. 30

Selection of the Panel .............................................. 31

Consensus ............................................................. 32

Delphi Questionnaire Design .......................................... 34

Advantages of the Delphi ........................................... 35

Disadvantages of the Delphi Method .................................... 36

Examples of Research Studies Using the Delphi ................. 39

Overview of the Likert Scales ........................................ 40

Uses of the Likert Scale ............................................. 40

Advantages and Disadvantages of Likert Scales .................... 41

Summary ............................................................. 42

Survey Design ....................................................... 42

Summary ............................................................. 43

vii
### III. METHODS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative Descriptive Research Design</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative Descriptive Research Design</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumentation</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phases of the Delphi: Round One</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phases of the Delphi: Round Two</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phases of the Delphi: Round Three</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability and Validity of the Delphi Method</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validity and Reliability of Likert Scales</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures for Data Collection</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Management and Statistical Procedures for Qualitative Data</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis: Analytical Procedures</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis: Descriptive Statistics</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures for Organizing, Managing and Analyzing Data for Open-ended Question One</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry Data Analysis: Categorization</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthiness of Study</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Data Analysis: Abstraction</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDICES ........................................................ 124

APPENDIX A-1: THE UNIVERSITY OF AKRON INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL .......................... 125

APPENDIX A-2: INITIAL CONTACT LETTER ................................... 126

APPENDIX B-1: ROUND ONE SURVEY FOR CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS OF SOCIAL COMPETENCE .................... 127

APPENDIX B-2: CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS OF SOCIAL COMPETENCE ................................................ 129

APPENDIX B-3: LETTER FOR ROUND TWO OF DELPHI SURVEY ........ 131

APPENDIX B-4: ROUND TWO SURVEY FOR CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS OF SOCIAL COMPETENCE ..................... 132

APPENDIX B-5: LETTER FOR ROUND THREE OF DELPHI SURVEY ... 134

APPENDIX B-6: ROUND THREE SURVEY FOR CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS OF SOCIAL COMPETENCE ..................... 135
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Current Definitions for Social Competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Dissertation Research Utilizing Delphi for Achieving Consensus on Conceptual Definitions for Complex Phenomenon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Demographic Information for Participants in the Delphi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Return Rates of Three Round Delphi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Timetable for the Three Round Delphi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Categories for Answers to Open-Ended Responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Definitions for Categorizing of Data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Results from Quantitative Analysis for Conceptual Definitions for Social Competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Categorization Based on a Priori and Emergent Categories to Responses to the Open-Ended Question #15: How Do You Define Social Competence Conceptually?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Results of Word Counts and Pile Sort Processes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Questions 16 and 17</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When you don’t feel too sure of yourself and somebody says, “Hey, you’re cool,” well then, you appreciate that so much, it makes you feel so good, you just want to be with them. You want people to notice you. I think everybody does, probably.


Statement of Subjectivity

The role of the researcher in any study affects the nature of the study, questions asked, and the general design of the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Hatch, 2002). In quantitative research, every effort is made to remove any influence and/or bias of the researcher from the study. However, in many qualitative studies, the researcher becomes a part of the research itself (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996; Glesne, 1999; Hatch, 2002) through the choice of questions to pose to the participants in the research study and the interpretive lens, or subjectivity, through which the data is analyzed.

Subjectivity is comprised of the different beliefs a person possesses which affect how they view and interpret the external world. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) assert that the qualitative researcher has wrestled over the years with charges that it is easy for prejudices and attitudes of the researcher to bias the data. The concern about subjectivity is crucial when data has to go through the researcher’s mind, before he/she puts it on
paper. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) stated that “the primary goal of the researcher is to collect data, not to pass judgment on the setting” (p. 33).

A person’s race, gender, age, religion, physical and mental ability, sexual orientation, and geographical location, while not an all-inclusive list, are all components which shape their subjectivity (Glesne, 2006). None of these components acts in exclusivity to form the totality of subjectivity. Rather, the elements work together to form a unique lens with different elements coming to the forefront as determined by context (Bogdan & Biklin, 1998). Subjectivity may help to explain how two people may view the same text, image, situation, or any other discourse and come away with different interpretations.

A discussion of subjectivity is critical with respect to this study in two ways. First, it is imperative that as the researcher, I examined and clearly stated my subjectivity towards the study and its components, and secondly discuss how my subjectivity affected the way I saw and analyzed the data. Because this study focuses on the concept of social competence, how my experiences and beliefs inform my subjectivity are of particular interest. By being aware of my subjectivity and how it may affect my interpretive lens, I was better able to step outside of my personal views as is required by qualitative methodology, and look at the data from a different perspective. By following this approach, I theoretically reduced the amount of bias I consciously and unconsciously placed on the analysis. Additionally, by explicitly discussing my subjectivity, others who examine my research are able to understand the perspective from which I conducted this study.
The aim of this study was to examine how researchers would conceptually define social competence. My research may have been affected by the lens through which I view the world. I am White, female, Roman Catholic, heterosexual, forty-six years old, middle class, college educated, and physically-abled. While none of these labels capture the totality of my subjectivity, these are the lenses through which I view the world.

Prior to beginning my doctoral program, and teaching at the University level, I was a stay at home Mom with two young children. It was during this time, unknowingly, that the foundation for this dissertation research would evolve. When my daughter was in kindergarten, I became a co-leader for her Girl Scout troop. A few years later, we were doing work for different Girl Scout patches that the girls could earn. One of these badges incorporated learning about manners and social skills and another included topics on health and grooming. I created three classes, based on the requirements and presented them to the troop. In addition, we did a little fashion show at an area mall.

To make a long story very short, this little class grew into a very large entrepreneurial venture that over ten years would include the participation of thousands of girls from ages five to eighteen. I created and copyrighted three programs, Manners, Modeling and More (for girls ages 5-8), pre-teen Modeling Workshop (for girls ages 8-12), and teen Modeling Workshop (for girls ages 13-18). These classes were promoted by ten Girl Scout Councils and seven shopping malls in the State of Ohio. The premise of these workshops was for a trained instructor to model behaviors and social skills that were based upon socially accepted behavioral norms for White or African-American middle-class girls.
My goals for the students were that each would gain more confidence in her abilities to interact with peers as well as persons of all ages. To accomplish this goal, students were given explicit instruction in how to start and maintain a conversation, as well as eye contact, body language and other essentials. Each student had many opportunities within the class time allotted to practice these skills. Through my subjectivity, I felt that the girls needed to be taught these skills the same as they are explicitly taught how to read or write. While the classes that I led were attended by girls, I feel these skills are equally important for boys. To further explain my position, I feel that because human relationships and communication within these relationships are such central aspects that define the human experience, learning these skills may enhance these relationships.

I feel that I must add that my goal was not to transform any girl into a “social butterfly” but rather to impart the knowledge of techniques and skills required to be more effective in social interactions as evidenced by the ability to carry-out a two-way friendly conversation as well as enhanced social skills and manners. From the positive feedback that I received from both parents and students, and the popularity of my program by virtue that most of my calls for new classes came from referrals from previous participants, I have concluded that my program did meet its intended goals. This statement was further confirmed by virtue of the many positive comments from leaders such as “this was the best program we have had,” and, “I noticed how much better the girls got along together after your program.”

It was not until my doctoral program of study that I truly began to unpack my feelings about the value that social skills, social competence and communications may
have on a persons sense of well-being. In addition, through my research, I learned that not only does social competence affect a person’s confidence (Foster & Ritchey, 1979); it also impacts classroom learning and achievement (Wentzel, 1991a). Early in my studies, I started to read research conducted by University of Illinois professor, Kathryn Wentzel. In her research, Wentzel (1991a) concluded that social competence in childhood and early adolescence is a powerful predictor of academic achievement. Wentzel (1991a) viewed social competence as social goal setting, problem solving capabilities, and feelings of social support. She concluded that “Children who are accepted by their peers or display pro-social and responsible forms of behavior at school tend to be high academic achievers, whereas socially rejected and aggressive children appear to be at risk for academic failure” (p. 1066).

In another article by Wentzel (1991b), she postulates that “for instance, anti-social children tend to as adults be overrepresented in groups characterized by alcoholism, unemployment, divorce and dependent on public assistance” (p. 1). After reading this, as well as extensively in the literature to prepare this dissertation, I wondered why we, as educators and researchers, would not place learning good social and interpersonal skills on the same level of importance that schools put on learning math. I wondered why schools did not heed the research that claims that despite all of the research stressing the importance of listening, communication, proper manners and social skills, these skills are not commonly taught in the classroom (Baty, 2000).

Consequently, over the past three years in the College of Education, I have re-examined my life and have come to terms with my views that have been influenced by my work, personal and professional experiences, which in turn have shaped my views on
social competence and why it should be taught as part of school. From a subjective viewpoint, the main reason that I want to do this study is to ascertain how experts will define social competence, and move the field toward a comprehensive conceptual definition. To move this field of research further, a comprehensive conceptual definition is needed. From there, I want to develop programs that enhance social competence for all students; which may, according to research, help boost academic achievement and lower school drop-out rates (Kuperschmidt & Coie, 1990). To monitor my subjectivity, in all data analysis in this research the objective quantitative analysis was done prior to the subjective analysis in order to properly validate the findings.

Based on empirical research, in today’s society, the need to communicate and feel competent in social interactions should be incorporated into schools. If the purpose of school is to prepare students for the future (Egan, 2003), this future will most probably be a service and/or information based economy. In these types of economies, communication and collaboration are essential to positive working relationships and outcomes. I hope that this research will be the catalyst for future changes in school that stress the importance of teaching social and interpersonal skills that will enhance their students’ personal experiences, interpersonal interactions and equally important, raise academic achievement.

For what do people strive in social settings? What makes someone feel socially competent? For several decades, social competence has been identified as a critical factor in child and adolescent development (Spence & Shephard, 1983; Parker, Rubin, Price & DeRossier, 1995; Zsolnai, 2002). A child or adolescent’s ability to interact successfully with his or her environment and those persons with whom they interact may have a
significant impact upon a child’s future adjustment. The adolescent girl quoted above offers one view or conceptualization of social competence which is the desire for positive feedback from others which in turn adds to an individual’s sense of feeling socially competent.

Conceptual Definitions

To paraphrase Newman and Newman (1994), a concept is an abstraction or generalizing of specific qualities. A conceptual definition would then be an explanation of what the concept means. As many authors have noted (Dodge, 1985; Hubbard & Coie, 1994; Taylor & Asher, 1984; Waters & Sroufe, 1983; Yeates & Selman, 1989), there are a wide variety of published definitions of social competence, but an accepted definition has yet to emerge.

From the 1950’s to the present, research has utilized varying conceptual definitions; for example, White (1959) called social competence “an organism’s capacity to interact effectively with its environment” (p. 297); while Weinstein (1969), said it is “the ability to accomplish interpersonal tasks and the ability to manipulate others’ responses” (p. 755). The next decades in the social competence literature added to the list of definitions, “the ability to perform culturally defined tasks” (Ogbu, 1981, p. 414), and Rubin and Rose-Krasnor (1992) stated social competence to be “the ability to achieve personal goals in social interaction while simultaneously maintaining positive relationships with others over time and across settings” (p. 285). More recently, Baron (2000) referred to social competence as the ability to appropriately interact with other people. Although these definitions differ in focus and specificity, a common theme can be recognized which is effectiveness in social interactions. Social interactions are broadly
defined by Carneiro, Loureiro and Sachsida (2005) as any type of relationship of an individual with other individuals that can affect his/her behavior.

In addition to conceptualizations for social competence that include effectiveness in social interactions as a central aspect, some researchers view social competence primarily in terms of a set of desirable social skills (Cavell, 1990; Dodge, 1985; Gresham, 1986; Hubbard & Coie, 1994; Mize & Ladd, 1990; Waters & Sroufe, 1983). Social skills are defined as the ability to interact with others in a given social context in specific ways that are socially acceptable or valued and at the same time personally beneficial, mutually beneficial or beneficial primarily to others (Hargie, Saunders & Dickson, 1981). In addition to viewing social competence from a social skills perspective, research has also viewed social competence from a ‘social outcomes’ perspective.

The social outcomes perspective, as explained by Foster and Ritchey (1979) and Anderson and Messick (1974) includes being effective in the realization of ones’ social goals. Social goals, according to Pervin (1989) are the objectives an individual attempts to accomplish in interactions with others. However, to date, no research has emerged that addresses whether social competence is an overlap of social skills, achieving ones’ social goals or if it is distinctive concept based upon outcomes of social interactions.

As evidenced by the above perspectives, there seems to be little agreement in social competence research as to what constitutes social competence. Hence, many current research articles in the area of social competence report a lack of an accepted conceptual definition for the term (Johns, 2001; Hubbard & Dearing, 2004; Zsolnai, 2002; Smith & Travis, 2001). Based upon the above explanations, conceptual definitions
for social competence may be characterized in terms of social skills, social interactions, social goals or social outcomes.

Brief History of the Concept of Social Competence

Law, Wong and Song (2004) explain that the study of social competence has its roots in Thorndike’s (1920) proposition that intelligence has three broad based components. These three components of intelligence are (1) intelligence regarding words, numbers, and ideas (2) intelligence regarding mechanical devices and physical objects, and (3) intelligence in the social arena. The last component of intelligence was defined as “the ability to understand and manage men and women, boys and girls-to act wisely in human relations” (Law, et al. 2004, p. 484). Similarly, Moss and Hunt (1927) defined ‘social intelligence’ as an “ability to get along with others” (p. 127).

It was Vernon (1933) who provided a more comprehensive definition for social intelligence as an “ability to get along with people in general, social technique; or ‘ease in society’, knowledge of social matters, susceptibility to stimuli from other measures in a group and insights into temporary moods and underlying personalities of strangers” (p. 44). However, Thorndike (1936) reported that there was much overlap between high general intelligence and social intelligence. It was not until 1939, that the concept of social intelligence was again seen in the literature. This time, Wechsler (1939), creator of the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS), included a sub-test to measure social intelligence. This test assessed an individual’s ability to comprehend social situations utilizing pictures of various social situations (Thorndike & Stein, 1937). After two decades of such testing, Wechsler (1958) concluded that “socially competent people demonstrated a high general intelligence that was applied to social situations” (Wechsler,
By virtue of these findings, social intelligence was not something separate from general intelligence. The 1960’s showed a dearth in social competence research. In the 1970’s, the term social competence emerged in the research literature.

In 1973, the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare’s Office of Child Development sponsored a panel to define the meaning of social competence in children. Anderson and Messick (1974) provided the overview of the panel findings from this 1973 meeting which concluded that social competence involved something more than a general intelligence. The panel sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare’s Office of Child Development further sought to define the broad range of cognitive and personal-social dimensions of the developing child. This panel, however, “stopped short of finding their all-inclusive definition” (p. 285).

Zigler and Trickett (1978) further attempted to define social competence using a two-fold approach which reflected the success of the child in meeting social expectancies and the self-actualization or personal development of the child. Their definition included measures of physical health and well-being, formal cognitive ability, achievement, motivational and emotional variables. The 1980’s saw a flurry of activity in social competence research with many differing conceptual definitions forwarded. McFall (1982) claimed social skills and social competence were not identical concepts. Gresham (1986) said social competence was an evaluative term based upon the judgment of others for skills performed correctly in social situations. In 1983, the Theory of Multiple Intelligences emerged. Gardner (1983), building on the earlier work of Thorndike (1920), classified intelligence into eight categories; two of which he referred to as interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences. Gardner and Hatch (1989) described interpersonal
intelligence as “the ability to understand other people, what motivates them, how they work, and how to work cooperatively with them” (p. 6). Intrapersonal intelligence is “access to one's own feelings and the ability to discriminate among them and draw upon them to guide behavior; knowledge of one's own strengths, weaknesses, desires, and intelligences” (p. 6). This form of intellect entails the ability to understand one's own emotions, goals and intentions (Santrock, 2003). It was Gresham (1986) who claimed the assessment technology for children’s social competence has made great strides, however the field of assessment technology for social competence is in its infancy in terms of a general conceptual framework.

Reed (1994) viewed social competence as organizing cognitions and behaviors into integrated actions based on socially and culturally acceptable interpersonal goals. In the new millennium, Baron and Markman (2000) have defined social competence “as the ability to interact effectively with others as based on discrete social skills” (p. 41). It was Ryan and Shim (2006) who conceptualized social competence as the ability to interact with others in a given social context in specific ways that are socially acceptable or valued and at the same time personally beneficial, mutually beneficial or beneficial primarily to others.

To summarize this brief history of social competence, Thorndike (1920) described social competence as ‘intelligence in the social arena’. The last twenty years of research have added that social competence is an organizing construct, with transactional, context-dependent, performance-oriented, and goal-specific characteristics. Most conceptualizations of social competence can be generalized into effectiveness in social interactions.
The development of a conceptual definition for social competence should be a matter of great importance to the research community because research in social competence has claimed links to many variables. Social competence has been linked to such variables as predicting future job performance (Riggio & Taylor, 2000; Law, Wong & Song, 2004), problem solving abilities (Zsolnai, 2002; Englund, Levy, Hyson & Sroufe, 2000; Simmons-Morton & Crump, 2003), academic success (Wentzel, 1991a), and overall life satisfaction (Renk & Phares, 2004; Gutstein & Whitney, 2002). While the above mentioned research makes such claims, research involving the term of social competence has utilized many differing conceptual definitions.

Social competence has been conceptually defined in numerous ways. In general, social competence is described in global terms, such as the ability to effectively make and maintain positive social outcomes by organizing one’s own personal and environmental resources (Boyom & Parke, 1995; Ladd, 1999; Rubin, Bream, & Rose-Krasnor, 1991). Rubin and Rose-Krasnor (1992) defined social competence as “the ability to achieve personal goals in social interaction while simultaneously maintaining positive relationships with others over time and across situations” (p. 285). Sheridan and Walker (1999) identified two parts of social competence. One aspect is to learn a variety of important social skills appropriate in different contexts, and the other is to learn to relate and behave in a way that is acceptable to other people. As is indicated above, conceptual definitions have been inconsistent across investigations.

Since social competence has been linked with such important aspects of life as academic success, future job performance and overall life satisfaction; the lack of a
shared conceptual framework of social competence may create serious problems with identifying, assessing and providing interventions for students who might demonstrate a lack of effectiveness in their social interactions (Hughes, 1990; Renk & Phares, 2004). According to Nixon (2001) the lack of social competence not only has a profound effect on the adjustment of the individuals, but also with whom they share their lives. For instance, children who lack social competence may show tendencies toward becoming adolescents who are overrepresented in groups characterized by alcoholism and substance abuse (Scheier & Botvin, 1998). Thus, social competence not only affects the individual, but also those around them. Therefore, it is important to have screening tools available that can effectively determine deficits in social competence.

As noted, social competence has been described by investigators, but the research field has thus far proceeded in the absence of a shared conceptual definition. Smith and Travis (2001) suggested that researchers in the area of social competence can better answer questions by developing a shared theoretical approach, or conceptual framework, ensuring that researchers and practitioners are operating from the same paradigmatic assumptions as they work together to understand the concept of social competence. Thus far, there have been no systematic efforts in the research community to establish the defining criteria of social competence; or, if it is a uni-dimensional or multi-dimensional construct comprised of various components.

Social competence appears to be a compound trait (Hough & Schneider, 1996; Oser & Reise, 1994; Schneider & Hough, 1995). It was Schneider, Ackerman and Kanfer (1996) that claimed that “social competence in not uni-dimensional, but instead comprised of several relatively independent dimensions” (p. 477). Schneider et al. (1996)
further suggested that research should put to rest that the notion that social competence is uni-dimensional; or that it is a general intelligence applied to social situations as was suggested by Thorndike (1920), because “such ideas take an overly narrow view of the concept” (p. 479). As long as fundamental questions concerning the concept’s specificity remain unaddressed, it is not possible to undertake important investigations into the concept of social competence or to develop instruments that allow such investigations to proceed. Thus, research must move towards a definition that is more precise for the purpose of validation and refinement.

Significance

A child’s ability to successfully manage his or her relationships with peers and teachers is associated with many positive outcomes such as teacher acceptance, academic achievement, peer acceptance, positive peer relationships, and friendships (Lane, 2005). However, when students lack the necessary skills to navigate these relationships, they may experience negative outcomes such as teacher rejection, school failure, social rejection, and limited social involvement (Gresham, 2002). Thus, the degree to which children and adolescents achieve social competence may influence their educational experience.

Kostelnik, Stein, Whiren, Soderman, and Gregory (2002) state “social competence is not a luxury, it makes a tremendous difference in how children feel about themselves” (p. 5).

Indeed, the best childhood predictor of adult adaptation is not IQ, or school grades, but rather the adequacy with which a child gets along with others. Children who are generally disliked, who are aggressive and disruptive, who are unable to sustain close relationships with others are seriously at risk. (Hartup, 1992, p. 196)
The importance of social competence need hardly be argued. To successfully negotiate through life, one must be able to get along with classmates, family, colleagues and friends. Successfully addressing social tasks such as these is an important task for virtually everyone. According to Gutstein and Whitney (2002), “social competence has been repeatedly demonstrated to be a critical variable in predicting future life successes” (p. 161). Thus, the development of social competence in children and adolescents has been related closely to positive outcomes in later life.

One of the obstacles to understanding how social competence affects behavior, development and positive life outcomes is a lack of an accepted conceptual definition for the term. Darden and Gintner (1996) claimed that within the social competence literature, many terms and definitions have been used which are often overlapping and contradictory. More recently, Gresham, Cooks and Crews (2004) explained that most standard interventions for children and adolescents with social difficulties tend to only include instruction on discrete pro-social behaviors often found in social skills training packages; thus identifying social competence solely from a social skills perspective. This might contradict results from Griffin, Nichols, Birnbaum and Botvin (2006) that social competence becomes increasingly important during childhood and adolescence as young people encounter a variety of new social situations and should respond with a ‘broad range of appropriate behaviors’. From this, a researcher might wonder what constitutes a ‘broad range of appropriate behaviors’.

Unfortunately, many of the behavioral characteristics identified as important for social competence are not addressed in interventions because the behaviors, skills or characteristics that might constitute a definition for social competence are incomplete
One possible reason for this incomplete picture of social competence is that the behaviors identified are not easily defined (Warnes, Sheridan, Geske & Warnes, 2005). Arguably, because social relationships are of such central importance in everyday life, there may well be no skills more important than those required to sustain relationships. Thus, the achievement of social competence can be considered one end point of successful development. This study is significant because it sought to understand how experts might conceptually define social competence. Results from this study are transferable for use by other researchers, psychologists and professors who may choose to use this study as a base for further research in the field of social competence.

The research presented give support for the notion that social competence is a complex construct; in addition, how identifying the characteristics and the components significant to a common conceptual definition may simplify and better direct future research endeavors in this field. For example, those researchers who develop programs that focus on and aid in building social competence may find this research helpful in determining the priority, focus, and applicability of such programs.

Purpose

It was Thorndike’s (1920) original proposition that the skill of getting along well with other people was considered to be a personal intelligence. Since that early publication, the term social intelligence has been replaced with the term of social competence. While social intelligence was conceptually defined as the ability to act wisely in human relations, no such conceptualizations have been put forward for social competence.
This premise is made even more evident and supported by the following statements that were gleaned from the last three decades of published research. These statements illustrate the discrepancies in conceptualizations for social competence as well as confirm the notion that the research community is no closer to a conceptual definition for the concept of social competence than it was almost 30 years ago. Ogbu (1981) conceptualized social competence as the ability “to perform culturally defined tasks” (p. 414). Ford (1982) proposes social competence to be “the attainment of relevant social goals in specified social contexts” (p. 323). Attili (1990) defines social competence as “social success” (p. 241). Finally, Glass, Guli and Semrud-Clikeman (2000) conceptually defined social competence as the “ability to accurately recognize response options [in social contexts] particular to that situation and then choose the most appropriate options “(p. 24).

According to Mathews, Zeidner and Roberts (2002) many a researcher has failed in their attempts to define and measure social competence. As a result, “the research literature uses the term ‘social competence’ as if researchers shared a common understanding” (Rose-Krasnor, 1997, p. 1). The purpose of this study is to understand how experts will conceptually define social competence in hopes of bringing together fragmented research into a more coherent conceptual framework for social competence.

Research Question Addressed in this Study

It was Thorndike (1920) who distinguished that there is a difference between abstract, mechanical and social intelligences. Since that time, one of the most difficult aspects of conceptually defining and understanding social competence is determining
which behaviors constitute social competence. To come closer to a conceptual definition for social competence, the following specific question was addressed:

1) How do experts conceptually define social competence?

Delimitations of the Study

Participants for this study were chosen based upon their published research utilizing the words ‘social competence’ in the title within the years of 2002-2007 from selected academic databases. The first limitation is that while the selected databases of PsychInfo® and Academic Search Premier® may represent the majority of social competence research of the recent past, these definitions of social competence may not be exhaustive and all-inclusive of all published definitions.

The second limitation is this study represents only the opinions of the experts that were solicited and agreed to participate in the research. In turn, the results from this study may only be generalizable to the community from which the participants were selected. Third, this study was conducted entirely in an electronic format. Even though options were offered to receive the survey in hard copy, or with other compatible computer programs, many experts in social competence may have not been reached due to the fact that initially a potential participant had to have access to computer based technologies. Because of these constraints, some experts may have chosen not to participate.

Definitions and Operational Terms

Ability: level of effectiveness in communications with other agents in the social environment
Experts: the researchers, professors, psychologists and educational psychologists who have published research in the last five years utilizing the words social competence in the title.

Motivation: the efforts to behave in pro-social and socially responsible ways. (Wentzel, 1998)

Individual: one human person

Information Processing: the sequential steps an individual utilizes in processing a social interaction including: encoding of social cues, interpretation of social cues, response decision and behavioral enactment (Crick & Dodge, 1994)

Social: an encounter involving two or more individuals

Social adjustment: the degree to which one is achieving age appropriate, societally determined goals

Social Goals: the objectives an individual attempts to accomplish in their interactions with others (Pervin, 1989)

Social Performance: the adequacy of functioning in relevant social tasks

Social Interactions: any type of relationship of an individual with other individuals that can affect his/her behavior (Carneiro, Loureiro & Sachsida, 2005)

Social Motivation: goal directed behaviors that are aimed at or crucial to social interactions (Carver & Scheier, 1998)

Social Outcomes: The realizations of ones’ social goals (Foster & Ritchey, 1979; Anderson & Messick 1974)

Social Perception: that which encompasses both the detection and the discrimination of environmental cues as well as the ability to accurately infer the
meaning of perceptual cues from context (Penn, Corrigan, Bentall, Racenstein & Newman, 1997)

Social Skills: the ability to interact with others in a given social context in specific ways that are socially acceptable or valued and at the same time personally beneficial, mutually beneficial or beneficial primarily to others (Hargie, Saunders & Dickson, 1981)

Summary

The modern study of social competence as separate from a general intelligence has its roots in a paper published almost 90 years ago when Thorndike (1920) defined social intelligence as an ‘ability to act wisely in human relations’. He argued that this social intelligence should be viewed differently from abstract, mechanical or general intelligences. In the 1930’s Wechsler began to assess social intelligence by using photos of social situations and having the person choose what the proper response might be in those situations. More recently, Anderson and Messick (1974); Atteli (1990); Schneider and Byrne (1989) and Zigler and Trickett (1978) claim there is less agreement on the defining attributes of social competence while Dodge (1985) and Rubin and Rose-Krasnor, (1992) found effectiveness in social interactions to be the conceptualization for social competence. A discrepancy exists about how social competence is conceptualized, even though it has been, according to Gutstein & Whitney (2002), “repeatedly demonstrated to be a critical variable in predicting future life successes” (p. 161). The lack of an accepted conceptual framework has been noted by many authors (Dodge, 1985; Hubbard & Coie, 1994; Taylor & Asher, 1984; Waters & Sroufe, 1983; Yeates & Selman, 1989) who concur that there are a wide variety of published definitions of social competence, but an accepted definition has yet to emerge.
The importance of social competence need hardly be argued. To successfully negotiate through life, one must be able to get along effectively with classmates, family, colleagues and friends. Successfully addressing social tasks such as these is an important task for virtually everyone. One of the obstacles to understanding how social competence affects behavior, development and positive life outcomes is a lack of an accepted conceptual definition for the term. This study seeks to unify researchers in the development of a conceptual definition for social competence. This information will then be used in the development of an instruments and measurements that will allow for more effective understanding of social competence.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Research in social competence in adults has shown that differences in social competence may predict many important factors. Some of these factors have included job performance (Riggio & Taylor, 2000; Witt & Ferris, 2003), financial success (Baron & Markman, 2003), leadership (Riggio, Riggio, Salinas & Cole, 2003) and general life satisfaction (Law, Wong & Song, 2004). Each of these studies utilized differing conceptualizations for the construct of social competence. For example Riggio, Riggio, Salinas and Cole (2003) used the term social competence as demonstrating high levels of communication and social skills, while in the same year Baron and Markman (2003) conceptually defined social competence as the “ability to interact effectively with others as based on discrete social skills” (p. 41). Law, Wong and Song (2004) viewed social competence on the same lines as emotional intelligence by stating it as ability to regulate one’s emotions, and to use one’s emotions” (p. 494).

Studies conducted with children have shown that poor relationships with peers during childhood and adolescence may be detrimental to social, emotional and academic development (DeRossier, Patterson, & Kuperschmidt, 1994) and have been associated with higher rates of school drop-outs (Kuperschmidt & Coie, 1990). As children mature through early childhood and into adolescence, the importance of peer relationships becomes increasingly salient. When peer problems are more persistent and chronic,
children’s risk for negative outcomes is significantly increased (DeRossier, Patterson, & Kuperschmidt, 1994). A person’s ability to interact with the people and the world around him or her in a socially acceptable manner is “crucial to long term success” (Hargie, Saunders and Dickson, 1981).

The term of social competence has been utilized in research involving both adults and children, as well as in schools, businesses and other social arenas. Many differing conceptualizations for the term are noted which include social skills, emotional regulation and communication skills. Social competence has been associated with such outcomes as financial success, academic achievement and school drop-out rates.

Current Definitions of Social Competence

Numerous definitions of social competence have been advanced. In the broadest sense, social competence may be defined as pro-social skills or problem solving skills that result in positive outcomes in social situations (see Table 1).

In addition to the definitions, other researchers refer to social competence in broad general categories or perspectives. Some of these categories or perspectives include interpersonal skills (Snyder, 1974), social skills (Gresham, 1985) and communication competence (Segrin, 2000). Social competence has been conceptualized as interpersonal skills that one might have for promoting general peer acceptance and the formation of friendships (Harter, 1982; Rubin, Coplan, Nelson, Cheah, & Lagace-Seguin, 1999). Baron (2000) referred to social competence as the ability to appropriately interact with other people. Concurrent with the above propositions and conceptual definitions, one might deduce that social competence requires a vast proficiency across several behavioral...
Table 1: Current Definitions for Social Competence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Definition for Social Competence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White (1959)</td>
<td>‘an organism’s capacity to interact effectively with its environment’ (p. 297)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldfried &amp; D’Zurilla (1969)</td>
<td>‘the effectiveness or adequacy with which an individual is capable of responding to various problematic situations which confront him’ (p. 161).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weinstein (1969)</td>
<td>‘the ability to accomplish interpersonal tasks . . . ability to manipulate others’ responses’ (p. 755)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zigler &amp; Trickett (1978)</td>
<td>the success of the child in meeting social expectancies and the self-actualization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ogbu (1981)</td>
<td>‘the ability to perform culturally defined tasks’ (p. 414).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McFall (1982)</td>
<td>‘a judgment by another that an individual has behaved effectively’ (p. 1).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ford (1982)</td>
<td>‘the attainment of relevant social goals in specified social contexts, using appropriate means and resulting in positive developmental outcomes’ (p. 323).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waters &amp; Sroufe (1983)</td>
<td>‘an ability to generate and coordinate flexible, adaptive responses to demands and to generate and capitalize on opportunities in the environment (i.e., effectiveness)’ (p. 80).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor &amp; Asher (1984)</td>
<td>‘the formulation and adoption of personal goals that are (1984) appropriate and adaptive to specific social situations and implementing effective behavioral strategies for achieving goals’ (p. 57).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howes (1987)</td>
<td>behavior that reflects successful social functioning’ (p. 253).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duck (1989)</td>
<td>‘ability to achieve desired outcomes and show adaptability across contexts’ (p. 92).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yeates &amp; Selman (1989)</td>
<td>‘the development of the social-cognitive skills and knowledge, (1989) including the capacity for emotional control, to mediate behavioral performance in specific contexts, which in turn are judged by the self and others to be successful and thereby increase the likelihood of positive psychosocial adjustment’ (p. 66).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masten, Coatsworth, Neeman, Gest, Tellegen, &amp; Garmazy (1995)</td>
<td>“a pattern of effective performance in the environment evaluated from the perspective of salient developmental tasks in the context of late twentieth century society” (p. 1636).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glass, Guli &amp; Semrud-Clikeman (2000)</td>
<td>‘the ability to accurately recognize response options (in social contexts) particular to that situation and then choose the most appropriate options.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reed (1994)</td>
<td>“organizing cognitions and behaviors into integrated actions based on socially and culturally acceptable interpersonal goals” (p. 294).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reed (1994)</td>
<td>“ability to continually assess and modify social behavior in order to maximize the likelihood that social goals will be attained” (p. 294).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and cognitive domains which may include social skills, interpersonal skills and social perceptions.

Confusion Over the Dimensionality of Social Competence

A contributing factor in defining social competence is the lack of agreement regarding the dimensionality of social competence. A proliferation of social competence constructs has emerged over the decades. Thorndike (1920) originally defined social intelligence in multi-dimensional terms involving both social understanding as well as social behavior. Some research still views social competence uni-dimensionally in terms of behaviors or intelligences. For example, Aditya and House (2002) viewed social competence from an intelligence perspective defining it as interpersonal acumen. Conversely, from a behavioral perspective, Pulakos, Arad, Donovan and Plamondon (2000) defined social competence as interpersonal adaptability.

More often than not, according to Kosmiski and John (1993), different factor names and sub-dimensions are employed to label the constructs, with little integration between sub-disciplines of psychology. The result is an exceptionally disjointed research base (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989). Based upon the current definitions, social competence may be uni-dimensional in nature or require vast proficiencies across several behavioral and cognitive domains.

Perspectives on Social Skills as Part of the Concept of Social Competence

Patterson (1990) claimed the following social skills were important in social interactions: providing information, regulating interaction, expressing intimacy, social control, presenting identities and images, affect management, facilitating service and task goals. Segrin (2000) added behaviors that include conversational content and selection,
eye contact and gestures; and maintaining appropriate interpersonal distance. Verbal behaviors, according to Sheffer, Penn and Cassisi (2001) include such tasks as asking questions, speaking on topic, and responding to questions. Sheffer et al. (2001) explains that even further in importance in verbal skills are paralinguistic skills. Paralinguistic skills are defined by Sheffer et al. (2001) as behaviors that include elements of speech other than content; for example, fluency, clarity and volume. While all of these factors have been included in various conceptual definitions of social competence, the term social skill appears quite often.

Perspectives on Social Perception as Part of the Concept of Social Competence

Social perception may also be related to social competence. Social perception is a construct that encompasses both the detection and the discrimination of environmental cues as well as the ability to accurately infer the meaning of perceptual cues from context (Penn, Corrigan, Bentall, Racenstein & Newman, 1997). Information processing theories of social competence (Brenner, Hodel, Genner, Roder, & Corrigan, 1992; McFall, 1982) explain that appropriate responding in social situations is dependent upon accurate perception of the environment. Social perception can be broken down into three parts: inputs and interpretations, integrations and interpretations, and choices of behavioral response or output (Glass, Guli & Semrud-Clikeman, 2000). In other words, individuals must be able to accurately recognize response options particular to that situation, and then choose the options that are most appropriate.

Social perspective taking or the ability to empathize with others has also been identified as a component of social perception and may be part of the concept of social competence (Glass, Guli & Semrud-Clikeman, 2000). Social perception is also related to
the individual’s ability to detect the social context within which the interaction is taking place. Paraphrasing Butler and Wells (1995) who explained that because social interactions are highly situation specific and social situations are highly variable, social perception may play an important role in understanding social competence. Accuracy in perceiving others, also known as social perceptions, has been central to definitions for social competence. One example, offered by Glass et al. (2000) is the ability to accurately recognize response options (in social contexts) particular to that situation and then choose the most appropriate options.

Perspectives on Information Processing as Part of the Concept Social Competence

A review by Crick and Dodge (1994) suggests that overwhelming evidence supports the empirical relation between information processing styles and social adjustment. With some aspects of processing, for example, “hostile attributional biases, intention cue detection accuracy, response access patterns, and evaluation of response outcomes are likely to be causal of behaviors that lead to social status and perceived self-competence” (p. 1). In recent years, social information processing models of social behavior have emerged that have provided significant advances in understanding children’s social adjustment (Dodge, 1985, 1986; Dodge & Crick, 1990, Yeates & Selman, 1989).

In one version of the information processing model for understanding social competence (Dodge, 1986) claimed that children, when faced social situational cue engage in four mental steps before enacting socially competent behaviors. These steps include “(a) encoding of situational cues, (b) representation and interpretation of those cues, (c) mental search for possible responses to the situation and (d) selection of
perspectives on motivation as part of the concept of social competence

Social motivation may affect social competence and social performance. Despite this fact, Segrin (2000) stressed the importance of considering social motivation separately from an individual’s social performance. Segrin (2000) explained that under conditions of low social motivation, individuals may display a lower level of skill than that which they may actually possess. For example, if an individual in a social situation is uncaring about the outcome, that person may expend less skill. This being said, the co-participant in a conversation may rate social competence in that person as lower.

To further illustrate the connection between motivation and social competence, evaluation apprehension, as explained by Geen (1991) plays a major role in social facilitation, and may be a product of motivation in the self-presentation process. For example Geen (1991) states there “appears to be an implicit need of individuals to avoid criticism or negative evaluation by others when the others are in a position to exercise judgment” (p. 378). Baumeister (1982) asserts that the desire to make a good impression is a fundamental motive and that fear of negative evaluation arises when the person has some concern over being able to present the self adequately. Thus the need or lack of
need to be perceived as socially competent may affect motivational levels between 
persons in social interactions.

Summary

The concept of social competence has been utilized in research involving both 
adults and children, as well as in schools, businesses and other social arenas, and been 
associated with such outcomes as academic and financial successes. There is confusion in 
the field of social competence research as to dimensionality. Perspectives about what 
constitutes social competence have been investigated by the research community; most 
notably; social skills, perceptions, information processing and motivation. Based upon 
the current definitions, social competence may require vast proficiencies across several 
behavioral and cognitive domains.

The Delphi Method

Linstone and Turoff (1975) defined a Delphi as a “method for structuring a group 
communication process so that the process is effective in allowing a group of individuals, 
as a whole, to deal with a complex problem” (p. 3). They added that to “accomplish this 
‘structured communication’ there is provided: some feedback of individual contributions 
of information and knowledge; some assessment of the group judgment or view; some 
opportunity for individuals to revise views; and some degree of anonymity for the 
individual responses” (p. 4). The Delphi method is also intended to structure and detail 
the expansive information for which there is some evidence (but not yet knowledge) in an 
attempt to achieve informed judgment and decision-making (Ziglio, 1996).

As explained by Mullen (2003) the Delphi usually involves sending a 
questionnaire, which may be structured or relatively unstructured, to the respondents,
who are commonly termed an ‘expert panel.’ The responses are collated and the original or a revised questionnaire is re-circulated, frequently accompanied by an anonymous summary of responses. Participants are invited to confirm or to modify their previous responses. This procedure is repeated for a pre-determined number of rounds or until some pre-determined criterion has been fulfilled; “participants may also be asked to give an explanation or justification for their response” (p. 38). Thus, the Delphi typically involves a number of rounds, feedback of responses to participants between rounds, opportunity for participants to modify their responses, and anonymity of responses.

The “Expert” Panel

Sackman (1975) criticized the use of experts asking “what is an [expert] in the target field and “how are such experts operationally defined?” (p. 695). In addition, he argued that “it is almost impossible to find current psychometric or social science literature on [experts]” (p. 703). Although experts are often assumed to be professionally or scientifically qualified and/or to have achieved high status, an early study on the future of communication services in the residential market used an “expert” panel of housewives (Linstone, 1978). Pill (1971) suggested that an ‘expert’ should be defined as anyone with a relevant input. Linstone (1978) noted “a Delphi generally cannot be confined to so-called experts” (p. 294); while Cantrill, Sibbald and Buetow (1996) argued “that the definition of an expert should include any individual with relevant knowledge and experience of a particular topic” (p. 69).

Size of Panel, Response Rate and Attrition

Although many pioneering Delphi’s used very small panels, Linstone (1978), reported panels of varying sizes up to the low hundreds, also noting a Japanese Delphi
“involving several thousand people” (p. 274). Linstone (1978) stated that “a suitable minimum panel size is seven with accuracy deteriorating rapidly with smaller sizes and improving more slowly with large numbers” (p. 274). For Cavalli-Sforza and Ortolano (1984) a “typical Delphi panel has about 8 to 12 members” (p. 153). Phillips (2000) stated “the optimum size of the panel is seven to twelve members” (p. 193). Turoff (1970) suggests “anywhere from ten to fifty people”. In contrast, Wild and Torgersen (2000) suggest panel sizes of 300-500 are usually considered sufficient. Cantrill, Sibbald and Buetow (1996) report that “Delphi’s have used panel sizes varying from 4 to 3000” and recommend that size “should be governed by the purpose of the investigation” (p. 69).

Concerns have been expressed about bias resulting from low response rates and high drop-out rates between rounds. Walker and Selfe (1996) note response rates from an unacceptable 8 per cent to an excellent 100 per cent. Walker and Selfe (1996) stated that, in order to maintain rigor, “a 70% minimum response rate should be achieved” (p. 679) but offer little support for this claim. However, as Reid (1988) noted as cited in Mullen (2003) “evidence from most studies is that the larger the panel the higher the drop-out rate – with panels of 20 tending to keep their members” (p. 40).

Selection of the Panel

According to Reid (1988) one of the criticism of Delphi is that does stand up to scrutiny “because of the danger inherent in the selection of the panel” (p. 245). Although this claim was made, little was offered to substantiate how one would choose a panel. In response to this claim, Williams and Webb (1994) noted that only one of 13 studies examined by Reid (1988) “actually selected a random sample” (p. 182). Beech (1999)
observes that, because experts are selected or nominated, there is an “absence of the usual representative sampling techniques” (p. 283). Reid (1988) claims that “introduction of some basic sampling techniques with follow-ups of non-respondents would be worthwhile where the population of experts is genuinely large” (p. 245).

However, Beretta (1996) points out that “representative sampling techniques may be inappropriate when expert opinions are required” (p. 83). Goodman (1987) notes that the originators of Delphi “tend not to advocate a random sample of participants; instead, the use of experts or at least informed advocates is recommended” (p. 730) especially in forecasting. Early on, Helmer (1977) argued,

it should be pointed out that a Delphi is not an opinion poll relying on drawing a random sample from ‘the population of experts’; rather, once a set of experts has been selected (regardless of how), it provides a communication device for them, that uses the conductor of the exercise as a filter in order to preserve anonymity of responses. (p. 18-19)

Heterogeneity of participants is a concern with the Delphi. Linstone and Turoff (1975) mention that “heterogeneity of the participants must be preserved to assure validity of the results” (p. 4). In support, Pill (1971) suggests that “many innovations and real breakthroughs in research occur from outside a discipline or specialty”, adding further that “one asset of the use of a group is the diversity of opinion they bring to bear thus minimizing the possibility of overlooking some obvious facet of a question” (p. 62).

Consensus

One limitation in Delphi studies highlighted in the literature relates to decisions about what constitutes consensus among panel members’ responses. Many researchers have elected to use the data as an ‘empirical’ guide for the level of consensus rather than defining the standard prior to the study (Williams & Webb, 1994), and this is most
commonly presented by measures of average and dispersion (White 1991, Jones & Hunter 1995). Williams and Webb (1994) in critiquing this approach felt that the concept of ‘high consensus’ could be arbitrary and subject to the researcher’s personal interpretation. Other studies have measured consensus using the spread of scores or standard deviation for each question from the mean average score (Passannante, Restifo & Reichman 1993; White 1991). The rationale provided for this approach to consensus, according to White (1991) suggested that a wide spread of scores implies a weaker consensus and any relative tightening of the spread in subsequent rounds indicates that the degree of consensus has improved.

Consensus is defined (or ‘achieved’) in a variety of ways. Setting a percentage level for inclusion of items appears to be a common interpretation, albeit one that is construed at different levels. In their Delphi study on curriculum content, Williams and Webb (1994) sought 100% agreement for items to be accepted. However, they note that others had set the level of agreement as low as 55%. Others were less specific. Beech (1997), for example, suggested that consensus was implied by the results, whereas for Butterworth and Bishop (1995) noted it was ‘most’ participants’ agreement. In contrast, Duffield (1993) defined consensus according to stability of responses between rounds. For example, prior to the commencement of the Delphi rounds, a baseline mean of 3.00 after three rounds ("agree" on the Likert scale used) was accepted as consensus. A number of studies appear to leave interpretation of consensus entirely to the researcher (Lindeman 1975, Bond & Bond 1982, Gabbay & Francis 1988, Hartley 1995, Gibson 1998).
Delphi Questionnaire Design

Although some Delphi’s have been criticized for poor questionnaire construction, similar criticism could equally be directed at poorly designed questionnaires used in conventional surveys. Goldschmidt (1975) notes there is nothing in the characteristics of Delphi which suggests that “the implementation of the procedures should not conform to professional standards for questionnaire design” (p. 198). This premise is supported by Oppenheim (1992) asserted that the questionnaire opens a quick and seemingly easy avenue to fact gathering, though this assertion belies the complexity of process involved. There is a more extensive review of literature later.

The process of questionnaire design for a Delphi requires constant forward planning (McGibbon, 1997), and repeated piloting to define, and refine it. McGibbon (1997) further added that the formation of a questionnaire requires a clear definition of the issue under consideration, and the related concepts involved. Murray (1999) explained that a Delphi questionnaire design should facilitate the translation of definitions and concepts into indicators that can be used to measure the subject under discussion. These definitions and concepts can be uncovered by conducting a literature search, arranging interviews with interested parties or organizing brainstorming’ sessions with colleagues. “This process should increase content validity, and may uncover perspectives and experiences previously unconsidered by the researcher” (p. 149). According to Mullen (2003), virtually all Delphi’s use self-completion questionnaires, sent to participants in an electronic format.
Advantages of the Delphi

A defining feature of the Delphi, and one of its claimed strengths, is anonymity (Mullen, 2003). While no operational definition for term of anonymity was found in the research studies, it may be implied to mean that the participants were unknown or unacknowledged to each other, but possibly not to the researcher. This anonymity may aid “in removing the effects of status, powerful personalities and group pressure which can arise in meetings” (p. 47). Charlton (1981) hinted at anonymity to mean that “at no time need respondents feel compelled to compromise their views as they might in a committee meeting” (p. 288). Moscovice, Armstrong, Shortell and Bennett (1988) point to the need to preserve anonymity to prevent domination by a small group. Anonymity may facilitate honest expression of views by participants without the intimidation, inhibition or peer-pressure factors.

As noted by Key (1977), the Delphi has, but is not limited to, the following advantages which include (1) use as a planning tool which may aid in probing priorities held by members and constituencies of an organization (2) the Delphi saves time and travel which are required to bring people together for a conference and (3) Delphi prevents personality biases from affecting the results. Hoshmand and O’Byrne (1996), add that another advantage with the Delphi Method is that it is involving, valuing and iterative, and therefore embraces the principles of good quality action research. There have been several studies (Ament, 1970; Wissema, 1982; Helmer, 1983) supporting the Delphi method.
Disadvantages of the Delphi Method

The Delphi process has been criticized as being subject to bias because the investigator limits the scope of the issue evaluated by the participants (Graham, Regehr & Wright, 2003). Thus, “the breadth of the issue under consideration is at least partially controlled by the investigator, any consensus that may emerge may be somewhat distorted” (p. 1151). To paraphrase Pill (1971), the Delphi method has also been criticized for the fact that the panelists never meet together. Other group processes depend on the interaction between the participants as a source of novel insight into an issue. Due to the nature of Delphi, no discussion takes place, and any consensus that the group appears to have developed can only derive from information provided to it by the investigator. Where there is discussion among panelists, like in other types of group process, the consensus reached may be significantly different from that expected prior conducting the group process. Another disadvantage as noted by Graham, Regehr and Wright (2003) is “establishing measures for group consensus” (p.1152).

Dissertation and Thesis Research Utilizing the Delphi Method

A search through the ProQuest Digital Dissertations™ database reveals at least 280 dissertations and theses that used the Delphi method in their research. The research projects reviewed were from either education or healthcare. Below are some highlights from the dissertations utilizing the Delphi. Beginning with the initial Delphi question(s) in Round One, they can be either broad or narrow. Many (Alexander, 2004; Christian, 2003; Good, 1998) began with open questions in Round One, while some (Ayers, 1985; Friend, 2001; Menix, 1997) used narrow questions that focused on literature derived content.
With regard to number of participants, a great variability existed. Friend (2001) used only eight participants, while Lecklitner (1984) had 345. Lecklitner (1984) explained the large number of research participants were in part due to a heterogeneous sample with six distinct sub-groups. Others researchers also used heterogeneous samples (Cabaniss, 2001; Menix, 1997; Rosenbaum, 1985) while the majority relied upon homogeneous, purposive samples. Some generated a random sample within these purposive samples (Good, 1998; Laxton, 2002; Wilke, 1982).

With regard to number of rounds, most had three, while up to five were required (Kincaid, 2003) due to the increased difficulty of getting consensus from a heterogeneous sample. Not all large, heterogeneous samples required numerous rounds: Lecklitner (1984) used a sample of 345 consisting of 6 subgroups and required only 2 rounds. He did not strive for consensus rather to understand what the subgroups thought about his research questions.

While some of the older studies used conventional mail (Cramer, 1990; Lecklitner, 1984; Silverman, 1981), most used electronic mail. However, new technologies (Survey Monkey™, Two-Way™) allow the researcher to put the Delphi questionnaire online where research participants enter their answers. Some researchers (Cabaniss, 2001; Richards, 2000; Schmidt, 1995) used online surveys to collect their data.

The data analysis in these dissertations varied. Few researchers used purely qualitative analysis, (Kincaid, 2003; Watson, 1982) others quantitative, (Friend, 2001; Krebsbach, 1998; Shook, 1994; Silverman, 1981; Whittinghill, 2000). Most researchers chose quantitative followed by qualitative analysis of subsequent round Likert-style
questions (Friend, 2001; Good, 1998; Prestamo, 2000; Richards, 2000; Rosenbaum, 1985).

Two dissertations used the Delphi to gain understanding and consensus about complex phenomena, or to obtain agreement and consensus toward conceptual and operational definitions of constructs (see Table 2). Most notably, Droll, (2005) included in his dissertation that the purpose of utilizing the Delphi was to derive a common conceptual definition of work-related education for faculty at community colleges within the realm of higher education in the 21st century. Droll (2005) concluded that “the panel also identified other components that could contribute to a common definition for work-related education to establish a consolidated position” (p. 14). In addition, Levinson (2005) used the Delphi to gain consensus on a conceptual definition of multicultural children's literature.

Table 2: Dissertation Research Utilizing Delphi for Achieving Consensus on Conceptual Definitions for Complex Phenomenon

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author (year)</th>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Number of Rounds</th>
<th>Beginning (n)</th>
<th>Ending (n)</th>
<th>Consensus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Levinson (2005)</td>
<td>Definition for multicultural children’s literature</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Droll (2005)</td>
<td>Conceptual definition for work related education</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Examples of Research Studies Using the Delphi

Recently, Savchenkova (2003) used the Delphi to produce a final list of evaluation criteria for the selection and design of teaching software essential for software design and selection. Osborne, Collins, Radcliffe, Millar and Duschl (2003) used a Delphi Survey for their “Ideas about Science.” International experts on science educators were chosen as the 23 participants who gained consensus on the key ideas about what should be included as essential components of school science curriculums.

In recent research, the Delphi Method resulted in a comprehensive, conceptual definition of paratonia (Hobbelen, Koopmans, Verhey, Van Peppen & de Bie, 2006). To summarize that research, paratonia is a motor problem that develops during the course of dementia. Definitions of paratonia used in the literature differed considerably, which had clinical implications and may have lead to an undesirable heterogeneity in study populations. For this reason, “we Hobbelen et al (2006) initiated a Delphi procedure with clinicians in the field to establish a consensus for a definition of paratonia” (p. 50).

Delphi literature relating to psychology and curricular development reveals that the technique has been used successfully to: (1) assess statements of professional competence in terms of priority in basic clinical psychology training (Green and Gledhill, 1993) and (2) to ascertain indicators of effective preparation for teaching adults (Houtz and Weinerman, 1997). There was overwhelming satisfaction (96%) for the use of the Delphi Method in developing a national set of child well-being indicators (Hanafin, Brooks, Carroll, Fitzgerald, Gabhainn & Sixsmith, (2007).

To summarize here, the Delphi Method has many advantages as well as disadvantages. Some advantages include anonymity, as well as being a way of gathering
information without the inconvenience of time, travel and meeting complications. Some of the disadvantages may include, defining who is an expert in the chosen field under investigation, criticism of questionnaire design, and panel size. The Delphi Method has been successfully utilized to gain consensus for conceptual definitions for complex phenomena.

Overview of Likert Scales

Likert scales, introduced by Rensis Likert (1932), are one of the most widely used methods of measuring personality and social and psychological attitudes (Babbie, 1998). Likert (1932) describes the scale as a measure of attitude. He explained the scale as a set of items list of statements about a single topic composed of approximately an equal number of favorable and unfavorable statements is given to a group of subjects. The subjects are asked to respond to each statement in terms of their own degree of agreement or disagreement. The design of a Likert type scale asks participants to select one of five responses: strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, or strongly disagree.

According to Busch (1993), a consideration when using Likert type scales is whether to provide an odd or even number of response options. An odd number offers the choice of a neutral response, while even numbers require participants to choose one direction. According to Reed (1990) neutrality can lead to indecisive data; thus, “a short, even numbered category responses could lead to muddled survey results” (Busch, 1993, p. 735). Since its inception, Likert scales have been utilized in a variety of research.

Uses of the Likert Scale

A review of the literature revealed that researchers commonly use Likert type scales in the development of conceptual frameworks as well as instrumentation that help
to measure a diverse array of constructs. For example, Likert type scales have been used to measure attitudes towards illegal aliens (Ommundsen & Larsen, 1998), willingness to seek help (Cohen, 2000) and measuring adolescent concerns that foster runaway behavior (Springer, 1998). An assumption, according to Clason and Dormody (1994), is that Likert scales presume the existence of an underlying (or latent or natural) continuous variable whose value characterizes the respondents’ attitudes and opinions. For example, ” Hodge & Gillespie (2003) mention that “prominent measures of self-esteem, depression, alienation, locus of control, ethnocentrism, racism, religiosity, spirituality and homophobia have all used Likert type scales to make visible the underlying latent construct” (p. 45).

Advantages and Disadvantages of Likert Scales

The popularity of Likert type scales can be traced to a number of advantages. Some of these factors include: (1) ease of construction (2) intuitive appeal (3) adaptability and (4) good reliability (Hodge & Gillespie, 2003; Babbie, 1998). More advantages of Likert type scales are “a means for quick and efficient data collection and can indicate trends in the thinking of the respondents as a whole” (Mcguire, 1996, p. 310). Finally, Cummins and Gullone (2000) add that the Likert type scale has a fairly robust character which has proved to be reliable over a wide variety of forms.

Wu (2007) adds a disadvantage is “assigning integer scores successively to scale categories is often not realistic (p. 2858). Oddgeir, Martinussen & Rosenvinge (2005) add “Likert-based response formats may introduce an acquiescence bias” (p. 873). Hodge and Gillespie (2003) noted a few disadvantages that included: (1) require individuals to
think across at least two dimensions which include content and intensity
multidimensionality (3) an intermediate response option.

Summary

A Likert type scale is a type of response scale often used in questionnaires, and is widely used in survey research. When responding to a Likert type questionnaire item, participants specify their level of agreement or disagrrement with a statement. A neutral option is sometimes used. The scale is named after Rensis Likert, who published a report describing its use (Likert, 1932).

Survey Design

Phleeger (1996) states“ designing a survey is very similar to designing an experiment” in that the “design must match the objectives so that the survey data and analysis attempt to answer the questions being posed” (p. 18). Usually, a survey has one or two basic goals; “first, a survey may be attempting to describe a phenomenon of interest. Secondly, the survey wants to make more concrete a fuzzy picture of a product, process or population.”(p. 18). In the second case, the survey aims to assess the impact of some intervention (Kitchenham & Phleeger, 2002). According to Umbach (2005), because surveys can be implemented with relative ease, “many researchers are overlooking the basic principles of survey research which include processing and measuring of data.” (p. 91).

Error in survey research is defined as “the gap between what is true and what is measured; every survey has error associated with it” (Umbach, 2005, p. 92). To properly design a survey, two types of error that resonated through the literature that should be considered are measurement error and processing error. The first of these, measurement
error occurs “when a respondent’s answer to a survey is inaccurate, imprecise, or cannot be compared in any useful way to other respondents’ answers” (Dillman, 2000, p. 9). There are ways according to Bradburn, Sudman & Wansink (2004) for minimizing measurement error, which include: (1) having defined objectives (2) paying close attention to question wording and (3) evaluating survey questions by consulting experts and pre-testing the questionnaire. Pre-testing may also give survey designers an estimate of how long it will take for respondents to complete the survey, and uncover any problems that may emerge from wording and/or contradictions. The second type of error to be considered is processing error (Umbach, 2005).

Processing error, according to Umbach (2005) is introduced after data are collected and prior to analysis. When analyzing data, researchers are likely to make differing judgments when coding the data. Tourangeau, Rips and Rasinski (2000) offer the suggestion that is to avoid open-ended questions and search for outliers. In survey design, technological advances such as the Internet have made it easier to conduct surveys and in some cases to gather data more quickly than traditional methods such as mail or phone surveys. A researcher must take under consideration that the design of the survey is suited to the questions under investigation, as well as ways of reducing measurement and processing errors

Summary

Research studies have acknowledged the importance of social interactions in the lifetime development of humans. Since the 1920’s numerous conceptualizations for social competence have been forwarded that include viewing social competence form the perspectives of social skills, perceptions and motivation. Dimensionality of the concept
has also been brought into question. In order to bring the research field closer together for a conceptual definition, a Delphi was selected.

The Delphi has been successfully used to gather information and more toward consensus for conceptual and operational definitions as well as the latent factor structures of complex phenomena. The use of Likert type scaling, introduced by Rensis Likert (1932), is a widely used method of measuring agreement or disagreement among participants, and is widely used in research measuring personality, social and psychological attitudes about issues in social sciences and education. Both methods have their noted advantages and disadvantages.
CHAPTER III

METHODS

Thorndike (1920) distinguished that there is a difference between abstract, mechanical and social intelligences. Since that time, one of the most difficult aspects of conceptually defining and understanding social competence is determining which behaviors actually constitute social competence. To come closer to a conceptual definition for social competence, the following specific question was addressed: 1) How do experts conceptually define social competence?

This study was conducted to determine how experts would conceptually define social competence. Chapter Three will describe and report on the methods utilized for collection and analysis of data. In addition, it will specifically address the following areas: (a) methodology (b) research design (c) sampling (d) instrumentation (e) subjectivity (f) procedures (g) data analysis.

Methodology

Philosophers of science and methodologists have been engaged in a long-standing epistemological debate about how best to conduct research (Guba, 1990). This debate has centered on the relative value of two fundamentally different and competing schools of thought or inquiry paradigms. Logical positivism uses quantitative and experimental methods to test hypothetical-deductive generalizations. Among the major implications of this approach are the need for independence of the observer from the subject being
observed, and the need to formulate hypotheses for subsequent verification (Amaratunga,
Baldry, Sarshar & Newton, 2002). Positivism searches for causal explanations and
fundamental laws, and generally reduces the whole to simplest possible elements in order
to facilitate analysis (Easterby-Smith, 1991; Remenyi, Williams, Money & Swartz,
1998).

Positivism is defined as the objective approach utilizing scientific methods that
are based upon reliable and objective data which is the product of measurable
experiments, tests, and statistical procedures (Duffy & Jonasson, 1992). The conceptual
assumptions of positivism are (1) “reality is analyzable and decomposable, and
(2) learning consists of assimilating the objective reality” (p. 138). Quantitative
methodology was chosen for this study.

Research Design

While the Delphi is typically used as a quantitative technique (Rowe & Wright,
1999), a researcher can use qualitative techniques with the Delphi method. In qualitative
research, as explained by Mason (2006), the researcher is interested in how the social
world is interpreted, understood and experienced; the researcher is flexible and sensitive
to the social context within which the data was collected; and qualitative research is about
producing holistic understandings of rich, contextual and detailed data. The qualitative
researcher as explained by Creswell (1998) attempts to make sense of or interpret the
phenomena in terms of the meaning the participants place on them. Skulmoski, Hartman
and Krahn (2007) claimed that the Delphi method is also well suited to rigorously capture
qualitative data; “it [Delphi] may be seen as a structured process within which one can
use qualitative, quantitative or mixed research methods” (p. 9).
Within a quantitative methodology, the researcher used multiple methods to understand how experts conceptually define social competence. Borrowing from quantitative methods, this study used a Likert type scale rating system. This quantitative method allowed participants the opportunity to numerically rate each proposed conceptual definition, by checking the perceived agreement with each statement. This method followed the response system used by Droll (2005) in a dissertation seeking a consensus for a conceptual definition for work related education. The Likert scale utilized as the lower anchor, “Strongly Disagree,” which was numerically assigned as a negative three (-3) value, and the higher anchor, “Strongly Agree,” was assigned a positive three (+3). The options were coded as: “Strongly Disagree” = -3; “Disagree” = -2; “Slightly Disagree” = -1; “Slightly Agree” = +1; “Agree” = +2; and “Strongly Agree” = +3. Following suggestions by Mattel and Jacoby (1972), a neutral option or response choice of "undecided," "no opinion," "uncertain," or "don't know" was intentionally left out. This approach agreed with Droll (2005) who explained that most participants, as experts, had an opinion and corresponding level of agreement for the items.

In addition to indicating their level of agreement or disagreement, with no neutral option, to the proposed conceptual definitions for social competence, the participants were also presented with yes and no responses and an open-ended question. (Appendix B-1) A qualitative approach in the form of an open-ended questions as well as opportunities for added explanation of their opinions was used to gather information from participants about how experts would (1) define social competence conceptually; (2) to explain why they thought social competence was a uni-dimensional or multi-dimensional concept and (3) explain their responses to the question, should researchers move toward a
consensus for a definition for social competence? To further analyze the above responses qualitatively, content analysis, more fully described later in this chapter, was utilized to examine responses from open-ended questions.

In support of multiple approaches of data collection, Culp and Pilat (1998) explain that when gathering descriptive data, researchers typically employ numeric data, checklists, weighting scales, or other quantitative measures. Often, there is a need to ask open-ended questions to probe subject areas or topics more fully. According to Culp and Pilat (1998)

This situation is likely to occur in areas which are relatively unresearched, where response categories cannot be predicted, when the researcher needs to identify an alternative method of collecting data or information in order to improve response rate, or reduce potential for researcher induced bias. (p. 1)

To summarize, both qualitative and quantitative approaches were chosen for this study. Using Likert type scales (quantitative), as well as open-ended questions (qualitative), allowed for better and stronger inferences from the collected data. This premise was supported by Skulmoski and Hartman (2007) that “it [Delphi] may be seen as a structured process within which one can use qualitative, quantitative or mixed research methods” (p. 9).

Quantitative Descriptive Research Design

This study utilized a quantitative descriptive research design that involved the collection of data to discern how experts define social competence conceptually. The researcher used quantitative descriptive research designs and surveys. According to Newman and Newman (1994), descriptive research designs are used for describing a population for which one has quantitative data. Within this design, descriptive survey methods may be used. Cashwell (2002) stated that descriptive survey methods allow the
researcher to observe and describe variables as they are distributed throughout a population. The population of interest for this study would be experts in the field of social competence. An expert was defined as those persons with published research that included social competence in the title between the years of 2002-2007. A descriptive survey method, in the form of a Likert type scale, includes most often the following response options: “Strongly Disagree” = -3; “Disagree” = -2; “Slightly Disagree” = -1; “Slightly Agree” = +1; “Agree” = +2; and “Strongly Agree” = +3, which generated quantitative data was utilized to obtain data for this study.

Quantitative descriptive research studies entail interpretation, in that researchers set the horizon of expectations for the study by pre-selecting the variables that will be studied. A researcher may then draw conclusions from the results of statistical tests, which are themselves based upon sets of assumptions. “Quantitative description limits what can be learned about the meanings participants give to events” (Becker, 1996, p. 61). To summarize, quantitative descriptive research is concerned with objectively measuring conditions or relationships that exist, practices that prevail, beliefs, points of view, or attitudes that are held, processes that are going on, effects that are being felt or trends that are developing (McCutcheon, 1995). In addition to quantitative descriptive methods the researcher utilized qualitative description.

Qualitative Descriptive Research Design

To paraphrase Sandelowski (2000), qualitative descriptive studies have as their goal a comprehensive summary of events in the everyday terms of those events. Researchers conducting qualitative descriptive studies stay close to their data and to the surface of words and events. Qualitative descriptive designs typically are an eclectic but
reasonable combination of sampling and data collection, analysis, and re-presentation techniques. A qualitative descriptive study is the method of choice when straight descriptions of phenomena are desired. For the qualitative portion of the survey, open ended responses were solicited from participants to explain their ratings or opinions offered in the closed-ended questions. Open-ended questions, which asked participants to explain or describe their answers, were analyzed through content analysis.

Sample

One of the most important considerations when carrying out a Delphi study is selecting the panel of experts (Stone, Fish & Busby, 1996). The selection of panelists is important because the validity of the study is directly related to this selection process; that is, the knowledge of the panelists must be relevant to the questions being posed (Dawson & Brucker, 2001). This notion agrees with Cantrill, Sibbald and Buetow (1996) who argued “that the definition of an expert should include any individual with relevant knowledge and experience of a particular topic” (p. 69). Experts were chosen based upon their knowledge of the concept of social competence. Knowledge of the social competence was determined by the experts publishing at least one journal article in the years inclusive of 2002-2007 with “social competence” in the title, and their willingness to participate based upon their return of their initial letter of invitation. Unlike almost any other research design, randomization was not warranted nor needed (Stone, Fish & Busby, 1996). It was decided that 20 participants was the goal. This notion was confirmed by Reid (1988) who notes, evidence from most studies is that the larger the panel the higher the drop-out rate – with panels of 20 tending to keep their members. Also in research in finding consensus for conceptual definitions, Droll (2005)
started the Delphi study with 20 experts, Levinson (2005), 25 experts and Hobbelen et al. (2006) used 17 experts. To get twenty participants ‘on board’, fifty experts in social competence research were recruited via e-mail.

In Round One of the survey, a total of twenty (n=20) participants returned the survey. Of those twenty participants, nineteen submitted electronically, and one was submitted in hard copy. Of the twenty participants, all were experts as defined above.

In Round Two, the survey was sent again to all who returned their surveys in Round One (n=20). A total of fourteen (n=14) participants returned the survey in Round Two. All fourteen participants were experts as defined as those publishing an article with social competence in the title in the years 2002-2007, and all submitted their surveys electronically. When only fourteen of the participants returned their surveys at the two week deadline, even with reminders, to meet the required return rate of (16 of 20) or 80% from Round One, a convenience sample was utilized in order to add two more participants. Convenience sampling is often used in exploratory research where the researcher is interested in getting an inexpensive approximation of the truth. As the name implies, the sample is selected because they are convenient (Maxwell, 2005).

Participants for the convenience sample were recruited via an electronic letter from among educational psychologists affiliated with large colleges in the mid-west. Educational psychologists where utilized because of their background knowledge in social competence research. Educational psychologists were chosen because of what Pintrich (2000) explained as a strong focus of research in educational psychology recently, and it “clearly represents an attempt to develop models that integrate cognitive, motivational, and social components of development” (p. 221). Additionally, Patrick
(1997) demonstrated how social competence and social self-regulation were studied by educational psychologists as part of the “new “focus for educational psychology. Finally, Cantrill, Sibbald & Buetow (1996) argued “that the definition of an expert should include any individual with relevant knowledge and experience of a particular topic” (p. 69). Also, these educational psychologists were willing to participate in the survey as was indicated by their return of surveys for Round Two. In Round Two, participants were asked to indicate gender, as well as to indicate whether they were a professor or psychologist (see Table 3).

Table 3: Demographic Information for Participants in the Delphi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender/Profession</th>
<th>Round One</th>
<th>Round Two</th>
<th>Round Three</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male Professor</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Professor</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Psychologist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Psychologist</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response or incomplete response</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Round Three, the survey was sent again to all who received it in Round Two. The same participants (n=16) returned Round Three. As in Rounds One and Two, participants were asked to indicate gender, as well as to indicate whether they were a professor or psychologist (see Table 3).

Instrumentation

The Delphi was chosen to collect opinions from experts over the course of three rounds. One of the reasons the Delphi was chosen is because it is a flexible research technique well suited when there is incomplete knowledge about a problem or phenomenon (Skulmoski, Hartman & Krahn, 2007). According to Helmer (1966) a
Delphi possesses many attributes that make it an attractive research technique. The Delphi’s ability to “develop both qualitative data and quantitative data, provide controlled anonymous feedback make it flexible and tolerant of panelist diversity” (Bowles, 1999, p. 36). In addition, The Delphi has been used as a means of forecasting future events; (Helmer, 1966; Brown, 1968; Weaver, 1971; Smith & Simpson, 1995) in this case, how experts might conceptually define social competence. The central assumption of the Delphi is that it offers collective judgment and wisdom of several experts which may be better than the estimates and predictions of any one expert (Mullen, 2003). This assumption was central to the choice of using the Delphi Method for this study, as many researchers have used differing conceptual definitions for social competence (see Table 1). It was hoped these researchers, upon seeing results between rounds of the Delphi might help the field move toward a conceptual definition.

The Delphi questions are commonly transmitted as part of a mail or electronic survey. An electronic format using Microsoft Word for Windows® was chosen for this study. In all three rounds of the Delphi, in the opening letter, participants were presented with the option of receiving a hard copy by mail or WordPerfect® because according to the Tech Support Specialist for this research, between six to nine percent of researchers, psychologists, and professors may use WordPerfect®. Survey questions were a sampling of already published definitions for social competence. This agreed with advice offered from Umbach (2005) that the researcher must ensure that questions provide good representation or measures of the concepts they are trying to estimate or predict. This was done over the course of a three round Delphi.
Most Delphi’s require at least two to three rounds; however, five to six rounds are not uncommon (Mullen, 2003). The number of rounds required in any given study is dependent upon the level of consensus or agreement that the survey aims to achieve (Skulmoski et al., 2007). The number of rounds again is variable and dependent upon the purpose of the research. Delbecq, Van de Ven and Gustafson (1975) suggest that a two or three round Delphi is sufficient for most research; and if group consensus is desirable and the sample is heterogeneous, then three or more rounds may be required. However, if the goal is to understand nuances, which is a goal in qualitative research (Glesne, 2006) and the sample is homogeneous, then fewer than three rounds may be sufficient to reach consensus, theoretical saturation, or uncover sufficient information (Linstone & Turoff, 1975). Finally, as the number of rounds increases the efforts and time investment increases, and subsequently, one often sees a fall in the response rate (Alexander, 2004; Rosenbaum, 1985; Thomson, 1985). In this study, a heterogeneous group of psychologists and professors were utilized. Based on the above suggestions by Delbecq et al. (1975) that three rounds may be required by a heterogeneous group, but being cautioned by (Alexander, 2004; Rosenbaum, 1985; Thomson, 1985), that increased rounds often accompany a drop in response rates. Droll (2005) used three round in a Delphi to move toward consensus for a conceptual definition for work-related education. Based on the above research, three rounds were considered appropriate. The three rounds were sent and received via a Two-Way® survey. Two-Way® is a survey system that allows for surveys to be sent out via the Internet, and then results from the returned surveys are deposited in a data bank and retrieved at will.
Phases of the Delphi: Round One

The introductory letter (see Appendix A-2) was sent to fifty experts and welcomed them to the study. This letter also included a link to the first round of the survey and explained the objectives of the study as well as the general procedures to follow. Linstone (1970) suggested anywhere from ten to fifty people; therefore, fifty participants were recruited in hopes of gaining twenty willing participants. The goal of twenty was based on Reid’s (1988) note that the larger the panel, the higher the drop-out rate- “with panels of 20 tending to keep their members” (Mullen, 2003, p. 42). All participants were asked to read the rationale, directions, and instructions before attempting to complete their surveys. Since the participants were all deemed to be adults by virtue of their professional positions, consent to participate was given by return of the survey (see Appendix A-1).

The Round One of the Delphi survey consisted of three sections. The first section contained demographic survey items. The second section contained 14 statements that pertained to the conceptual definitions for social competence, the third open and closed ended response questions (see Appendix B-1).

In the first section of the Delphi survey, participants were asked to indicate their gender, as well as their professional position. By collecting demographic data along with other survey items as suggested by Schmidt (1997), the researcher work towards checking that the population that is being considered is appropriate for the conclusions that are drawn which includes professors, educational psychologists, and psychologist. In internet surveys, as is cautioned by Stanton (1998), volunteer bias and skewed demographics may contribute to obtaining a sample that is not representative of an
identifiable population. By virtue of the definition of ‘expert,’ for this study, a homogenous group of all psychologists or all professors was not warranted as per Cantrill, Sibbald and Buetow (1996) who argued “that the definition of an expert in a [Delphi] should include any individual with relevant knowledge and experience of a particular topic” (p. 69).

The second section of the Delphi survey contained current conceptual definitions for social competence for rating how much agreement the participant had for the definition. This approach was chosen because it added to the study in the form of content validity. Content validity is described by Newman and Newman (1994) as “how representative items under investigation are of the content that it purports to measure” (p. 53) (see Validity section for more discussion). The participants were not told that the definitions they were rating were published conceptual definitions in order that their agreement with a statement might not be influenced by this information. A Likert type scale was placed immediately beside each definition. The Likert type scale was self-explanatory. Participants were asked to rate each statement by checking the perceived agreement with each statement. The rating scale had as the lower anchor, “Strongly Disagree,” and was assigned a negative three (-3) value, and the higher anchor, “Strongly Agree,” was assigned a positive three (+3). The options were coded as: “Strongly Disagree” = -3; “Disagree” = -2; “Slightly Disagree” = -1; “Slightly Agree” = +1; “Agree” = +2; and “Strongly Agree” = +3. Otherwise, as per the consent to participate, it was clear to the participants that they did not have to respond to every statement.

The second section was followed a third section in the Delphi survey that was comprised of open and closed ended questions. As is suggested by Powell (2002), “open-
ended questions are recognized to increase the richness of the data collected” (p. 378). The addition of qualitative data collection methods in the form of an open-ended question, and closed ended questions were added to gain a more complete view of the participants’ views of social competence. The open-ended question numbered as question 15, was how would you conceptually define social competence? The participants were asked to indicate a yes or no response to questions numbered as questions 16 and 17 (see Figure 1) as well as offer explanation for their choices.

Six days after the initial survey was sent, as suggested by Fowles (1978), a generic reminder request was sent to those who had not yet completed Round One via electronic mail. When the first survey was returned electronically, a follow-up page was sent citing references for the published definitions chosen for rating on the survey. (see Appendix B-2). Twenty participants returned the Round One survey. This represented a 40% response rate from the initial pool of experts. Following previous research from Droll (2005) who found consensus toward a conceptual definition for work related education starting with twenty participants in a Three Round Delphi and Hobbelen et al (2006) who started with 17 participants in a Three Round Delphi for consensus on a conceptual definition for paratonia, twenty or more participants was deemed appropriate for the study. If the goal of twenty participants was not attained for Round One, the data collected from the participants in Round One would then serve as the base for analysis, and the study would not proceed into another round.

After data were collected from the completed Round One surveys, the analysis process began. The data were analyzed by first entering them into an Excel® sheet. The Excel program was chosen because it helped the researcher to organize and provide basic
data management, tabulation and graphics. The SPSS program was utilized to analyze the
descriptive statistics obtained from the data collection process. Open-ended comments
and opinions were interpreted as subjective information, which had characteristics
relevant to the research questions. This subjective information was developed and
aggregated which resulted in five new synthesized definitions being added in Round
Two.

Phases of the Delphi: Round Two

The Round Two survey was electronically mailed to the 20 participants who
responded following the analysis of Round One. The informational letter preceded the
survey, and contained a link to open the second survey. The letter thanked the
participants for their responses from Round One, as well as explained the objectives and
general procedures to follow for Round Two (see Appendix B-3). All participants were
asked to read the rationale, directions, and instructions before attempting to complete
their surveys. In addition, five new definitions were added (see Appendix B-4).
Round Two consisted primarily of the same questions from Round One plus the five new conceptual definitions which were developed and aggregated from open-ended responses to the question; How do you define social competence conceptually? A Likert scale was placed immediately beside each statement. For those previously published definitions, the group means from Round One were placed in a column beside the respective Likert scale options. This group mean indicated the relative position of the group consensus, based upon previous scores recorded by participants during Round One.

During Round Two, each participant was given an opportunity to re-rate each of the original statements with knowledge of the group's mean, as well as with the understanding the statements were previously published definitions. It was explained in the letter for Round Two that although consensus was desirable, they should not feel compelled to re-rate according to the group’s ratings. However, participants were advised that if they differed markedly from the group’s ratings, they should give careful reappraisal to those particular statements. As in Round One, the Likert scale was self-explanatory. Participants were asked to rate each statement by rating their perceived agreement with each statement. The rating scale had as the lower anchor, “Strongly Disagree,” and was assigned a negative three (-3) value, and the higher anchor, “Strongly Agree,” was assigned a positive three (+3). The options were coded as: “Strongly Disagree” = -3; “Disagree” = -2; “Slightly Disagree” = -1; “Slightly Agree” = +1; “Agree” = +2; and “Strongly Agree” = +3.

As was suggested by Fowles (1978), one week after the Delphi survey for Round Two was sent via electronic mail, a generic reminder request was sent via electronic mail to those who had not yet completed Round Two. Verification was made on an every-
other-day basis until the desired number of sixteen responses necessary to proceed to Round Three was received. The number of sixteen minimum responses or 80% return rate was selected based on the Delphi procedures explained by Mullen (2003). Survey results for the participants were downloaded into Excel and then descriptive statistics were analyzed utilizing the SPSS® software system. A criterion was set so that any statement not scoring an overall positive mean was excluded from Round Three. This approach was utilized as a method of data reduction.

Phases of the Delphi: Round Three

The Round Three survey was electronically mailed following the analysis of Round Two. The electronic mail for the Round Three survey thanked the participants for their support of the study and explained the general procedures to follow for Round Three (see Appendix B-5). Each participant was asked to read the rationale, directions, and instructions before attempting to complete their survey. Round Three contained the statements from Round Two—less the two statements not scoring an overall positive mean. These statements not scoring an overall positive mean in Round Two were question 7: I believe social competence is conceptually defined as the ability to perform culturally defined tasks (overall score from Round Two -0.31 ± 1.30), and question 9: I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as a pattern of effective performance in the environment evaluated from the perspective of salient developmental tasks in context of 21st century society (overall score from Round Two -0.06 ± 1.43). A Likert scale was placed immediately beside each statement. As before, the group’s mean was indicated on the survey.
With Round Three, each participant was given a final opportunity to re-rate each remaining statement with knowledge of the group mean. It was explained that although consensus was desirable, the participants should not feel compelled to rate according to the group’s rating. However, participants were advised that if they differed markedly from the mean rating, they should give careful reappraisal to that statement. As in Round One and Round Two, the Likert type scale was self-explanatory. Participants were asked to rate each statement by annotating their perceived agreement with each statement. The rating scale had as the lower anchor, “Strongly Disagree,” and was assigned a negative three (-3) value, and the higher anchor, “Strongly Agree,” was assigned a positive three (+3). The options were coded as: “Strongly Disagree” = -3; “Disagree” = -2; “Slightly Disagree” = -1; “Slightly Agree” = +1; “Agree” = +2; and “Strongly Agree” = +3. One week after the initial notification, a follow-up letter was sent via electronic mail to those who had not yet completed Round Three. A total of sixteen returned survey three, which constituted 100% participation rate. Table 4 shows return rates from all three rounds of the Delphi.

Table 4: Return Rates of Three Round Delphi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Surveys Sent</th>
<th>Surveys Returned</th>
<th>Return Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Round One</td>
<td>Round One</td>
<td>Round One</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Round Two</td>
<td>Round Two</td>
<td>Round Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Round Three</td>
<td>Round Three</td>
<td>Round Three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reliability and Validity of the Delphi Method

When undertaking any research study, consideration must be given to issues of reliability and validity. Reliability is the extent to which a procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions. Reid (1988) argues that Delphi’s may have more reliability and validity than any other type of qualitative method.

Reliability refers to the consistency of such measurements when the testing procedure is repeated on a population of individuals or groups (American Psychological Association, American Educational Research Association, & National Council on Measurement in Education, 1999). Reliability also refers to the extent to which the responses are free of measurement error. Ideally, the responses should be the same every time the measurement is repeated with the same group, sample, or population.

To achieve reliable results, the Delphi was selected because of its appropriateness for the research question. In comparing the Delphi's results with other methods, Ulschak (1983) confirmed effectiveness of the method related to generating ideas and use of participants' time. Debecq, Van de Ven and Gustafson (1975) suggested using the minimally sufficient number of respondents increases reliability, but offers no support for what is a minimally sufficient number. Dalkey, Rourke, Lewis and Snyder (1972) reported there was a definite and monolithic increase in the reliability of group responses with increasing group size, but offers no guidelines for group size. Ludwig (1997) reports reliability, with a correlation coefficient approaching .9, was found with a group size of 13. For well-founded and reliable conclusions, this study started Round One with twenty participants, and ended with sixteen; well above the thirteen discussed by Ludwig (1997).
In addition, Rounds Two and Three of the Delphi afforded the experts an opportunity to change their initial ratings in light of the new information gained between rounds.

“Validity” simply stated, “refers to the quality of actually measuring the behaviors which the instrument is designed to measure” (Newman & Newman, 1994, p. 283). Validity is a fundamental consideration in developing and evaluating the extent to which an instrument is doing what it is supposed to do. Hasson, Keeney and McKenna (2000) explained the Delphi is based upon the assumption of safety in numbers, meaning that several people are less likely to arrive at a wrong decision than a single individual, but offers no suggestion for how many participants define “safety in numbers.” According to Hill and Fowles (1975) threats to validity arise principally from pressures for convergence of predictions which undermines the Delphi's forecasting ability. However, the use of participants who have knowledge and an interest in the topic may help to increase the content validity of the Delphi (Goodman, 1987).

Content validity describes how well the content of the scale matches the content domain intended to be measured by the scale (Newman & Newman, 1994). In other words, it makes human judgments about whether or not the content of the items covers the major facets related to the knowledge areas. Content validity addresses features of the test, not the scores. In fact, content validation often occurs before scores are even obtained. Crocker and Algina (1986) outlined the following steps for content validation:

1. “Defining the performance domain of interest;

2. Selecting a panel of qualified experts in the content domain;

3. Providing a structured framework for the process of matching items to the performance domain;

4. Collecting and summarizing the data from the matching process” (p. 218).
Following the above criterion, the experts were informed that they were to rate definitions for social competence as well as address open-ended questions. The experts were selected for inclusion in the study based upon their previous research and publications in the domain of interest. The items selected for inclusion in the study were selected from previously published definitions within the field of interest with specific instructions as to how they were to be scored and for providing requested responses. The data in each phase were analyzed in terms of the statements’ means, standard deviations, t-tests, and assigned p-values as well as to the participants’ responses to open-ended questions for each item. The iterative structure of the Delphi technique developed what the panel of experts identified as the content domain and what they considered to be the constructs of interest.

Other types of evidence related to content validity existed; for example, the use of participants who have knowledge and an interest in the topic may help to increase the content validity of the Delphi (Goodman, 1987) and the use of successive rounds of the questionnaire helps to increase the concurrent validity. Concurrent validity, according to Newman and Newman (1994) is defined as the degree to which scores on a test correlate with scores on a criterion standard. Finally, external validity, is defined as the extent that the results from a research sample and setting can be generalized to the populations and settings specified in the research hypothesis (Kidder & Judd, 1986). While reliability estimates for the Delphi have been vague, validity of the method for this research, especially content validity has been well documented in the research literature.
Validity and Reliability of Likert Scales

Since Likert (1932) introduced his summative rating scale, now referred to as a Likert Scale, researchers have attempted to find the number of scale point or response options that increase reliability (Chang, 1994). Findings from these studies have been contradictory. Some have claimed that reliability is independent of scale points for example, Boote (1981) and Brown, Widing and Coulter (1991). Jacoby and Mattel (1971) state that “evidence indicated that both validity and reliability are independent of the number of scale type options used in Likert scales” (p. 498). Others have argued that using a six point scale maximizes reliability (Cicchetti, Showalter & Tyrer, 1985; Finn, 1972).

On the other hand, Mattel and Jacoby (1971) found no change in reliability (test-re-test and internal) over scales ranging from 2 to 19 points. Most of these studies investigated internal consistency reliability, except for Cicchetti et al. (1985), who examined inter-rater reliability. Since Cicchetti et al. (1985) argued that a six point scale increases reliability, and Mattel and Jacoby (1971) found no change in reliability between 2 to 19 points in a Likert type scale, six response options were selected. Another consideration in choosing the Likert type scale is validity.

According to Chang (1994), apart from contradictory reliability with regard to the number of scale options [Likert scales], “little attention has been given to validity.” (p. 206). Jacoby and Mattel (1971) in their study of the predictive, concurrent and criterion related validity of Likert type scales claimed that “when determining the number of response option in a Likert Scale format, validity need not be considered because there is no consistent relationship between it and the number of scale options utilized” (p. 498).
Finally, Newman and Newman (1994) note that we as researchers “never have a totally valid test” (p. 55). Based on the above research, a six item scale was supported for reliability, while validity is purported to not be a consideration.

**Procedures for Data Collection**

Fowles (1978) describes the following ten steps that the Delphi method utilizes to obtain the collective judgment:

1. Formation of a team to undertake and monitor a study in which the Delphi method is utilized to collect opinions on a given subject.
2. Selection of one or more panels to participate in the exercise. The panelists were experts in the area of social competence.
3. Development of the first round Delphi questionnaire.
4. Testing the questionnaire for proper wording (e.g., ambiguities, vagueness).
5. Transmission of the first questionnaires to the panelists.
7. Preparation of the second round questionnaires (and possible testing).
8. Transmission of the second round questionnaires to the panelists.
9. Analysis of the second round responses (Steps 7 to 9 are reiterated as long as desired or necessary to achieve stability in the results).
10. Preparation of a report by the analysis team to present the conclusions of the exercise.

Following the steps outlined by Fowles (1978) a dissertation committee was chosen by the researcher to guide and monitor the research study. Secondly, experts were chosen for this study. Experts were chosen based upon publishing a peer-reviewed journal article including the years 2002-2007, with social competence in the title of the article.
The third step included generating questions for the Delphi Questionnaire One. In order to determine survey questions, the researcher utilized a search strategy. A systematic review was conducted in order to collect studies about social competence. Research articles which included a conceptual definition for social competence within the article were located through the PsycInfo©, Academic Search Premier© and The Professional Development Collection© databases. To be more specific, within the articles, the author(s) clearly write(s) that social competence is defined as ____________. As part of step four, the dissertation committee that was chosen by the researcher to guide and monitor the research study reviewed the survey questions (see Appendix B-1). The researcher made revisions to the open-ended questions based upon their suggestions. The purpose of this process was to make sure there were no ambiguities or vagueness in the proposed survey questions.

After the survey was approved, step five included sending the cover letter (see Appendix A-1) and the first round of questions to the subjects via e-mail. Directly after the subjects returned their surveys via e-mail, a follow-up paper referencing the quotes and definitions from which the survey questions were created was sent (see Appendix B-2). Step six was analyzing responses to Round One of the Delphi. Answers to the open-ended questions were analyzed qualitatively for content and themes, and five new questions based upon aggregated data from open-ended responses were added to the survey in Round Two. Step seven involved a revised cover letter (see Appendix B-3), and creating a new survey from those questions previously asked in Delphi Questionnaire One, along with the participants’ response as well as group means. For Delphi Questionnaire Two (see Appendix B-4), the aim was feedback responses to Delphi
Questionnaire One, and to encourage clarification of their views by allowing for the changing of their opinions from the closed ended questions based upon the group response to the questions.

In Delphi Questionnaire Three, a final letter was sent to participants (see Appendix B-5). Participants were presented with the groups’ means to the items that were included in Delphi Questionnaire Two, as well as given the chance to re-rate their responses (see Appendix B-6). The Rounds of the study followed the timeline presented in Table 5 based on suggestions outlined by Hasson, Keeney and McKenna (2000).

Table 5: Timetable for the Three Round Delphi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Final draft of Q1 sent to participant group (for completion within a 2-week deadline).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>‘Reminder’ letters sent to all participant group members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Analyzed results of Q1 and develop Q2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Finish Q2 and send to participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Final draft of Q2 sent to participant group (for completion within a 2-week deadline).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 6</td>
<td>Reminder’ letters sent to all participant group members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 7</td>
<td>Analyze results of Q2 and developed Q3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 8</td>
<td>Results collated and interpreted by the researcher and final draft of Q3 developed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 9</td>
<td>Final draft of Q3 sent to participant group (for completion within a 2-week deadline).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 10</td>
<td>Reminder’ letters sent to all participant group members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 11</td>
<td>Analyzed results of Q3 and develop overall summary of findings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Management and Statistical Procedures for Qualitative Data

The data from the Two-Way TM surveys were collected over the course of the Three Rounds. Data from each round were managed by first entering them into an Excel spreadsheet which denoted individual responses to each of the open-ended questions. Specific comments and responses to the open ended questions, which were downloaded into the Excel spreadsheet, were subsequently transferred to a Word document for qualitative analysis (see Chapter 4). The researcher utilized Microsoft Word 2007® for categorizing, coding and retrieval of qualitative data. For the qualitative data collection portions from open-ended question one, the researcher observed the following procedure:

1) Placed all responses in Microsoft Word 2007® for review and future retrieval.

The researcher employed data analysis and statistical procedures focused upon the primary purpose of this study which was to ascertain how experts define social competence conceptually.

Data Analysis: Analytical Procedures

Descriptive statistics were first entered into Excel® to organize the response options and then into SPSS® to analyze the descriptive statistics collected in each round of the Delphi. The data in each phase were analyzed in terms of the statements’ mean and standard deviation. The iterative structure of the Delphi technique developed what the panel of experts identified as the content domain of interest (Droll, 2005); which in this research is the conceptual definition for social competence. Negative means gave an indication of how individual statements did not support a definition for the construct of social competence. After Round Two, the two statements, which did not meet the criterion of an overall positive mean, as indicated by a score of +0.01 to +3.00 were
excluded from Round Three. A negative mean for these statements indicated that participants did not endorse these specific statements as descriptive of social competence.

Data Analysis: Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics, which are those statistics used to best answer questions about or describe the parameter of interest, were analyzed using means and standard deviations, t-tests and a p-value for the response options. Penfield (2003) defined the mean as “a common method of obtaining a representative value for the average of a group of scores” (p. 72). Penfield (2003) defined the standard deviation as “a measure of the amount of spread in a group of scores, which equals the typical distance that each score in the group lies from the group mean” (p. 72). A t-test, according to Newman and Newman (1994) is run to determine if two groups are significantly different. At the end of Round Three, t-tests were run to analyze if there was a significant difference between participant responses between rounds. A p-value according to Newman and Newman (1994) is the probability (ranging from zero to one) that the results observed in a study (or results more extreme) could have occurred by chance. “Convention is that we accept a p value of 0.05 or below as being statistically significant; that means a chance of 1 in 20, which is not very unlikely”(p. 60). An alpha level of 0.05 was chosen based on Newman and Newman (1994) that suggests most alpha levels in psychology and education are 0.05.

Procedures for Organizing, Managing and Analyzing Data for Open-ended Question One

Whereas previously published research is a good starting point toward deeper understanding of the concept of interest, and makes good sense, it may limit the scope and the discovery for a conceptual definition of social competence (Wacker, 1998). The
strategy in this research was to utilize previously published definitions, as well as open-ended questions for defining social competence and to allow a definition of social competence based on careful descriptive and qualitative analysis to emerge. When a survey was returned from participants after Round One of the Delphi, the responses to the open-ended question, numbered as 15, were organized, managed and analyzed based on categorization, abstraction and iteration.

Early Data Analysis: Categorization

Categorization is the process of classifying or labeling units of data (Spriggle, 1994). Qualitative researchers categorize data as part of the process of analysis. The essence of categorization is identifying a chunk or unit of data (e.g., a passage of text of any length) as belonging to, representing, or being an example of some more general phenomenon. “categorization involves naming or giving labels to instances of the phenomenon found in the data” (p. 493).

To accomplish this, a list of categories was developed based on a synthesis of research literature in the area of social competence. “Categorization may proceed deductively, for example locating passages that represent a priori constructs, themes, or ideas; or inductively by identifying emergent categories from the data” (Spriggle, 1994, p. 493). Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that researchers start with some general categories derived from reading the literature and add more categories and sub-categories as they proceed in the research process. As explained above, a deductive approach was utilized to establish categories. An inductive category labeled “Miscellaneous” was added to identify emerging themes in the data. Category descriptions were created for this study by reading a representative sample of the research literature pertaining to social
competence and noting the specific categories and dimensions for social competence that were recurring in the articles (see Table 3). Each category was then assigned a numerical code for easy computer entry, classification and retrieval.

Miles and Huberman (1994) noted that coding drives the retrieval and organization of data. Some investigators such as LaPelle (2004), prefer to electronically enter all data received, thus enabling easy retrieval of all passages defined as belonging to the same category. In this case, the computer was used to store and retrieve categories and their accompanying passages, not to code or categorize data. Categories for numerical coding are presented in Table 6, while Table 7 defines the categories.

The categories contained definitions to facilitate the coding of data. (See Table.6)

1) The categories were assigned numerical codes. These numerical codes were used for later sorting of data.

2) Data collected from open-ended response in round one were recorded according to format presented in Table 6 and placed categorically.

Table 6: Categories for Answers to Open-Ended Responses

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Social Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Social Perceptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Information Processing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Misc. (Themes emerging from the data).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 7: Definitions for Categorizing of Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Skills</td>
<td>Social skills are defined as the ability to interact with others in a given social context. (Hargie, Saunders &amp; Dickson, 1981).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Perceptions</td>
<td>Social perception encompasses both the detection and the discrimination of environmental cues as well as the ability to accurately infer the meaning of perceptual cues from context (Penn, Corrigan, Bentall, Racenstein &amp; Newman, 1997).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Efforts to behave in pro-social and socially responsible ways (Wentzel, 1998).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Processing</td>
<td>Sequential steps and individual utilizes in processing a social interaction including: encoding of social cues, interpretation of social cues, response decision and behavioral enactment (Crick and Dodge, 1994).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Trustworthiness of Study

According to Glesne (2006), addressing trustworthiness in the research one is conducting is of great importance. To add to the trustworthiness of the study, an external audit was conducted. An external audit is “an outside person examines the research process and audits the field notes, analytic coding themes, etc.” (p. 38). Doctoral students in the College of Education at a mid-western college reviewed the researchers’ categorical placements of the data. These reviewers had a background in qualitative research. Markedly differing opinions on categorical placements of responses were noted, discussed and changed as indicated by the reviewers.

#### Early Data Analysis: Abstraction

According to Spriggle (1994), “abstraction builds on categorization; it takes categorization one step further in that it collapses more empirically grounded categories.
into higher-order conceptual constructs” (p. 493). Abstraction goes beyond the identification of patterns in the data; it groups previously identified categories into more general, conceptual classes (Spriggle, 1994). Abstraction includes both incorporating more concrete categories into fewer more general ones (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and recognizing that a unit or word of data is an empirical indicator of a more general construct of interest.

To abstract the data, word count within each category was selected as the best tool to accomplish abstracting data based on suggestions in Wegerif and Mercer (1997). Using computer-based transcript analysis such as word counts can help “combine qualitative and quantitative methods in a study which hence can produce an overall interpretation which is more convincing than either qualitative or quantitative accounts can be if used alone” (Wegerif & Mercer, 1997, p. 285). Word count, which can be performed by a computer to facilitate the process, was used to analyze the data within each category, specifically the number of times certain conceptual words were utilized within each category. Word counts were useful for discovering conceptual words and patterns of ideas in the body of the written responses to open-ended questions.

Word counts helped the researcher to discover constructs, and hence potentially recurring themes, from these concepts that emerged within each category. A study conducted by Ryan and Weisner (1996) as noted in Glesne (2006) instructed fathers and mothers of adolescents in Los Angeles to “describe your children in their own words” (p. 161). Ryan and Weisner (1996) identified all the unique words in the answers they got to this question and noted the number of times each word was used. This kind of analysis considers neither the contexts in which the words occur nor whether the words are used
negatively or positively. Researchers used this technique to try and understand if there were words or concepts used consistently by parents to describe their children. For the purposes of this research, the researcher asked participants to describe in their own words how they might conceptualize social competence.

Word counting was useful because it gave the researcher another tool for understanding how experts might conceptualize social competence. From the word counts analysis, five new definitions were synthesized from the words and concepts most commonly given by participants in Round One; and then placed in Round Two, for subsequent consideration from participants. These results, combined with the results from the quantitative portion of the survey, allowed the researcher to make iterations about the participants’ choices about what should be included in the conceptual definition for social competence. It should be noted that the aforementioned word count and subsequent synthesis of definitions was only done after Round One of the Delphi for inclusion in the questionnaire for Round Two. Word counts were not utilized after Round Three.

Later Data Analysis: Iteration

The coding and categorizing of data were accomplished by the researcher through an iterative process. Agreeing with Spriggle (1994), iteration allowed the investigator advantages; namely, it permitted the development of provisional categories, constructs, and conceptual connections for subsequent exploration. According to Glesne (2006), “simple word counts can help researchers to identify patterns in the data” (p. 159). Agar (1980) claimed that mathematics can be useful when determining patterns, and adds “most of the points I need to make can be supported with simple frequency distributions.
Through the iteration of the data, new constructs, and conceptual connections for subsequent exploration were established.

The researcher then fractured the definitions that were submitted to see what words or phrases contained in the proposed definitions submitted by participants could be placed into the six selected categories. The words or phrases that appear under each category are portions of responses that participants proposed. After the categories were established, the researcher placed the words and phrases from the proposed definitions into the provisional categories to further analyze the data and for data reduction. These qualitative data, combined with the results from the quantitative portion of the survey, allowed the researcher to make iterations about the participants’ choices about what should be included in the conceptual definition for social competence.

Displaying Data for Open-Ended Question #15

Miles and Huberman (1994) describe data display as “an organized assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action taking” (Glesne, 2006). The data were displayed using computer graphics such as tables and matrices. Of particular interest to the researcher was if two or more themes occurred together consistently. Such data displays assisted the researcher to manage and make sense of the data and transform it in ways that might help communicate to the researcher findings that help to answer the research question under investigation.

Procedures for Organizing, Managing and Analyzing Data for Questions #16 and #17

Microsoft Word 2007® was utilized to record and organize responses to question 16, which asked do you believe that researchers should move toward consensus for a definition of social competence? After indicating a yes or no response, a space for
explanation of their opinion was offered. Question 17 asked participants to indicate a yes or no response regarding whether they thought social competence is uni-dimensional or multi-dimensional as a concept and then asked for explanation. A simple tally system of the number of yes or no responses from question 16, and explanations offered were recorded and saved for later presentation and discussion. A tally of the responses for question 17, as well as the additional explanations were noted for use in the presentation and interpretation of data section. These data helped the researcher gain insight into the current opinions of the participants as to whether they think researchers in social competence should move toward a conceptual definition for the concept and dimensionality.

Interpretation of Qualitative Data

The purpose of qualitative interpretation is for the researcher to use the themes and connections to help explain their findings; in other words, attaching meaning and significance to the data analysis (Maxwell, 2005). As suggested by Glesne (2006) visual displays such as tables, boxes and diagrams were utilized to display data. From the analysis, the researcher was able to note the major findings. By revisiting the data several times, it helped to reveal gaps in the investigation and connections that remained unclear. The results from the qualitative portions of the survey aided and gave perspectives from which to draw conclusions about conceptual schemes and words that should be included in the definition for social competence; as well as items that suggested further study. The researcher revisited the data as many times as was necessary to cross-check or to help in verifying the conclusions.
Summary

Quantitative methodology, along with both qualitative and quantitative methods enabled the researcher to understand what might constitute the conceptual definition of social competence. The Delphi method, through which data were collected, utilized quantitative methods in the form of a Likert Scale rating system with six response options. The options were coded as: “Strongly Disagree” = -3; “Disagree” = -2; “Slightly Disagree” = -1; “Slightly Agree” = +1; “Agree” = +2; and “Strongly Agree” = +3. The Delphi technique was recognized as an appropriate study design and assessment to make important decisions about educational policy (Clayton, 1997). The study was then sent to experts in the field of social competence. Experts were chosen among those persons who had published social competence research in the years 2002-2007. Systematic literature searches were performed in the Academic Search Premier®, Professional Development Collections® and PsycInfo® databases.

The published conceptual definitions of social competence were generated from research in social competence located in the aforementioned databases. Definitions from 22 articles were incorporated into the surveys. To be included as part of the survey, the article had to explicitly state a conceptual definition of social competence within the text. The survey also included an open-ended question, and opportunities to offer support for two closed-ended questions. All Delphi rounds included a Likert type scale for participants to rate definitions for social competence. During Rounds Two and Three, participants had the opportunity to change their minds about their own opinions in light of the overall means calculated for each conceptual definition. The quantitative analysis
of data was completed using a statistical program, SPSS® to calculate means, standard deviations and p-values.

The researcher used qualitative analysis in the form of word categorization, abstraction and iteration. The qualitative analysis took into consideration the compilation of comments made from Round One of the survey, most notably the open-ended question, how do you define social competence conceptually? Through qualitative analysis, the researcher was able to create five new definitions for the concept of social competence that were included for evaluation in both Rounds Two and Three of the survey.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

This study was conducted to determine how experts conceptually define social competence. To come closer to a conceptual definition for social competence, the following specific question was addressed: how do experts conceptually define social competence? The results of this study are reported in two sections. The first consists of observations from the data which include quantitative descriptive measures. The second section deals specifically with examining the qualitative data from open and closed ended responses to questions posed in Round One of the Delphi.

Perhaps one of the most interesting findings in the analysis of this study is the consistency with which participants rated response options over the three rounds. For example, over the course of three rounds, in all but two questions, means of responses never varied more than 0.75 in gain or loss of support for a proposed definition. According to Newman and Newman (1994), a mean can be used as a way to calculate a group’s opinion. In Delphi studies, one of the objectives is to move closer toward a consensus for the issue posed. So a mean that varies very little, may be an indication about agreement or disagreement about a proposed definition.

From a purely intuitive perspective, one might have expected to see the experts rate definitions with more emphasis on higher scores for their favorite concepts and lower for their least favorite conceptual definitions for social competence. While this did not
occur, it could be an indicator that social competence could have multiple meanings. If we assume, as previously noted in the literature (Johns, 2001; Hubbard & Dearing, 2004; Zsolnai, 2002; Smith & Travis, 2001) social competence is an elusive concept and the results may be in support of this assumption.

Presentation of Quantitative Descriptive Data from Closed-Ended Questions

In this study, the researcher wanted to know the participants’ opinions about what should be included in a conceptual definition for social competence. A Likert type scale was utilized to indicate how closely participants’ opinions matched the question or statement on a rating scale. The numbers ranged from one end of the scale from (-3) which represented least agreement, or "Strongly Disagree," to the other end of the scale (+3) which represented most agreement, or "Strongly Agree." In Table 8 are the results from the survey questions by rounds that includes the means and standard deviations. Items listed with “no score” indicate that an overall negative mean was recorded and that the definition was excluded from Round Three of the Delphi. The decision to exclude any definition that scored an overall negative mean in Round Two from entering into Round Three was decided because it was viewed by the researcher as not representing what experts feel should be included in the definition.

Based on the responses displayed in Table 8, two definitions emerged with consistently high means. The first, statement one, had the highest overall mean scores; 2.05 ±0.75; 2.37 ±0.61 and 2.18 ± 0.75, respectively. The other, statement 18, had for its means 2.12 ±0.61 and 2.12 ± 0.88. Statement 18 was added to round two, which was synthesized from qualitative data gained in round one. In addition, the standard deviation from the scores was less than one standard deviation from the mean (see Table 8).
Table 8: Results from Quantitative Analysis for Conceptual Definitions for Social Competence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Round One (Mean)</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Round Two (Mean)</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Round Three (Mean)</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1)</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2)</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>1.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3)</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4)</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5)</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6)</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7)</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>-0.31</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>no score</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8)</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9)</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>no score</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10)</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8: Results from Quantitative Analysis for Conceptual Definitions for Social Competence (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Round One</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Round Two</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Round Three</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11) I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as an ability to generate and coordinate flexible and adaptive responses to demands and to generate and capitalize on opportunities in the environment.</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12) I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as social skillfulness and social abilities that promote general peer acceptance and the formation of friendships.</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13) I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as organizing cognitions and behaviors into integrated actions based on socially and culturally acceptable interpersonal goals.</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14) I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as the ability to continually assess and modify social behavior in order to maximize the likelihood that those social goals will be attained.</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15) I believe that social competence can be conceptually defined as the ability of an individual to read the environment and adapt their behavior to meet personal goals.</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16) I believe that social competence can be conceptually defined as an ability to deal effectively with the constantly changing demands in ones social environment.</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17) I believe that social competence can be conceptually defined as the capacity for engaging in social interactions that maintain positive relationships.</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18) I believe that social competence can be conceptually defined as how well an individual can adapt socially to a given situation with other people either one-on-one or in a group environment to achieve individual as well as group goals.</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19) I believe that social competence can be conceptually defined as the ability to adapt to all situations and reach a maturity level allowing one to respect all people and their level of social interaction.</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When interpreting any standard deviation value it is important to keep in mind that the greater the value of the standard deviation, the more spread out or dispersed a data set is likely to be (Newman & Newman, 1994). With this understanding about means and standard deviations, questions one and eighteen had the highest amount of overall agreement based on high mean scores and low standard deviation scores and they had statistical significance.

One sample t-tests results can be viewed in Table 8. These tests utilized data from Round Three of the survey to determine whether the means were significantly above zero or neutral. Based upon low mean scores, high standard deviations and p-values greater than the parameters set of 0.05, participants were more likely to believe that social competence is not conceptually defined as “social success;” also, that social competence is not conceptually defined as the adequacy with which an individual is capable of responding to various problematic situations which confront them. All other responses analyzed showed statistical significance.

Responses to Open-Ended Question

Round One of the Delphi survey included one open-ended question, as well as closed ended responses to gather qualitative as well as quantitative data. Question 15 asked participants: How do you define social competence conceptually? From the total returned surveys (n=20) for Round One, thirteen of those participants offered conceptual definitions or responses. There were two approaches to coding the collected data to the above question. These approaches are coined a priori and emergent coding. With emergent coding, categories are established following some preliminary examination of the data, while with a priori coding, the categories are established prior to the analysis,
and are based upon published research or theoretical positions (Stemler, 2001). The *a priori* categories were decided upon prior to the surveys being sent based on an extensive review of social competence literature.

As indicated in Chapter 3, responses were placed into a priori categories derived from previous published research of social competence. See Chapter Two for literature reviews on perspectives on categories labeled 1) Social Skills, 2) Social Perceptions, 3) Motivation, 4) Information Processing, and 5) Miscellaneous (Themes emerging from the data). Category five had two sub-categories 5a) abilities and 5b) social goals, as these stood out based on high instances during the word count process. This idea of a Miscellaneous category is confirmed by Maxwell (2005) who explained that having such a category helps shed light and relationships that might go unnoticed or misunderstood. For results of categorization see Table 9.

From this categorization, based on the number of times a statement was placed into a category, one might be able to deduce from the proposed definitions that social skills and abilities might be part of what constitutes social competence; while social goals, motivation and information processing might find less support.

**Qualitative Analysis for Open-Ended Responses**

The purpose of the open-ended questions was to give participants the opportunity to describe what they felt should be included in a conceptual definition for social competence. In Round One of the Delphi, participants were asked to answer the question: How would you define social competence conceptually? The responses are presented in Table 9.
Table 9: Categorization Based on *A Priori* and Emergent Categories to Responses to the Open-Ended Question #15: How Do You Define Social Competence Conceptually?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>A Priori Categories</th>
<th>Emergent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Ability to manage, develop and maintain positive social relationships and resolve interpersonal problems.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) One's ability to deal effectively with constantly changing demands in one's social environment.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Succeeding in social tasks in a particular situation and environment.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Capacity for engaging in social interactions and relationships in ways that resolve conflicts and preserve relationships.</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Social competence is a multi-level construct that includes social adjustment, social performance, and social skills.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Social competence is a multi-factored construct. Social competence includes purpose, efficacy, and feelings about overall self. It is a general understanding of one’s worth within a particular social context which may vary much in the way self efficacy varies to the particular domain. I think it is difficult to have one “master” definition and I often suggest we use caution in doing so. Just as intelligence was a human construct, so too is social competence.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Pretty much as it is stated in #1 (Referring to definition #1 in the survey of published definitions) which was: “the ability to interact with others in a given social context in specific ways that are socially acceptable or valued and at the same time personally beneficial, mutually beneficial or beneficial primarily to others.” (Ryan and Shim, 2006).</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9: Categorization Based on *A Priori* and Emergent Categories to Responses to the Open-Ended Question #15: How Do You Define Social Competence Conceptually? (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>A Priori Categories</th>
<th>Emergent</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8) To display and practice competencies and skills related to diplomatic interaction, judgment, human compassion, and achievement, with the hope that the ultimate outcome of personal contribution may make a positive and lasting impression on the lives of those which God has ordained to be within our circle of influence.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) Ability to adapt to all situations and reach a maturity level allowing one to respect all people and their level of social interaction.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as the ability to assess and modify behavior to realize social goals.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11) An individual’s ability to use his or her relationships (of all kinds—shallow and deep) to help him or her and others to attain their individual and mutual goals.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12) I would define social competence as the ability to recognize and analyze responses to any given situation one might encounter.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13) How well an individual can adapt socially to a given situation with other people either one-on-one or in a group environment to achieve individual as well as group goals. These goals may be either set or implied.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition to analyzing the responses and placing them into *a priori* and emergent categories, a word count process was also utilized. Word count is simply a computer function that counts how many times a word appears in the documents of interest. The actual number of times that each word appeared in the participant responses to the question how do you define social competence conceptually is in parentheses beside the word (see Table 10).

Six words were chosen from the actual word count process. These became categories from which to further analyze the responses. The basics of categorizing can be summed up in these quotes: "A category is a group of words with similar meaning or connotations" (Weber, 1990, p. 37). The six responses chosen not only represent the six highest word count results, but were also deemed by the researcher to be mutually exclusive categories. As indicated in the literature, when selecting categories, "categories must be mutually exclusive and exhaustive" (GAO, 1996, p. 20). Mutually exclusive categories exist when no unit falls between two categories; each unit of data is represented by only one category (Stemler, 2001). No unit analyzed in the proposed definitions for social competence fell between any two categories.

The researcher then fractured the definitions that were submitted to see what words or phrases contained in the proposed definitions submitted by participants could be placed into the six selected categories. The words or phrases that appear under each category are portions of responses that participants proposed. The researcher wrote down key words or phrases from responses and placed them into the six categories found in Table 10.
From the above qualitative data analysis techniques, five new definitions were synthesized that included words or phrases from the major categories derived from the responses as well as the abstracted empirical data provided from the word counts process (see Table 10).

From the categorization and word counts processes, the researcher synthesized five new definitions that were added to Round Two of the Delphi as questions 15-19 of the Delphi. These definitions included:

1. I believe that social competence can be conceptually defined as the ability of an individual to read the environment and adapt their behavior to meet personal goals.

### Table 10: Results from Word Counts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ABILITY (7)</th>
<th>GOALS (4)</th>
<th>ADAPT (3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Display and practice competencies and skills.</td>
<td>Attain individual as well as group goals</td>
<td>Recognize and analyze Social adjustment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manage develop and maintain positive social relationships</td>
<td>Succeeding in social tasks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity for engaging</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective performance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENVIRONMENT (3)</td>
<td>INDIVIDUAL (7)</td>
<td>SOCIAL (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Given situation</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>With other people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Given situation one may encounter</td>
<td>One’s Feelings about one’s self</td>
<td>Diplomatic interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Particular situation</td>
<td>One’s worth</td>
<td>Resolve interpersonal problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A particular domain</td>
<td></td>
<td>Resolve conflicts and preserve relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Social performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Social skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. I believe that social competence can be conceptually defined as an ability to deal effectively with the constantly changing demands in one's social environment.

3. I believe that social competence can be conceptually defined as the capacity for engaging in social interactions that maintain positive relationships.

4. I believe that social competence can be conceptually defined as how well an individual can adapt socially to a given situation with other people either one-on-one or in a group environment to achieve individual as well as group goals.

5. I believe that social competence can be conceptually defined as the ability to adapt to all situations and reach a maturity level allowing one to respect all people and their level of social interaction. (see also Appendix B-4).

Results of Open-Ended Question: Do you believe that researchers should move toward consensus for a definition of social competence?

In Round One of the Delphi survey, participants were asked to answer “yes” or “no” to the following posed question: Do you believe that researchers should move toward consensus for a definition of social competence? Fourteen participants indicated that researchers should move toward consensus for a definition for social competence. Four responded with a no, and two did not respond.

In addition to the closed ended question, participants were given the opportunity to explain their responses to the question: Do you believe that researchers should move toward consensus for a definition of social competence? In the following paragraphs, the researcher will identify the themes that emerged supported by participant responses. The following were some of the comments given by the fourteen participants (n=14) that indicated that researchers should move toward consensus for a definition for social competence.

While all participants were asked the same question, as indicated by the variety of responses, a few main themes emerged from those indicating that researchers should
move toward consensus for a definition for social competence. First, I will discuss the participants’ premises that conceptual clarity is of importance. This premise is supported by the following responses: “because if in the research field something is called social competence, it needs to be objectively defined” (Participant #7); having an agreed upon term is always better than conceptual confusion (Participant #12) and, “with conceptual clarity, no researcher using the term can proffer one characteristic or dimension more important than another (Participant #8). Yet another anonymous participant added that a “conceptual definition improves scientific communication and application of theory” (Participant #6). Finally, if we are going to have a construct we call "social competence," we should figure out how to objectively define it” (Participant #16).

Based on these responses, it may be thought that conceptual clarity, in the absence of an official definition, may lessen confusion over what constitutes social competence. This would agree with research posited by Smith and Travis (2001) which suggested that researchers in the area of social competence can better answer questions by developing a shared theoretical approach, or conceptual framework, ensuring that researchers and practitioners are operating from the same paradigmatic assumptions as they work together to understand the puzzle.

A second theme that emerged was the notion that more reliable instruments were needed with which to measure social competence. This notion was deduced by the researcher based upon the following responses “an agreed upon definition for social competence may increase reliability of instruments and increase the knowledge base in the field” (Participant #11). Another anonymous participant included “what evidence do we have for the validity of a concept and what is the factor structure of our measures?”
(Participant #12), and because functioning and symptomatology can overlap, it is difficult to devise an instrument that can determine where one construct “ends” and another “begins.” This comment might also overlap in agreement with another participant response that stated, “with an agreed upon conceptual definition, the research community will benefit as a whole; in turn, their findings will benefit society as a whole by assisting persons to function in any given social situation” (Participant #4).

The following were comments offered by the four participants who indicated an answer of “no” to the question: Should researchers move toward a conceptual definition for social competence? One participant indicated that definitions are a “matter of semantics and agreement will never happen anyway” (Participant #8). Another added, “I think this is an evolving idea” (Participant #11). The final comment read, “it is my opinion that social competence is much like intelligence: relative to cultural norms and practices. It is only relative to the immediate environment” (Participant #15). It is interesting to note that the three responses given involved distinctly different positions including cultural contexts, semantics and a concept that is still evolving.

In another closed ended question, participants were asked: Do you think social competence is uni-dimensional or multi-dimensional as a construct? Of the twenty participants who responded, all twenty (n=20) selected multi-dimensional as their choice. This represents 100% of the responses indicating their choice that social competence is multi-dimensional rather than uni-dimensional. In addition to the closed-ended response options to the above posed question, participants were also asked to explain their choice. Thirteen participants (n=13) offered explanation for their selection. Some anonymous participants chose very simplistic explanations such as “many dimensions are apparent”
“a uni-dimensional construct is “unlikely to be inclusive enough for this capacity that pertains to such a wide array of possible tasks/demands” (Participant #14). Dimensions identified as part of social competence construct included: relationship outcomes, problem solving skills, cognitive, interpersonal, developmental, social adjustment, social performance, social skills, and cultural dimensions. A final response indicated a process that included multiple competencies that involved an interaction of perceiving others, acting accordingly and contemplating future interactions.

Research Question

1) How do experts conceptually define social competence?

To answer this question, a rigorous analysis of both the qualitative and quantitative data was conducted. From a quantitative perspective, the following two definitions emerged as the two with the overall highest means. Social competence is conceptually defined as the ability to interact with others in a given social context in specific ways that are socially acceptable or valued and at the same time personally beneficial, mutually beneficial or beneficial primarily to others (overall mean 2.20 ± 0.71). Also, social competence can be conceptually defined as how well an individual can adapt socially to a given situation with other people either one-on-one or in group environment to achieve individual as well as group goals (overall mean 2.12 ± 0.74). From the quantitative analysis, the two definitions that emerged with the highest overall means lower overall standard deviations and were statistically significant, paralleled the main concepts and words that emerged from the qualitative data analysis. These concepts and words included: ability, goals, adaptation, environment, individual and social.
Based on this evidence, one might be able to conclude that social competence is a multi-dimensional construct. In addition, most experts believe that the research community should move toward consensus for a conceptual definition for social competence.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

The literature on social competence continues to grow, but there is little consensus over what comprises the concept of social competence. Early work in the field by Thorndike (1920) showed the first attempt at defining what we might refer to today as social competence as intelligence in the “social arena.” This “social arena” was more specifically defined as “the ability to understand and manage men and women, boys and girls to act wisely in human relations” (Law, et al, 2004, p.484). This study attempted to uncover how experts might define social competence conceptually in hopes of unifying fragmented research in this field. Social competence may be defined as an individual’s ability to adapt to the environment in order to achieve their social goals.

This chapter answers the research questions within the context of current literature. This chapter is organized according to the research question posed: how do experts define social competence conceptually? The first section of the chapter addresses the research question of how experts conceptually define social competence. This section explains the results from the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data collected that revealed that experts connect social skills with social competence, but do not view social competence solely within the term of social skills.

The second section will discuss the position of consensus among participants that social competence is a multi-dimensional concept. The third section explores the
responses offered to the question posed: Should researchers move toward consensus for a definition for social competence? This section details the differences between the participants that indicated researchers should move toward consensus with those that indicated that researchers should not toward consensus of a definition.

Defining Social Competence

Based on the qualitative data collected in the form of open-ended questions, and qualitative analysis outlined in Chapter III, a conceptual definition for social competence is an individual’s ability to adapt to the environment in order to achieve their social goals. From a quantitative analysis which included measures of central tendency, experts rated the following two definitions with highest overall means and lowest standard deviations over the Three Round Delphi: 1) the ability to interact with others in a given social context in specific ways that are socially acceptable or valued and at the same time personally beneficial, mutually beneficial or beneficial primarily to others (overall mean 2.20 ± 0.71 out of a possible 3.00); and 2) how well an individual can adapt socially to a given situation with other people either one-on-one or in group environment to achieve individual as well as group goals (overall mean 2.12 ± 0.74 out of a possible 3.00).

Results and Existing Literature

Baron (2000) referred to social competence as the ability to appropriately interact with other people. Leffert, Benson and Roehlkepartan (1997), described social competence as involving the personal knowledge and skills which persons develop in order to deal effectively with life’s many choices, challenges, and opportunities. More recently, Kostelnik, Stein, Whiren, Soderman and Gregory, (2002) expanded their conceptualization of social competence consisting of six elements. These elements
include (a) adoption of social values, (b) development of a sense of personal identity, (c) acquisition of interpersonal skills, (d) learning how to regulate personal behavior in accord with societal expectations, (e) planning and decision-making and (f) development of cultural competence.

While Kostelnick et al (2002) view social competence in terms of elements of competencies, this study sought to understand how experts define social competence conceptually. Through both qualitative and quantitative analysis various categories emerged that may comprise social competence. These categories, based on the qualitative analysis of data included the terms, abilities, goals, adaptation, environment, individual and social. Words and concepts found in this analysis paralleled findings from Kostelnick et al’s (2002) study of the competencies that comprise social competence. For example, Kostelnick et al (2002) stated that social competence is learning how to regulate personal behavior in accord with societal expectations. The word learning might parallel the category of abilities from this research, while competencies in meeting societal expectations could refer to the categories of adaptation, social and environment. Finally, Kostelnick et al (2002) had as a defining characteristic of social competence the acquisition of interpersonal skills. The researcher concludes that an individual’s ability might denote the same meaning.

One noticeable difference in the results of this study, when compared with Kostelnick et al (2002) is the inclusion of cultural competency as part of the conceptualization of social competence. This study did not find cultural competence to be part of a conceptualization for social competence. Other parts of social competence, as defined by Kostelnick et al (2002), as planning and social decisions making, which may
be reflective of an information processing perspective to understanding what constitutes social competence was not readily supported by participants. In general, according to Rose-Krasnor (1997) this information processing perspective consists of selecting a social goal, monitoring the environment, generating and selecting a strategy, implementing the strategy, evaluating its outcome, and deciding on subsequent action.

While information processing perspectives and cultural competencies did not find much support as a conceptualization for social competence in this study, constructs such as social skills, abilities and social goals did resonate from both the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data. For example, based on the word counts, “individual,” “social” and “ability” were the three most common words utilized by the participants in their conceptualizations for social competence. In addition, the two definitions that received the highest overall ranking based on the means and standard deviations included statements such as “the ability to interact with others in a given social context” and “how well an individual can adapt socially to a given situation with other people either one-on-one or in a group environment to achieve individual as well as group goals”. The above statements both contain references to social skills or skillfulness in social contexts. The conceptualization process for social competence might well begin with an individual’s ‘social ability’, or their ‘social skills’ or social ‘skillfulness’.

Social Skills

Early research from the 1980’s viewed social competence solely in terms of social skills. For example, Sarason (1981) explained social competence as ability in social functioning; while Strong (1983) defined social competence “as the adequacy of a child's interpersonal behavior” (p.247). In 1990, Cavell (1990) presented a tri-component model,
viewing social competence as a multilevel concept comprised of social adjustment, social performance, and social skills. Although there have been many definitions and conceptualizations of social competence chronicled in the literature, the socially valid definition represents a useful way of conceptualizing skillfulness in social contexts or in short, social skills (Gresham, 1983, 1998b; Wolf, 1978).

According to Gresham (1983), a social validity conceptualization defines social skills as socially significant behaviors exhibited in specific situations that predict important social outcomes for children and youth. In addition, he explains that socially significant behaviors are those behaviors that others see, for example what parents, teachers, peers, and students consider important and desirable and that predict an individual's standing on socially important outcomes. Socially important outcomes are outcomes that parents, teachers, peers and students consider important, adaptive, and functional (Newcomb, Bukowski & Pattee, 1993). Socially important outcomes may include peer acceptance and friendships (Newcomb, Bukowski, & Pattee, 1993; Parker & Asher, 1987), teacher and parental acceptance (Gresham, 1992, 1998a; Gresham & Elliott, 1990; Merrell, 1993; Walker & McConnell, 1995), and school adjustment (Gresham, 1983; Gresham & MacMillan, 1997; Hersh & Walker, 1983; Walker, Irwin, Noell, & Singer, 1992). In short, socially important outcomes make a difference in terms of an individual's functioning or adaptation to environmental demands and age-appropriate societal expectations.

An important distinction should be made between social skills and social competence. Agreeing with this view, Gresham, Sugai, and Horner (2001) explain social skills are the specific behaviors that an individual uses to perform competently or
successfully on particular social tasks, for example starting a conversation, giving a compliment, or entering an ongoing play group. Social competence is an evaluative term or outcome based on social agents' judgments, given certain criteria that a person has performed competently on social tasks (McFall, 1982). In sum, this research project supported previous claims that social skills are a part of social competence, but are only one dimension of social competence. It did not support social competence as an evaluative term of a person's social skill as was hinted by McFall (1982).

Dimensionality of Social Competence

Social competence may be a multi-dimensional construct (Cavell, 1990; Schneider, Ackerman, & Kanfer, 1996). Even earlier, Odom and McConnell (1985) argued that the existing approaches to understanding social competence were generally uni-dimensional in nature and may under-represent the actual interpersonal social functioning. In particular, “these approaches all focus primarily on the actions, characteristics, or skills of a particular child, with little attention to the social validity and/or impact of these features” (p. 77).

Based on reviews of research with children and adults, Hops (1983) and McFall (1982) proposed that social competence is not reflected solely by the social behaviors of individuals nor by the social-cognitive processes that underlie these behaviors; the behaviors and processes are necessary but not sufficient for a complete description of social competence. This research found agreement among participants that social competence is a multi-dimensional concept.
Should Researchers Move toward a Conceptual Definition for Social Competence?

As Rodman (1984) put it, conceptual frameworks are primarily "within the context of discovery rather than the context of confirmation" (p. 110). In addition, Rodman (1984) adds that conceptual frameworks can “draw attention systematically to key variables that might otherwise be overlooked" (p. 110). Therefore, a conceptual framework for social competence may help pull together an expanse of data and help organize it so that a coherent and convincing set of generalizations can emerge. Miles and Huberman (1994) concluded that identifying categories, naming them, and providing some direction as to their interrelationship may help lead to the development of a conceptual definition. Therefore, a conceptual framework for social competence may help pull together an expanse of data and help organize it so that a coherent and convincing set of generalizations can emerge.

In this study, fourteen (n=14) out of twenty participants felt that researchers should move toward a conceptual definition for social competence. In agreement with Miles and Huberman (1994), participants in this study indicated several opinions that could be summed up by the following conclusion generated from participants’ responses from Round One of the survey. For researchers who were interested in developing a conceptual definition for research in social competence, the development of a conceptual framework could be used to generate research questions, provide conceptual clarity and make cross-site comparisons. The data from this study was further supported by claims from previously published studies. Some examples include claims by Rodman (1984) that (a) social competence research can be guided by a conceptual framework that would
allow for organizing prior research findings (b) identifying social, environmental and contextual variables that may influence behavior (Vaughn, McIntosh & Hogan, 1990), (c) identifying who and what will or will not be studied (Miles & Huberman, 1994), (d) facilitating the formation of research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994), and (e) designing interventions (Willard, 1993).

In addition, a conceptual definition of social competence can aid in (a) explaining how various factors interact to produce outcomes (Simpson, 1987); (b) providing a shared language with values, methodologies, and assumptions of educational communities organized around the same educational paradigm (Tuthill & Ashton, 1983); (c) providing a method to build theory and advance scientific knowledge (Rodman, 1984); and (d) enabling researchers to contribute to one another's findings and to develop a structured and comprehensive body of knowledge (Schloss, Schloss, Wood & Keihl, 1986). For those participants (n=4) who indicated that research should not move toward a conceptual definition, only one response, which was: “it’s a matter of semantics” found some support in the literature. Foster and Ritchey (2001) recognized this and suggested that a “coherent and convincing framework” (p. 363) might advance research.

Limitations of the Study

Drawing generalizable conclusions from these data may be difficult because of the limitations of the study. Several limitations should be clarified for the reader. First, the data presented is only reflective of those experts that chose to participate in the study; and therefore, may not be generalizable to the entire research field of social competence. While experts were defined as those who had published an article with social competence in the title in the years 2002-2007, only in Round One were the participants a
homogenous group defined as experts. This may be a limitation, because in Rounds Two and Three, the groups also included a convenience sample of educational psychologists. The experts who have published social competence research in the years 2002-2007 may have a differing opinion of what constitutes social competence than educational psychologists in general. It should also be noted that with the addition of the educational psychologists, there was not much movement of the means from Round One to Round Two.

Secondly, to measure a concept as complex as social competence, alternative measures may have been used. The Delphi method may have been too crude or insensitive to pick-up on the experts’ opinions over the course of only three rounds. By supplementing with another qualitative approach, such as interviews, a more complete picture of social competence may have emerged.

Another limitation is that a substantial majority of what researchers know about social competence are based on studies of children, teens and adults living in the United States. Since participants were all affiliated with institutions in the United States, it is possible that their views may only reflect the cultural norms for the Unites States. Because of the aforementioned limitation, it cannot be assumed that the behaviors or attributes that define social competence are equally important in all cultures (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 1998). A growing body of literature suggests that they are not (Mendez, McDermott, & Fantuzzo, 2002; LaFreniere, Masataka, Butovskaya, Chen, Dessen, & Atwanger, 2002). Because research cannot assume that social skills, knowledge, and attitudes are universal, the research field also cannot assume that the same strategies for conceptualizing social competence are appropriate across cultures.
The survey instrument developed for this study, a combination Likert type scale along with open and closed-ended questions is a common approach used to gather and rate responses in research. As with any survey, the language used may have had different meanings to different participants (Smith, 2003). An inability to establish an agreed upon meaning for every word, especially the previously published definitions that were presented for rating, may have been confounding to the research. For example, the term “social success” or “perceptions” may not have the same meaning to each participant. The results of this research in social competence and others studies may be confounded if experts and educational psychologists are defining concepts differently. Future research into conceptualizations of social competence may want to take these issues into consideration. Finally, due to the confidentiality inherent in the research process, those who returned the surveys were anonymous. This prohibited the researcher from being able to contact and clarify and opinions or positions offered by the participants.

Conclusions

Helping persons with significant social and behavior problems achieve social competence remains an elusive goal. It may be that researchers have not been able to achieve more favorable outcomes from social competence research because they do not have a complete picture of its multiplicity of components and how they interrelate. Because researchers do not have a representation of the complete social competence “puzzle,” it is difficult to know where or how to fit individual pieces together (Schneider, Ackerman & Kanfer, 1996). This research suggests that it is time to lay to rest any residual notions that social competence is a monolithic entity comprised solely of social skills. This research provided further support for the position that social competence is
not uni-dimensional, but instead is comprised of several relatively different but independent dimensions or categories.

Secondly, in the absence of an agreed upon conceptual definition, researchers are unable to see gaps in the research because there is not an organized way of looking at the problem. This being stated, knowledge in the area of social competence is likely to remain fragmented and scattered like puzzle pieces whose place in the large picture is unknown. Developing a conceptual framework for the study of social competence holds promise for fitting the pieces into a more coherent whole.

Beyond the educational and practical benefits that accrue from research guided by an agreed-upon conceptual definition lies the question of the potential of educational research to improve practice. Tuthill and Ashton (1983) suggested that educational communities can answer this question by developing a shared theoretical approach, or conceptual framework, ensuring that researchers and practitioners are operating from the same paradigmatic assumptions as they work together to improve social competence research.

Of course, the complexity of a conceptual framework of social competence could pose overwhelming challenges to a researcher. It would be impossible to study all of the interrelations among variables until a conceptual definition emerges. With such a definition, research may then proceed by sectioning the conceptual definition into smaller, more manageable segments that will allow for numerous investigations of the concepts included in the conceptual definition. Based on the data collected in this study, a conceptual definition may well begin with the following statement: social competence is an individual’s ability to adapt to the environment in order to achieve his or her social
goals. From this statement, research may well proceed with conceptualizing the elements of the definitions, for example ability, adapt, environment and social goals.

Directions for Future Research

As is noted by Rose-Krasnor (1997), “researchers should be wary of confusing a limited number of specific skills or indices with the flexible, multidimensional construct of social competence as adaptive and effective functioning” (p. 129). Based on the above, future research may do well to avoid leaps from broad definitions to methodological operationalizations without first defining conceptually the concept of social competence. Once an agreed upon conceptual definition for social competence is adopted in the research community, it would be necessary to begin inquiry into the dimensionality of social competence in order that an individuals’ social competence may not be summarized by a single factor.

Results from this study may serve as a pilot for a more complex study for the validation of a conceptual definition for social competence that includes more than a total of twenty experts. A more complete view of the concept of social competence may be attained by recruiting from across many disciplines, rather than be confined to those researchers who published an article with social competence in the title within the years of 2002-2007, and educational psychologists. In addition, more research may necessarily follow that would suggest a more appropriate way of measuring social competence and by developing age and culturally relevant profiles for measuring this concept. Research has established that people’s self evaluations of their social competence are distinct from their judgments of their competence in the academic and physical domains (Harter, 2003; Shavelson & Marsh, 1986). The broadness of this finding presented above is of great
importance to the research field for two reasons. First, there exists not only a discrepancy in how social competence is conceptualized, but also shows that both individuals and others with whom they associate make value judgments on social competencies. Therefore, once researchers have conceptualized social competence, it must be ascertained if it should be based on a self-evaluation or ratings from another. It may well be time for social competence researchers as well as educators to heed the words of Kostelnik, Stein, Whiren, Soderman and Gregory (2002) that stated “social competence is not a luxury, it makes a tremendous difference in how children feel about themselves” (p. 5); and Hartup (1992) that the best childhood predictor of adult adaptation is not intelligence quotient, or school grades, but rather the adequacy with which a child gets along with others.
REFERENCES


102


Jacoby & Mattel (1971). Three point Likert scales are good enough. *Journal of Marketing Research, 3*, 495-500.


Johns C. (2001). Depending on the intent and emphasis of the supervisor, clinical supervision can be a different experience. *Journal of Nursing Management, 9*, 139–145.


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A-1

THE UNIVERSITY OF AKRON INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW

BOARD APPROVAL

July 9, 2007

Gail K. Paviiga
1965 New Milford Road
Akron, Ohio 44325-2102
0330 972-8111 Fax

Ma. Paviliga:

Your protocol entitled "Social Competence: Towards a Conceptual Definition via the Delphi Method" was determined to be exempt from IRB review on July 9, 2007. The IRB application number assigned to this project is 2070610. The protocol represents minimal risk to subjects and matches the following federal category for exemption:

☐ Exemption 1 - Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices.

☐ Exemption 2 - Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior.

☐ Exemption 3 - Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior not exempt under category 2, but subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office.

☐ Exemption 4 - Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens.

☐ Exemption 5 - Research and demonstration projects conducted by or subject to the approval of department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine public programs or benefits.

☐ Exemption 6 - Testing and evaluation of educational programs and consumer acceptance studies.

Annual continuation applications are not required for exempt projects. If you make changes to the study's design or procedures that increase the risk to subjects or include activities that do not fall within the approved exemption category, please contact the IRB to discuss whether or not a new application must be submitted. Any such changes or modifications must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

Please retain this letter for your files. If the research is being conducted for a master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation, the student must file a copy of this letter with the thesis or dissertation.

Sincerely,

Sharon McWhorter
Associate Director

☐ Approved consent form attached

Cc: Francis Broadway, Advisor
    Rosalie Hall, IRB Chair

The University of Akron is an Equal Education and Employment Institution

125
My name is Gail Pavliga, and I am a doctoral student at the University of Akron. I would like you to participate in a research study. This dissertation research project hopes to discover a conceptual definition for the construct of social competence.

The method that I have chosen to collect your opinions is the Delphi Method. The Delphi Method makes use of a group of experts, selected based on the areas of expertise required. The notion is that well-informed individuals, calling on their insights and experience, are better equipped to predict the conceptual definition of social competence.

You will be asked to participate in a three round Delphi. Each round will include a survey that should take about 15 minutes to complete. These surveys will be e-mailed to you unless you request a hard copy to complete. Your responses to the series of surveys will be anonymous. You will be provided with a summary of opinions before answering the next questionnaire. It is believed that the group will converge toward the "best" response through this consensus process. In each succeeding round of questionnaires, the range of responses by the experts will presumably decrease and the mean will move toward what is deemed to be the best answer for the conceptual definition for social competence.

At the end of the data collection process, I will be happy to share the results with you. If you should have any further questions or concerns, you are welcome to phone me at 330-325-3408, or my dissertation advisor, Dr. Francis Broadway at 330-972-6983. I have read the information provided and all of my questions have been answered. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. My completion and return of this survey will serve as my consent. I may print a copy of this consent statement for future reference. If you choose to withdraw at any time, that will be honored.

I truly look forward to working with you on this research.

Sincerely,
APPENDIX B-1

ROUND ONE SURVEY FOR CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS
OF SOCIAL COMPETENCE

Please indicate your response to the following questions:

Please indicate sex  ____ male  ____ female

Please indicate your position  ____ professor  ____ psychologist

Please indicate your answers to the following questions utilizing the following criterion for your response:

-3  strongly disagree
-2  disagree
-1  slightly disagree
+1  slightly agree
+2  agree
+3  strongly agree

Please indicate your response to the following proposed conceptual definitions for social competence.

1)  I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as the ability to interact with others in a given social context in specific ways that are socially acceptable or valued and at the same time personally beneficial, mutually beneficial or beneficial primarily to others.  

2)  I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as “social success.”

3)  I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as the ability to accurately infer the meaning of perceptual cues from context.

4)  I believe social competence is conceptually defined as the ability to accurately recognize response options (in social contexts) particular to that situation and then choose the most appropriate options.

5)  I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as the ability to be effective in the realization of social goals.

6)  I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as the attainment of relevant social goals in specific social contexts.

7)  I believe social competence is conceptually defined as the ability to perform culturally defined tasks.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8)</td>
<td>I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as the attainment of relevant social goals in specific social contexts using appropriate means and resulting in positive outcomes.</td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 +1 +2 +3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9)</td>
<td>I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as a pattern of effective performance in the environment evaluated from the perspective of salient developmental tasks in context of 21st century society.</td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 +1 +2 +3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10)</td>
<td>I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as the adequacy with which an individual is capable of responding to various problematic situations which confront them.</td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 +1 +2 +3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11)</td>
<td>I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as an ability to generate and coordinate flexible and adaptive responses to demands and to generate and capitalize on opportunities in the environment.</td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 +1 +2 +3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12)</td>
<td>I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as social skillfulness and social abilities that promote general peer acceptance and the formation of friendships.</td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 +1 +2 +3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13)</td>
<td>I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as organizing cognitions and behaviors into integrated actions based on socially and culturally acceptable interpersonal goals.</td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 +1 +2 +3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14)</td>
<td>I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as the ability to continually assess and modify social behavior in order to maximize the likelihood that those social goals will be attained.</td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 +1 +2 +3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15) How do you define social competence conceptually?


16) Do you believe that researchers should move toward consensus for a definition of social competence?
   ___ yes ___ no
   Please explain


17) Do you think social competence is uni-dimensional or multi-dimensional as a concept?
   ___ uni-dimensional ___ multi-dimensional
   Please explain your choice
APPENDIX B-2

CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS OF SOCIAL COMPETENCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conceptual Definitions of Social Competence</th>
<th>Authors/reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as the ability to interact with others in a</td>
<td>(Combs and Slab, 1977)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>given social context in specific ways that are socially acceptable or valued and at the same time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personally beneficial, mutually beneficial or beneficial primarily to others.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as &quot;social success.&quot;</td>
<td>(Attili, 1990)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as the ability to accurately infer the</td>
<td>(Penn, Corrigan, Bentall, Racenstein &amp; Newman, 1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meaning of perceptual cues from context.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) I believe social competence is conceptually defined as the ability to accurately recognize response</td>
<td>(Glass, Guli &amp; Semrud-Clikeman, 2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>options (in social contexts) particular to that situation and then choose the most appropriate options.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as the ability to be effective in the</td>
<td>(Foster &amp; Ritchey, 1979), (Anderson &amp; Messick, 1974)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>realization of social goals.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as the attainment of relevant social goals in</td>
<td>(Ford, 1982)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>specific social contexts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) I believe social competence is conceptually defined as the ability to perform culturally defined fact.</td>
<td>(Ogbu, 1981)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as the attainment of relevant social goals in</td>
<td>(Ford, 1982)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>specific social contexts using appropriate means and resulting in positive outcomes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as a pattern of effective performance in the</td>
<td>(Masten, Coatsworth, Neeman, Gest, Tellegen &amp; Garmazy,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>environment evaluated from the perspective of salient developmental tasks in context of 21st century</td>
<td>(1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>society.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as the adequacy with which an individual is</td>
<td>(Goldfried &amp; D'Zurrilla, 1969)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>capable of responding to various problematic situations which confront them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11) I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as an ability to generate and coordinate</td>
<td>(Waters &amp; Sroufe, 1983)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flexible and adaptive responses to demands and to generate and capitalize on opportunities in the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>environment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12) I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as social skillfulness and social abilities</td>
<td>(Harter, 1982), (Rubin, Coplan, Nelson, Cheah &amp;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that promote general peer acceptance and the formation of friendships.</td>
<td>Lagace-Seguin, 1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13)</td>
<td>I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as organizing cognitions and behaviors into integrated actions based on socially and culturally acceptable interpersonal goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14)</td>
<td>I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as the ability to continually assess and modify social behavior in order to maximize the likelihood that social goals will be attained.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B-3

LETTER FOR ROUND TWO OF DELPHI SURVEY

Dear Professor or Psychologist:

The link below will connect you with the results of Round One of the Delphi survey. This dissertation research project hopes to discover a conceptual definition for the construct of social competence. For Round Two of the survey, which will take less than five minutes to complete, I ask you to look at the group mean for each question from Round One. I then ask you to re-rate your response in light of the group mean. The overall means presented are based on a scoring range of -3 to +3. Also included are five new conceptual definitions for the construct of social competence synthesized from the emerging themes presented by participants to the question, “How would you define social competence conceptually?”

The method that I have chosen to collect your opinions is the Delphi Method. The Delphi Method makes use of a group of experts that are selected based on the areas of expertise required. The notion is that well-informed individuals, calling on their insights and experience, are better equipped to predict the conceptual definition of social competence.

You will receive the final survey in approximately two to three weeks. This survey will be e-mailed to you unless you request a hard copy to complete. Your responses to the series of surveys will be confidential. You will be provided with a summary of opinions before answering the next questionnaire. It is believed that the group will converge toward the "best" response through this consensus process. In each succeeding round of questionnaires, the range of responses by the experts will presumably decrease and the mean will move toward what is deemed to be the best answer for the conceptual definition for social competence.

At the end of the data collection process, I will be happy to share the results with you. If you should have any further questions or concerns, you are welcome to phone me at 330-325-3408, or my dissertation advisor, Dr. Francis Broadway at 330-972-6983.

Your consent to participate in the research will be confirmed by your return of this survey. To access the survey electronically, please click the "Open" button at the bottom of this letter. If you wish to have a hard copy, please choose the "Request a hard copy" link, and one will be sent to you. You may choose to withdraw at any time during the research process, and your decision will be honored.

Thank you for your assistance in helping me to complete my dissertation research. Please respond to this survey by August 21, 2007

Sincerely,
Gail Pavliga, MA
APPENDIX B-4

ROUND TWO SURVEY FOR CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS OF SOCIAL COMPETENCE

Please indicate sex
- ☐ male  ☐ female

Please indicate your position
- ☐ professor  ☐ psychologist

Survey for Conceptual Definitions of Social Competence - Round 2 Please indicate your response to the following questions: Please indicate your answers to the following questions utilizing the following criterion for your response.

(Numbers in parentheses represent the Mean score from Round Two)-3 strongly disagree
-2 disagree
-1 slightly disagree
+1 slightly agree
+2 agree
+3 strongly agree

1. I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as the ability to interact with others in a given social context in specific ways that are socially acceptable or valued and at the same time personally beneficial, mutually beneficial or beneficial primarily to others. (2.05)
2. I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as "social success." (0.65)
3. I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as the ability to accurately infer the meaning of perceptual cues from context. (0.40)
4. I believe social competence is conceptually defined as the ability to accurately recognize response options (in social contexts) particular to that situation and then choose the most appropriate options. (1.40)
5. I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as the ability to be effective in the realization of social goals. (0.85)

6. I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as the attainment of relevant social goals in specific social contexts. (1.00)

7. I believe social competence is conceptually defined as the ability to perform culturally defined tasks. (0.20)
8. I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as the attainment of relevant social goals in specific social contexts using appropriate means and resulting in positive outcomes. (1.2)

9. I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as a pattern of effective performance in the environment evaluated from the perspective of salient developmental tasks in context of 21st
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as the adequacy with which an individual is capable of responding to various problematic situations which confront them. (1.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as an ability to generate and coordinate flexible and adaptive responses to demands and to generate and capitalize on opportunities in the environment. (0.75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as social skillfulness and social abilities that promote general peer acceptance and the formation of friendships. (1.65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as organizing cognitions and behaviors into integrated actions based on socially and culturally acceptable interpersonal goals. (1.40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as the ability to continually assess and modify social behavior in order to maximize the likelihood that those social goals will be attained. (1.30)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B-5
LETTER FOR ROUND THREE OF DELPHI SURVEY

Dear Professor or Psychologist:

The link below will connect you with the final round of the Delphi survey, as well as indicate the results from Round Two. This dissertation research project hopes to discover a conceptual definition for the construct of social competence. For Round Three of the survey, which will take less than three minutes to complete, I ask you to look at the group mean for each question from Round Two. Then, I would ask that you re-rate your responses in light of the group mean. The overall means presented are based on a scoring range of -3 to +3. The purpose of Round Three is to try and move closer toward a definition for the construct of social competence.

The method that I have chosen to collect your opinions is the Delphi Method. The Delphi Method makes use of a group of experts that are selected based on the areas of expertise required. The notion is that well-informed individuals, calling on their insights and experience, are better equipped to predict the conceptual definition of social competence.

This survey is being sent to you electronically, but you may request a hard copy to complete. Your responses to the final survey will be confidential. It is believed that the group will converge toward the "best" response through this consensus process.

At the end of the data collection process, I will be happy to share the results with you. If you should have any further questions or concerns, you are welcome to phone me at 330-325-3408, or my dissertation advisor, Dr. Francis Broadway at 330-972-6983.

Your consent to participate in the research will be confirmed by your return of this survey. To access the survey electronically, please click the "Open" button at the bottom of this letter. If you wish to have a hard copy, please choose the "Request a hard copy" link, and one will be sent to you. You may choose to withdraw at any time during the research process, and your decision will be honored.

Thank you for your assistance in helping me to complete my dissertation research. Please respond to this survey by September 10, 2007

Sincerely,
Gail Pavliga, MA
APPENDIX B-6

ROUND THREE SURVEY FOR CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS
OF SOCIAL COMPETENCE

Please indicate sex
○ male ○ female

Please indicate your position
○ professor ○ psychologist

Survey for Conceptual Definitions of Social Competence - Round 3. Please indicate your response to the following questions: Please indicate your answers to the following questions utilizing the following criterion for your response.

(Numbers in parentheses represent the Mean score from Round Two)-3 strongly disagree
-2 disagree
-1 slightly disagree
+1 slightly agree
+2 agree
+3 strongly agree

1. I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as the ability to interact with others in a given social context in specific ways that are socially acceptable or valued and at the same time personally beneficial, mutually beneficial or beneficial primarily to others. (2.37)

2. I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as "social success." (0.56)

3. I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as the ability to accurately infer the meaning of perceptual cues from context. (0.18)

4. I believe social competence is conceptually defined as the ability to accurately recognize response options (in social contexts) particular to that situation and then choose the most appropriate options. (1.62)

5. I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as the ability to be effective in the realization of social goals. (0.56)

6. I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as the attainment of relevant social goals in specific social contexts. (1.18)

7. I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as the attainment of relevant social goals in specific social contexts using appropriate means and resulting in positive outcomes. (1.68)

10. I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as the adequacy with which an individual is capable of responding to various problematic situations which confront them. (0.5)

11. I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as an ability to generate and coordinate flexible and adaptive responses to demands and to generate and capitalize on opportunities in the environment. (0.93)

12. I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as social skillfulness and social abilities that promote general peer acceptance and the formation of friendships. (1.81)

13. I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as organizing cognitions and behaviors into integrated actions based on socially and culturally acceptable interpersonal goals. (1.25)
14 - I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as the ability to continually assess and modify social behavior in order to maximize the likelihood that those social goals will be attained. (1.43)

15 - I believe that social competence can be conceptually defined as the ability of an individual to read the environment and adapt their behavior to meet personal goals. (1.00)

16 - I believe that social competence can be conceptually defined as an ability to deal effectively with the constantly changing demands in one's social environment. (1.56)

17 - I believe that social competence can be conceptually defined as the capacity for engaging in social interactions that maintain positive relationships. (1.62)

18 - I believe that social competence can be conceptually defined as how well an individual can adapt socially to a given situation with other people either one-on-one or in a group environment to achieve individual as well as group goals. (2.12)

19 - I believe that social competence can be conceptually defined as the ability to adapt to all situations and reach a maturity level allowing one to respect all people and their level of social interaction. (1.25)

(Numbers in parentheses represent the Mean score from Round Two) Note: The following have excluded due to overall negative mean:

7 - I believe social competence is conceptually defined as the ability to perform culturally defined tasks. (-0.31)

9 - I believe that social competence is conceptually defined as a pattern of effective performance in the environment evaluated from the perspective of salient developmental tasks in context of 21st century society. (-0.06)