

PARTICIPATION IN SKILLS USA AND PERCEIVED
STUDENT VALUE: A CASE STUDY

By

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to explain the role that involvement in SkillsUSA played in overall perceived value of a student's educational experience at a large, Midwestern, Career and Technology Education Center. The study population was a purposive sample comprised of students at a large Career and Technology Education center in a Midwestern institution. The study population consisted of secondary and post-secondary students who ranged in age from 18 to 60 years old. The study areas took place within the classroom setting and also consisted of sites where study participants were engaged in miscellaneous student organization activities. The findings from this study indicate that those who become involved in SkillsUSA have a very positive overall sense of value in their educational experience. Findings indicated that the more SkillsUSA activities the participants chose to get involved in, greater value was associated with the educational experience. This study could be conducted on a larger scale. It would help the applicability of this study to be done among several CTE school districts that would include more diversity in demographics and observe the manifestations that occur in a much larger sample population. This study could also benefit from opening up the participant population to include secondary students. This would allow the researcher to observe possible similarities or differences between secondary and post-secondary SkillsUSA members to observe the perceived value participation in SkillsUSA provides in their experience. Finally, there could be possible benefit from taking a mixed methods approach to this study.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Career and technical student organizations (CTSOs) have been in existence since the early 1900s, just after career and technical education (CTE) programs were formed. CTSOs were developed to provide co-curricular activities and opportunities to engage students to be able to further develop competencies through varying skills-related contests specific to occupational trades. In addition to skills contests, most CTSOs develop many leadership-related skills such as extemporaneous speech, prepared speech, and job interviewing. Leadership contests are often developed to improve student skills that will help them become leaders within any occupational training area and go on to be productive and responsible contributors in a global society. These skills include leadership proficiencies and interpersonal or “soft skills” that employers demand in businesses. Alfeld et al. (2007) found that the more students participated in CTSO activities, the higher their academic motivation, academic engagement, grades, career self-efficacy, college aspirations, and employability skills. These participation outcomes would indicate value of CTSOs as beneficial to the education of any individual that participates in a CTE program.

However, unlike other areas of career and technical education, little research exists to support the claims of career and technical student organizations of the benefits to

their members (Zirkle & Connors, 2003). In a study for the National Center for Research in Vocational Education, Camp, Jackson, Buser, and Baldwin (2000) stated, “Adequate research to address the impact and benefits of *VSOs (CTSOs) is simply not available” (p. iv). Lankard (1996) stated, “Although participation in these organizations has been associated with the development of positive work attitudes and leadership skills, it is unclear the extent to which participation in career and technical student organizations contributes to participants’ career and occupational development” (p. 1). Based on this information, there is confusion in regards to how involvement in CTSOs will benefit students.

Although there are many CTSOs that are specific to many different trade areas being taught, this study will focus on SkillsUSA, a CTSO that deals with trade and industrial technical training programs being taught across the country. SkillsUSA was founded in 1965 and was known then as the Vocational and Industrial Clubs of America or VICA. Today, SkillsUSA is a student organization that serves over 300,000 students and instructors. Instructors and advisors make up over 14,000 of the total membership. There are over 17,000 chapters in 54 states. SkillsUSA (2016) claims:

SkillsUSA is an applied method of instruction for preparing America’s high performance workers in public career and technical programs. It provides quality education experiences for students in leadership, teamwork, citizenship and character development. It builds and reinforces self-confidence, work attitudes and communications skills. It emphasizes total quality at work—high ethical standards, superior work skills, life-long education, achievement, and pride in the dignity of

work. SkillsUSA also promotes understanding of the free-enterprise system and involvement in community service. (p. 1)

Statement of Problem

SkillsUSA chapters were created to assist their members in acquiring job-related technical skills, leadership skills, and achievement (Alfeld et al., 2007; Brown, 2002; Brown, 2003; Gunderson, 2004; Johnson, 2008; McNally & Harvey, 2001; Ullrich, Pavelock, Fazarro, & Shaw, 2007). SkillsUSA has instituted programs such as job-related contests, the Workforce Ready System, the Professional Development Program, Career Skills Education Program, Student 2 Student Mentoring Program, and a program called CareerSafe. All of these programs are designed to help students achieve job-related technical skills, leadership skills, and achievement in and out of the classroom.

Although SkillsUSA chapters are capable of improving students' technical skills, leadership skills, and achievement, some students do not realize these benefits (Alfeld et al., 2007; Zirkle & Connors, 2003). One reason for this anomaly is because while every student is encouraged to participate, not all will do so or if they do participate, may not choose to be engaged. Also, many underperforming students do not experience these benefits because they are not encouraged to do so by school advisors because of preconceived expectations about their abilities. Other factors such as socioeconomic status, health concerns, and special needs are other possible reasons (Alfeld et al., 2007; Zirkle & Connors, 2003).

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explain the role that involvement in SkillsUSA played in overall perceived value of a student's educational experience at a large, Midwestern, Career and Technology Education Center.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

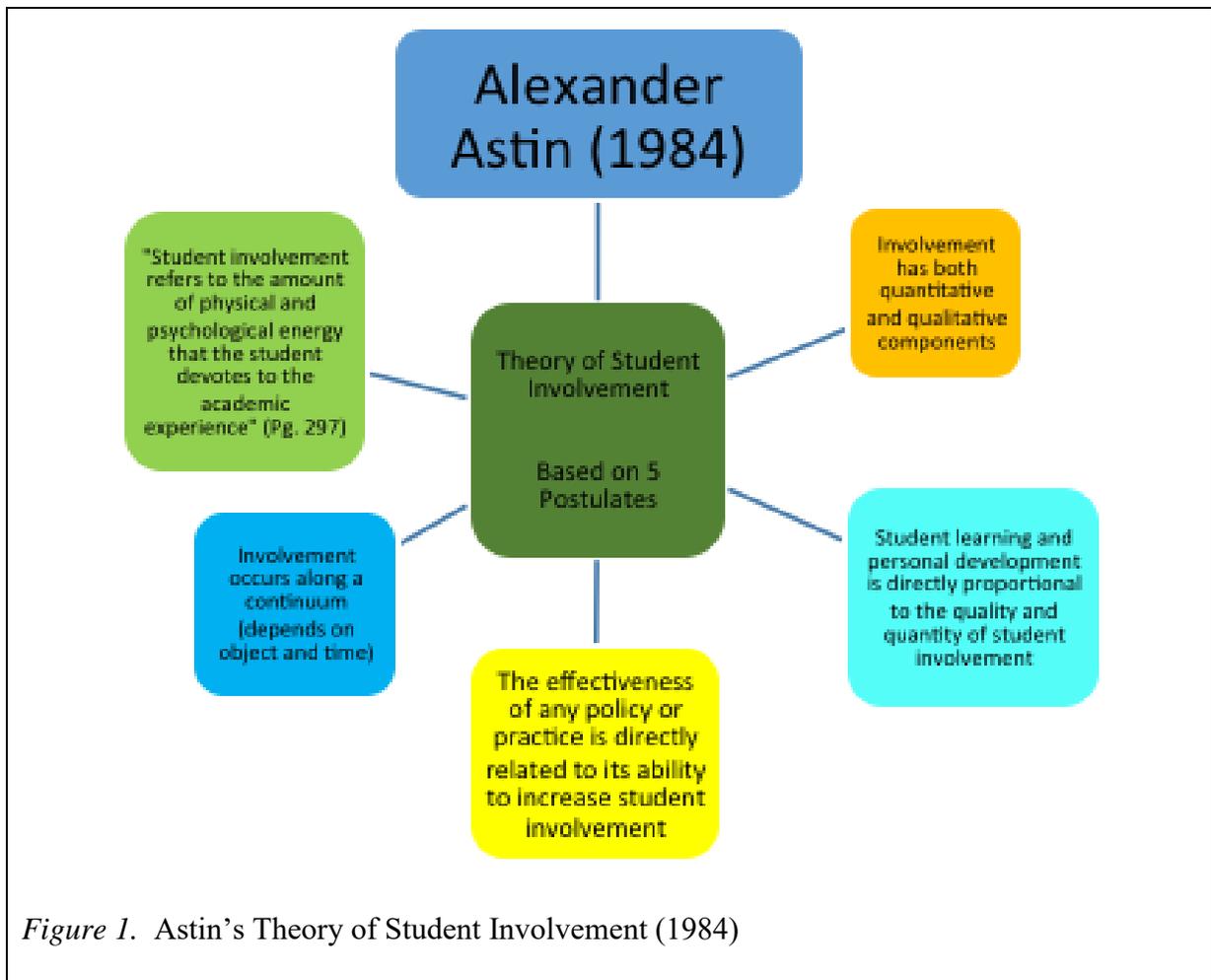
1. How did participants explain the value of their experience in SkillsUSA?
2. What benefits and weaknesses did they perceive in their involvement with SkillsUSA?
3. How did participants explain how the value of their experience in SkillsUSA was influenced by other factors?

Epistemological Perspective

The constructivist epistemological perspective guided this research. This perspective posits that the knowledge gained by any one person is directly a result of that person's perspective in how they experience things and is personally constructed (Ultanir, 2012). This epistemological perspective is suited for qualitative inquiry. Qualitative studies seek to find the reasons, opinions, or motivations to a particular problem or phenomenon (Monfared & Derakhshan, 2015).

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks have been described as the map for a study, giving rationale for the development of research questions or hypotheses (Fulton & Krainovich-Miller, 2010). LoBiondo-Wood (2010) said that the research question, purpose, literature review and theoretical framework should all complement each other and help with the operationalization of the design. Astin's Theory of Involvement (1984) will be the framework for this study. Figure 1 shows how involvement influences student learning.



Involvement appears to play a significant role in how students thrive when they participate in a CTSO like SkillsUSA. Through prior observation of student participation in SkillsUSA, it seems it is through the experiences and involvement of the student that real progress is made towards the occupational goals of the individual.

Significance of the Study

Significance to Research

This study has potential to be significant to the current body of research on CTE and SkillsUSA. While there is research that shows correlations between academic achievement and students that participate in CTE programs, there is not a great wealth of data that directly examines the perceptions of students involved in SkillsUSA. Some studies have briefly

mentioned SkillsUSA, but none to date have been done specifically on students that were involved in SkillsUSA. This study would provide initial data and provide a springboard for other studies on students and SkillsUSA.

Significance to Theory

The lens of Astin's involvement theory might be used to explain how CTSOs give students additional opportunities to practice what they are learning in their programs. This will give a new and unique perspective to how Astin's involvement theory could possibly be applied (Threeton, Ewing, & Clark, 2010).

Significance to Practice

The data from this study may help prove the worth of CTSOs to legislators and help to show the value to students. This could lead to increased funding through legislation. This study may also give CTE educators the ability to look at tangible data in ways that can help identify strengths and weaknesses in current CTSO practices and make improvements in how to better provide those services to students.

Methodology

The work of Yin (2002) guided this explanatory case study. Yin (2002) defined a case as "a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between a phenomenon and context are not clear and the researcher has little control over the phenomenon and context" (p. 13). Yin posited that there are questions that need to be answered that require case study as the necessary approach. In order to investigate a distinct situation including "many more variables of interest than data points," case studies draw from manifold lines of evidence for triangulating purposes and avails itself of "prior

development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis” (Yin, 2002, pp. 13-14).

Setting and Participants

This explanatory case study took place in spring 2017 and explored perspectives of a selected group of students involved in the student organization SkillsUSA. The study population was a purposive sample comprised of students at a large Career and Technology Education center in a Midwestern institution. The study population consisted of secondary and post-secondary students who ranged in age from 18 to 60 years old. The study areas took place within the classroom setting and also consisted of sites where study participants were engaged in miscellaneous student organization activities.

Data Collection

Different data types were collected for this case study, including interviews, document and artifact analysis, photographs, as well as participant observation. Documents and artifacts were collected throughout data collection that supported the study questions and represented participant experiences. I also made onsite observations and conducted interviews of the study participants, using a combined approach as described by Patton (2002), where there were a set of structured open-ended questions designed to solicit views and opinions of the participants about their involvement in SkillsUSA.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis includes the processes and procedures whereby identification, examination, and interpretation of patterns and themes are extrapolated from the collected data. The process begins with more broad open-ended inquiry and moves towards more precise data organization as more information emerges.

Interviews were transcribed and categorized in themes by myself along with collection of documents and field notes from observations. While Astin's Theory of Involvement is the lens by which this data was analyzed, the study may be modified if new emergent themes become apparent.

Thick, rich, description was used in the data reporting in order to make the results more realistic and meaningful. Member checking was used in an effort to ensure that data were analyzed and presented accurately to reflect the thoughts and opinions of the participants and their involvement in the study.

Assumptions

An assumption is a statement intended to be true without evidence. Several assumptions were made about students' decisions to join SkillsUSA:

1. Students have preconceived notions about SkillsUSA.
2. Students' prior positive SkillsUSA experience can potentially determine their future participation in collegiate student organizations and career professional associations.
3. Many students do not know the benefits of SkillsUSA membership.

Definition of Terms

Some definitions of terms may be helpful for understanding of this study:

Career and Technical Education (CTE) – This is a branch of education that primarily deals with teaching secondary and post-secondary students occupational trades that help them gain employment all over the world.

Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs) – CTSOs are an integral part of career and technical education that serve to give students opportunities to further develop occupational skills, leadership skills, and academic skills.

Vocational Education – Vocational education was the former term for career and technical education. It was changed to CTE in order to try to remove the negative stigma that the public has that CTE is only for at risk students.

SkillsUSA – A CTSO created in 1965 for students in trade and industrial education programs within the CTE system.

Remedial Courses – Courses designed to reinforce prior learning and help bring a student’s skill level up to where it should be in relation to other students.

Summary

This study may help clarify the value of participation in SkillsUSA to students and give more evidence as to the contributions of CTSOs to CTE and non-CTE students alike. I have worked in the CTE field for 18 years and see the value that CTSOs, like SkillsUSA, have to the students on a daily basis. This study has the potential to lead to other studies that will benefit the body of research, the theories surrounding CTSOs, and the field of CTE.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chapter II provides a review of pertinent literature on student involvement and the national SkillsUSA programs. The following sections serve as guidelines for the literature review: (a) overview of CTSOs, (b) goals and outcomes of CTSOs, (c) reasons surrounding varied results of participation in CTSOs, and (d) theoretical framework. Vocational Student Organizations (VSOs), now termed Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs), have been an integral component of Career and Technical Education (CTE) since the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 (Alfeld et al., 2007; Threton & Pellock, 2008). Since its inception, CTE has undergone major changes, but the integral relationship between CTE and CTSOs has always remained the same. The Carl D. Perkins CTE Improvement Act of 2006, also known as Perkins IV includes CTSOs as an important partner of CTE programs as well as meeting the requirements set forth in that legislation (Threton & Pellock, 2008). CTSOs prepare students to become productive, responsible citizens and assume leadership roles in their communities. CTSOs provide career and leadership development, motivation, and recognition for current and past secondary and post-secondary students in career and technical education programs.

A CTSO has been found to be most effective when implemented by trained CTE professionals. A dedicated instructor provides organized curriculum-oriented activities that help students gain career, leadership, academic, and personal skills that maximize employability skills and the ability to become productive citizens in the workforce, home, and community. The following sections address the general overview of CTSOs, goals and outcomes of involvement in CTSOs, and possible reasons surrounding varied results of participation in CTSOs.

Overview of CTSOs

The idea of an organization that is designed to foster the development and learning of a student's career goals and skills has its foundations as far back as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when similar organizations such as trade guilds and apprenticeships societies were formed. In 1917, the Smith-Hughes Act was enacted that was the founding legislation that gave federal dollars for vocational education in the United States (Alfeld et al., 2007; Johnson, 2008; McNally & Harvey, 2001). This act also provided funding for CTSOs. In 1926, the first national association for vocational education was created called the American Vocational Association, and in 1928, the first CTSO, the Future Farmers of America was formed (Reese, 2003; Zirkle & Connors, 2003). From the beginning of vocational education, CTSOs were intended to provide structured developmental opportunities for students that will give them the skills to master career trades and leadership abilities that will transition them to be productive and responsible contributors to society (Alfeld et al., 2007; Johnson, 2008; McNally & Harvey, 2001).

Gordon (2003) stated that Career and Technical Student Organizations generally are formed into chapters at the local level with advisors and sponsors, with support from state departments of education in the form of state advisors, with administrative and financial assistance. The CTSO national offices provide policy and curriculum development assistance to the state and local units. State departments of education support CTSOs through administrative and financial assistance with contests, meetings and conferences. Many state departments of education designate state advisors for each CTSO and these individuals interact with the local chapters on various activities (Zirkle & Connors, 2003). There are ten nationally recognized CTSOs: Business Professionals of America (BPA), Distributed Education Clubs of America (DECA), Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA), Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA), Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA), Future Farmers of America (FFA), National Young Farmer Educational Association (NYFEA), National Postsecondary Agricultural Student Organization (PAS), SkillsUSA, and Technology Student Association. For the purposes of this study, focus will be placed on students in SkillsUSA.

Goals and Outcomes of CTSOs

The goals of CTSOs include leadership development, professional development, community service, and competitive events (Alfeld et al., 2007). Involvement in these activities is designed to enhance student's employability skills, personal characteristics, interpersonal skills, motivation, and academic achievement (Alfeld et al., 2007; Johnson, 2008; Zirkle & Connors, 2003). This is accomplished through a co-curricular design that is integrated into each CTE program that has a CTSO associated with it.

The literature indicates a number of desirable outcomes from these programs for CTE students. CTSOs rely heavily on competitions to reinforce occupationally related skills that are being taught in the classroom. Many of these competitive events integrate academic outcomes into problem scenarios that help the students to not only practice the job-related skills they have learned, but also reinforce academic competencies that are being taught (Zirkle & Connors, 2003). Participants involved in these competitive events also gain recognition for their efforts.

Many business and industry companies partner with the CTSO to hold these competitions (Zirkle & Connors, 2003). A study of sophomore CTSO members conducted by Camp, Navaratnum, and Jeffreys (1987) found participation in career and technical student organizations produced a positive contribution to student achievement, which was measured by student grades. Another study by Camp (1990) found that academic achievement by students was enhanced by participation in extracurricular activities. Glover and Murrell (1998) found that progress in general academics and higher GPAs are positively associated with influences by student organizations.

Ullrich et al. (2007) studied the effectiveness of CTSOs in Texas and found the following:

Administrators indicated that FFA was the CTSO that was either most effective or second most effective in teaching leadership skills, keeping students engaged in school, improving technical skills, and improving academic achievement. HOSA and Skills USA also were consistent in being among the top three CTSOs that were effective in providing one of the four characteristics. (p. 2)

In this same study, more than eighty percent of these administrators perceived the FFA, HOSA, DECA, and SkillsUSA were effective in improving student achievement. Plank (2001) and Plank, DeLuca, and Estacion (2005) found that career and technical education (CTE), which is co-curricular rather than extra-curricular, can also play a role in keeping youth in school. Stone, Alfeld, Pearson, Lewis, and Jenson (2006) found that despite “vocational” education’s traditional stigma, it has recently been shown that academic skills can be enhanced in CTE content courses.

DeWitt (2008) stated, "A recent study found that CTSO activities positively affect students’ academic engagement, and the stronger the student’s involvement, the better the results” (p. 21). There are other desirable outcomes that were found across all literature that was reviewed. Among these included soft skills such as dependability, teamwork, honesty, trustworthiness, initiative, and motivation. Motivation is believed to be a key factor relating to increased academic achievement. In a Purdue study quoted by Reese (2001):

83 percent of FFA students consider their agriculture courses to be exciting, interesting, and challenging as compared to only 32% of typical students. These students are also more likely to believe the amount of work they do in school is important to their success later in life and more likely to believe it is important to do their best in all of their classes. (p. S17)

Another study by Sarkees (1983) found that when students participated in a CTSO, they reported having more self-confidence, better interpersonal relationship skills, and vocational related and employability skills. They also demonstrated increased

motivation for learning, valuable information about citizenship and living independently, improved leadership skills, as well as more effective student-teacher interaction.

While many elements of CTSOs are thought to have positive effects on students (Brown, 2002), studies by Lankard (1996) and Zirkle and Connors (2003) showed that little research exists to support the claims of these organizations benefit their members. In an address to the National Center for Research in Vocational Education in 1983, Edwin Miller, President of the Future Business Leaders of America-Phi Beta Lambda was asked if he knew of any studies that had evaluated the effects of career and technical student organizations. Miller responded by stating, “Unfortunately, there have not been any, to my knowledge. I have seen a few dissertations addressing the topic, but I frankly feel that they have fallen short” (Miller, 1983, p. 7). Over the last twenty-five years, there have only been a handful of studies that looked at the positive effects of participation in CTSOs by students and of those, fewer still focus on academic achievement.

To date, there has been no large-scale, comprehensive study that examines the immediate or long-term benefits of participation in CTSOs with respect to the development and assessment of employability skills or other indicators of student success, such as achievement and post-high school pathways (Camp et al., 2000; National Dissemination Center for Career and Technical Education, 2002; Zirkle & Connors, 2003). Zirkle and Connors (2003) also suggested that there is an absence of verifiable evidence that supports claims that involvement in CTSOs develops essential workplace skills and has suggested CTSOs develop an assessment procedure that can measure the outcome of participation in CTSOs. Lankard (1996) stated:

Although participation in these student organizations has been associated with the development of positive work attitudes and leadership skills, it is unclear the extent to which involvement in a career technical student organization contributes to students' career and occupational development. (p. 1)

Johnson (2008) posited, "Many administrators and instructors assume that a CTSO is a social gathering for the students and not related or beneficial to a student's academic achievement" (p. 14). Some studies found that participation in other non-CTSO related extracurricular activities provide the same type of benefits claimed by CTSO's (Alfeld et al., 2007). Mahoney, Larson, Eccles, and Lord (2005) found that the most popular non-school activities are extracurricular activities, volunteering, and part-time work. Alfeld et al. (2007) found that compared to a general classroom (non-CTE courses such as English and social studies), being in a CTSO was only associated with higher levels of career self-efficacy in the fall, and while both CTSO and general students gained over the school year, CTSO students gained significantly less. In addition, while their levels were not significantly different from those of general students in the fall, CTSO students also gained less than general students in college aspirations (and tended to gain less in civic engagement) between fall and spring. This particular finding does not correspond directly to academic achievement, but it does indicate that there may not be an advantage to being in a CTSO for students by comparison to non-CTSO students.

In the vocational educational system, SkillsUSA is an important CTSO. According to the SkillsUSA website (2017), SkillsUSA was founded in 1965 as the Vocational Industrial Club of America (VICA) in Nashville, Tennessee. There were fourteen different states represented as the new CTSO chose its name, colors, motto,

purposes, and goals. By 2004, VICA was changed to SkillsUSA and had exceeded over two hundred thousand members and was organized in over seventeen thousand three hundred classrooms in fifty-two different states and territories. Today, SkillsUSA is the largest CTSO in the United States serving over three-hundred thousand middle school, high school, and college/post-secondary students enrolled in training programs that prepare these students for technical, skilled, and service occupations around the globe (History and Brand section of website). SkillsUSA has served over twelve million members since it was founded in 1965. SkillsUSA's mission is to prepare students to become world class workers, leaders, and responsible American citizens. SkillsUSA has a structured program that is designed to assist students in reaching their stated mission through co-curricular leadership training as well as organized skills and leadership competitions at the state and national level where students can demonstrate their learned skills in these areas.

SkillsUSA's goal is to improve the quality of our nation's workforce through a program of citizenship, leadership, employability, technical, and professional skills training. Many components are in place to help achieve these goals. At the annual national leadership and skills conference, more than sixteen thousand students, teachers, and business partners participate in this week-long event that showcases the skill and leadership talent of the very best students from across the nation. Competitions allow each student to hone their crafts and help to motivate each student to excel in learning the professional skills necessary to be successful in the work place. Programs of work are developed in every chapter in order for students to learn how to plan much the same way businesses do to achieve their goals.

Every local SkillsUSA chapter is comprised of students enrolled in a technical trade program and a teacher advisor. There may be several local chapters in a CTE institution depending on how many training programs there are at that location. Each of these training programs also have corresponding skills competitions that students can participate in. While the focus of a SkillsUSA chapter is the student, a key factor is the SkillsUSA chapter advisor. The advisor plays a crucial part in helping students to learn about the benefits involved from participation in SkillsUSA. The SkillsUSA Membership Kit (2012-2013) states that advisor responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- Advising and supporting chapter officers in organizing and running the chapter
- Acting as a role model for students and members
- Seeking counsel from community members (parents and community leaders are great resources)
- Securing needed materials and resources to support member development
- Working with local businesses to offer field trips and networking opportunities
- Preparing students for SkillsUSA Championships
- Collaborating with other advisors to strengthen curriculum and activities

The advisor role cannot be underestimated. Students need to be guided and mentored to have meaningful chapter activities and a quality chapter. In many states, the role of the CTSO advisor is important enough that when the schools undergo accreditation evaluation, active participation of CTSO advisors is one of the evaluation criteria.

Programs have been developed to assist student chapters like The Professional Development Program, The Chapter Excellence Program, Career Readiness Curriculum, and the Workforce Readiness Curriculum (Overview section of website). These are designed as additional resources that are meant to enhance the learning, leadership, and professionalism of members of SkillsUSA. SkillsUSA has been developed to help enhance America's future workforce through its comprehensive set of support systems that help to develop CTE students into highly trained professionals that have the leadership skills to be successful in any industry. Additional details regarding SkillsUSA at the national level, state level, and local level will be included at the end of this chapter.

Varied Results of Participation in CTSOs

As mentioned above, contradictory evidence exists regarding the benefits of participation in CTSOs. All CTSO students do not derive the same benefit as others. In an article titled "Through Rose Colored Glasses" published in *The Agricultural Education Magazine*, the anonymous author (1999) stated, "We assert that the FFA develops premier leadership, personal growth, and career success. But does it really? Just because we say it does, doesn't necessarily mean it really does" (p. 27). After citing several studies, the author concludes "...there is virtually no solid evidence to support the contention that FFA develops leadership" (p. 27). In a study for the National Center for Research in Vocational Education, Camp, Jackson, Buser and Baldwin (2000) stated, "Adequate research to address the impact and benefits of VSOs is simply not available" (p. iv). Simply put, while CTSOs have received much attention in the CTE field, most of the research on their contributions and benefits is anecdotal (Alfeld et al., 2007).

Alfeld et al. (2007) commented that although there is much anecdotal evidence linking student involvement in CTSOs with positive civic, educational, and work outcomes, research on exactly how this occurs is virtually nonexistent. Further, in this study, CTSOs are thought to have beneficial effects on key outcomes for participating students for a variety of reasons, including their provision of authentic instruction, supportive adults, a task-focused peer group, clear goals and rewards, and opportunities for achievement, leadership, and skill development in a career-related field. Alfeld et al. (2007) also stated “the effects of participation were smaller than we expected, and not always in the hypothesized direction” (p. 31). Some other factors that might also influence the benefits of CTSOs to some members and not others include findings by Johnson (2008). This study stated that many barriers were identified including time restraints, family responsibilities, and lack of instructor interest. More advantages than disadvantages are found in the research regarding membership in a CTSO. Johnson (2008) stated that:

Sixty-one percent of students did not join a CTSO because they did not have time to participate. Eight percent of students did not participate because they did not have the money to join the CTSO. Twenty-three percent of students were unaware of the CTSOs that were available to them. (p. 72)

These facts, alone, could be a reason that some students do better academically than others. Some simply do not have the time, money, or knowledge of the benefit CTSOs can provide to them. Johnson (2008) also concluded that other variables may be associated with higher GPAs and graduation rates. For example, ACT scores, participation in remedial courses, and job advancements may contribute to higher GPAs

and graduation rates. In light of these findings during the review of literature, further research is needed on the benefits of participation in CTSOs for students and its effect on their increased academic achievement in order to gain a better understanding of this relationship.

Theoretical Framework

Career and Technology Education (CTE) emphasizes the application of skills being learned as a trademark of the best practices of how students are trained for the future workforce. This study will use Astin's Theory of Involvement to frame the study questions as well as the results that come from the resulting data. SkillsUSA is a student organization that is co-curricular and intended to help students to develop and practice their technical and leadership skills. Astin's Theory will be utilized to explain student participation in SkillsUSA.

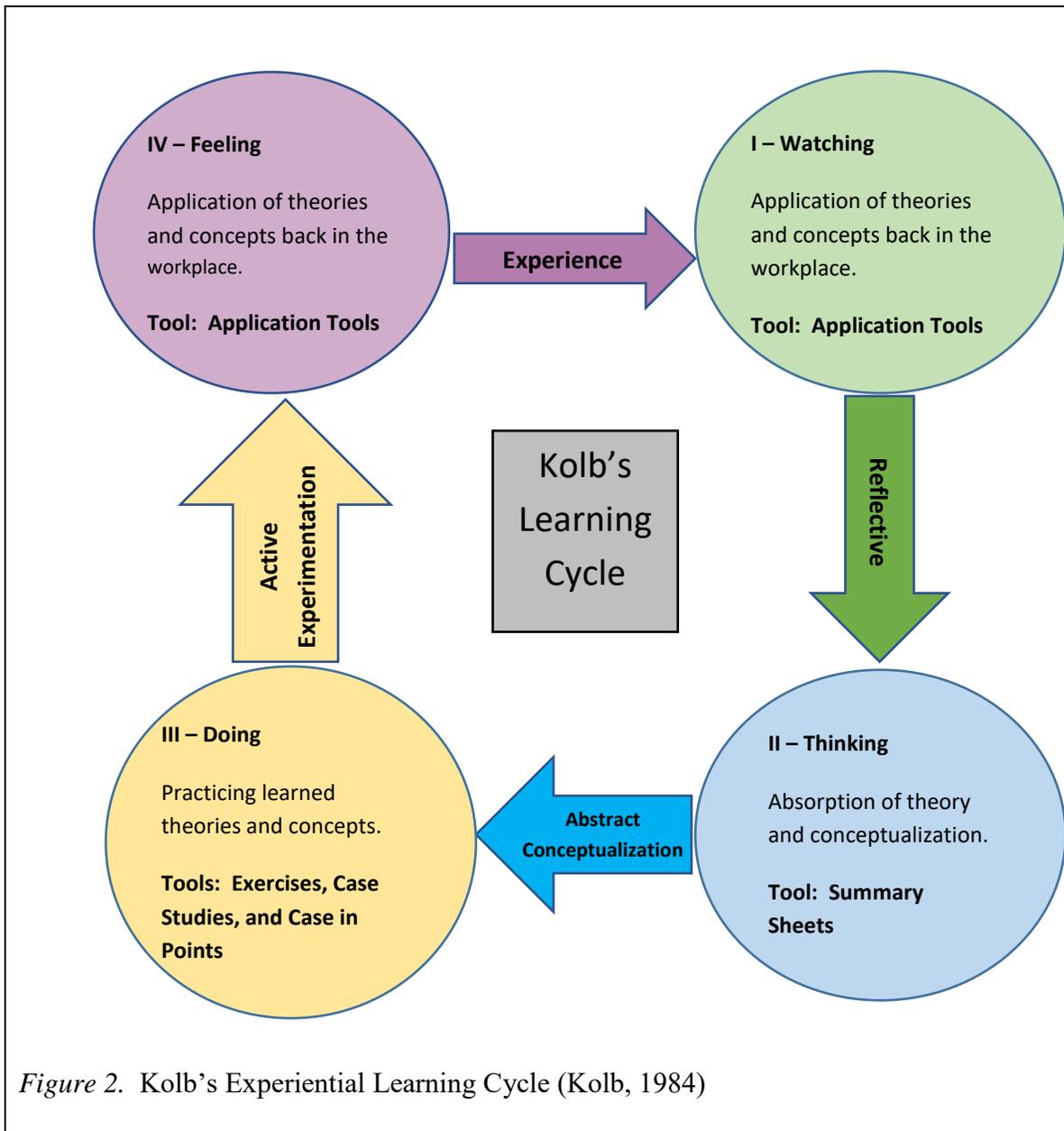
For many years, CTE has embraced a couple of ideologies that can easily be applied to CTE. Kolb's Experiential Learning theory has been used through the practice of hands-on learning (see Figure 2.1). CTE provides a place where the academic skills needed for moving into the workplace are enhanced (Stone, 2005).

Students get these essential workplace skills through a strategy known as contextual learning. Contextual learning theory asserts that learning occurs when students process new information or knowledge in such a way that it makes sense to them based on their own experience (Kolb, 1984). The terms, contextual learning and experiential learning, are often used interchangeably. In CTE programs, students glean cognitive knowledge through theory and make learning meaningful through hands-on exercises

intended to reinforce their learning. These experiences allow students to give meaning to what they plan to do in their careers.

Brookfield (1983) described experiential learning as the "sort of learning undertaken by students who are given a chance to acquire and apply knowledge, skills and feelings in an immediate and relevant setting" (p. 16). The difference between this type of learning environment and teacher-focused instruction is that the students have active engagement with what they are being taught as opposed to passive involvement with little engagement that is typical of a lecture based environment. The typical CTE program of instruction implements classroom teaching, lab applications, supervised live work experiences, and active involvement. CTE student organization activities reinforce all of these activities. Scott and Sarkees-Wircenski (2008) emphasized that most career and technical education programs are real-life in nature and designed to help students become better employees. Doolittle and Camp (1999), state that experiential learning aligns with constructivism epistemology, which posits that learners construct meaning from their experiences.

CTE has long embraced problem-based learning, which is related to experiential learning and leads to much higher learning outcomes. Boone (1990) examined student achievement and retention of knowledge based on the use of the problem-solving approach to teaching. Boone found that students who were taught through problem-solving approaches retained content better than those taught using subject matter approaches. Therefore, experiential learning and how it is implemented in CTE programs and student organizations like SkillsUSA stand to have a tremendous impact on student success measures in their chosen CTE program.



SkillsUSA relates to Kolb's theory, because students apply what they are learning in their training programs to SkillsUSA competitions and leadership training. In addition, students run for district, state, and national officer positions. The experiences and

learning gained from these activities are directly related to Kolb's theory. While much of what CTE is founded on can be applied to experiential theory through contextual application of occupational skills, it does not completely embrace all of experiential learning theory. It appears that what truly leads to positive outcomes for CTE students is their active participation in the learning process through CTSOs like SkillsUSA.

Alexander Astin is a respected researcher and author. He founded a student development theory based on student involvement that sought to identify how the level of involvement by a student influences the development of their academic experience. The idea of involvement as described by Astin directly relates to the amount of effort or energy, both psychological and physical, a student expends towards their academic endeavors. Astin (1984) described actions and behaviors exhibited by involved and uninvolved students:

A highly involved student is one who, for example, devotes considerable energy to studying, spends much time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students. Conversely, a typical uninvolved student neglects studies, spends little time on campus, abstains from extracurricular activities, and has infrequent contact with faculty members or other students. (p. 518)

While motivation is a factor in involvement, Astin placed emphasis on involvement. The actions students take towards being involved in their education are critical in understanding his theory. Astin's (1984) theory of involvement has five fundamental postulates:

1. Involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects. The objects may be highly generalized (the student experience) or highly specific (preparing for a chemistry examination).
2. Regardless of its object, involvement occurs along a continuum; that is, different students manifest different degrees of involvement in a given object, and the same student manifests different degrees of involvement in different objects at different times.
3. Involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features. The extent of a student's involvement in academic work, for instance, can be measured quantitatively (how many hours the student spends studying) and qualitatively (whether the student reviews and comprehends reading assignments or simply stares at the textbook and daydreams).
4. The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program.
5. The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement. (p. 297)

The final two postulates listed above are critical to education because they provide insight as to how educators can design and create better educational programs and policies for all students. While most educators and administrators are guided by some kind of educational theory, usually whatever theory they are guided by is implicit in action only and rarely put into a formal statement or examined critically in a way that is testable. Astin's (1984) theory is depicted below in Figure 3.

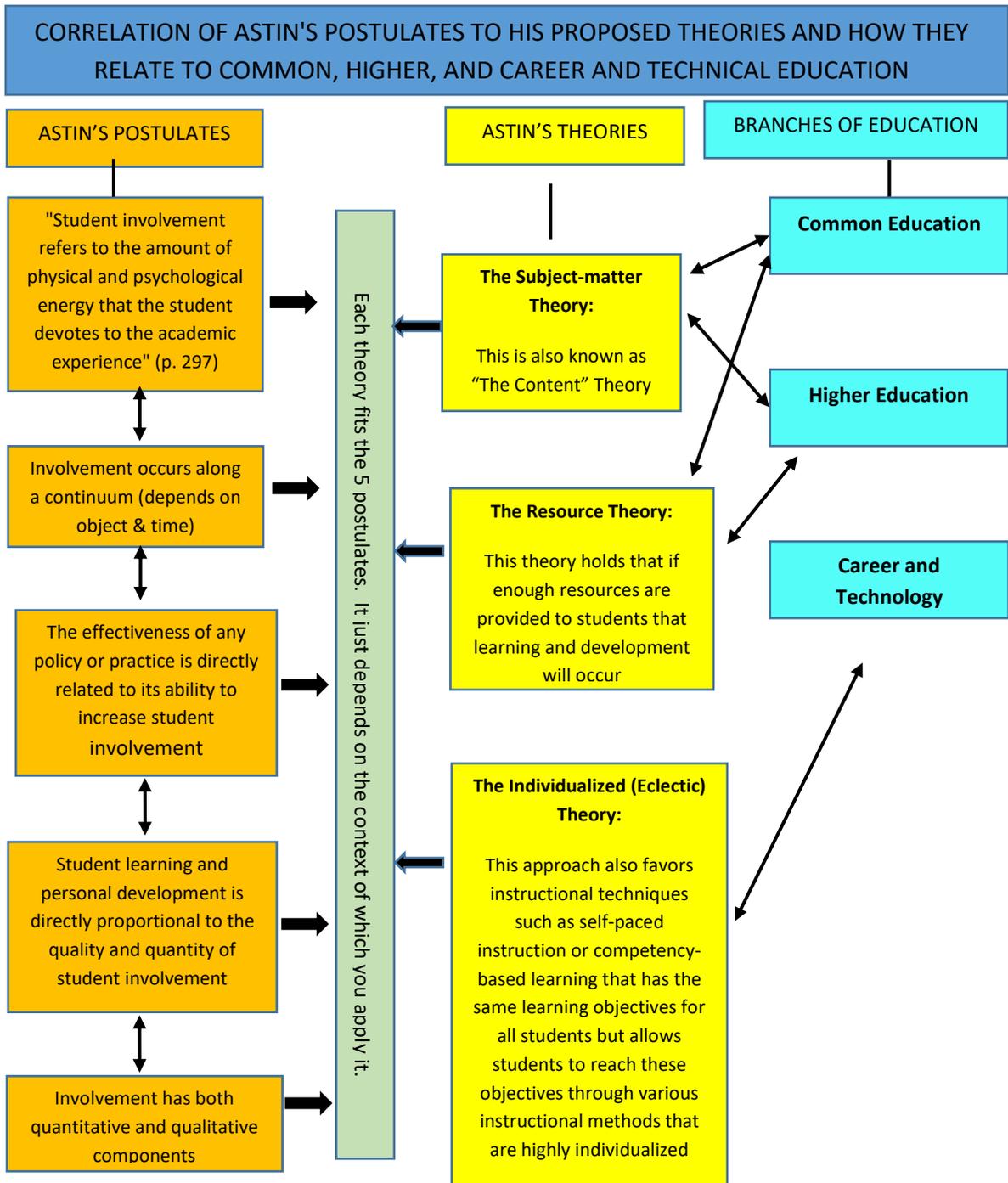


Figure 3. Correlation of Astin's Postulates to his Theories and How They are Used in Education (Astin, 1984)

Subject-Matter Theory

Subject-Matter Theory is also known as content theory. Astin (1984) explained that in subject-matter theory “student learning and development depend primarily on exposure to the right subject matter” (p. 299). One problem with this approach is that it places emphasis and “quality” on the content of what is listed in the course syllabus in order to assign value. This puts a student in a passive role as the learner. While this might work well for above average and highly motivated students, it can be a big disadvantage to students who are not as motivated to learn the subject matter or may have learning disabilities of any kind. These students can be left behind because of strict adherence to this theory of learning.

Resource Theory

Resource Theory holds that if enough resources are provided to students that learning and development will occur. This theory is popular among school administrators. Resources might include a wide range of components such as facilities, faculty members, and finances. Many colleges view high-achieving students as a resource and believe that if they recruit and retain more of these kinds of students that will increase the quality of learning by all students. The problem with this theory is that resources are almost always finite and may not equate to more resources. In addition, the accumulation of resources does not equate to effective use of the resources which would lead to favorable outcomes.

Individualized (Eclectic) Theory

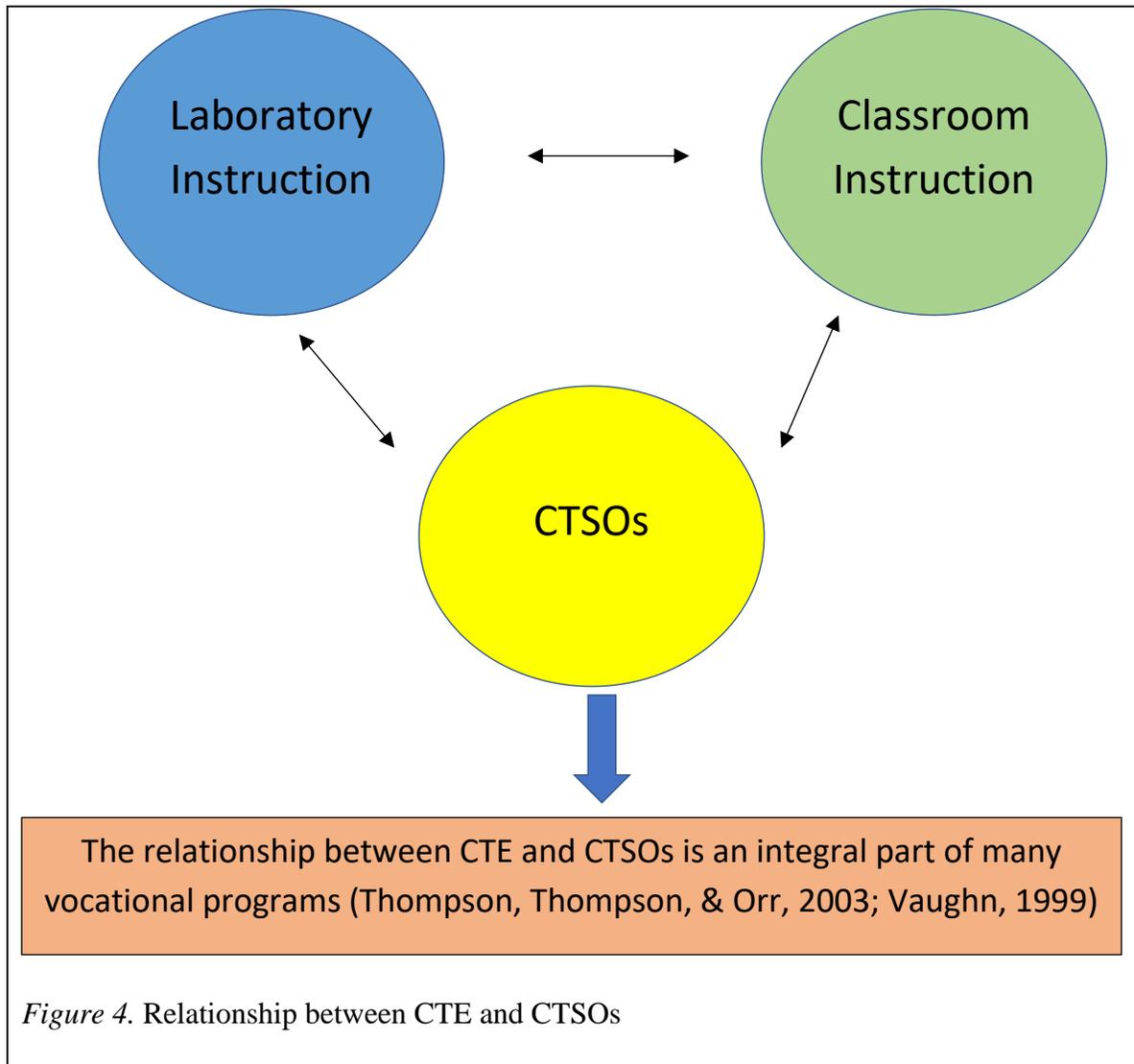
Individualized (Eclectic) Theory holds that no single approach to any one theory is enough for every student. This theory seeks to provide what each student’s needs are.

This is an individualized approach that would borrow from others in order to meet the needs of every student. This approach also favors instructional techniques such as self-paced instruction or competency-based learning that has the same learning objectives for all students but allows students to reach these objectives through various instructional methods that are highly individualized. The biggest problem with this theory is that it can be extremely expensive to use which makes it very difficult to implement for many schools. It is also difficult to determine which approach is most effective for different learners and therefore hard to determine which ones to use in meeting every student's needs.

Regardless of which implicit theory is used, if student involvement theory is applied, there must be sufficient effort from a student in order to achieve the expected learning and development outcomes. Some would argue that student involvement really comes down to motivation. Astin, however, believed that this implies a psychological reason for outcomes. Astin felt that involvement in his theory is more than a psychological frame of mind. He (1984) asserted that it has more to do with the behavioral manifestation of motivation. The behavioral manifestation would result in action towards educational goals, which results in involvement. In summary, the greater the involvement by the student in their educational goals by studying, participation in student activities, and networking with faculty and other students, the greater the amount of student learning and development will be.

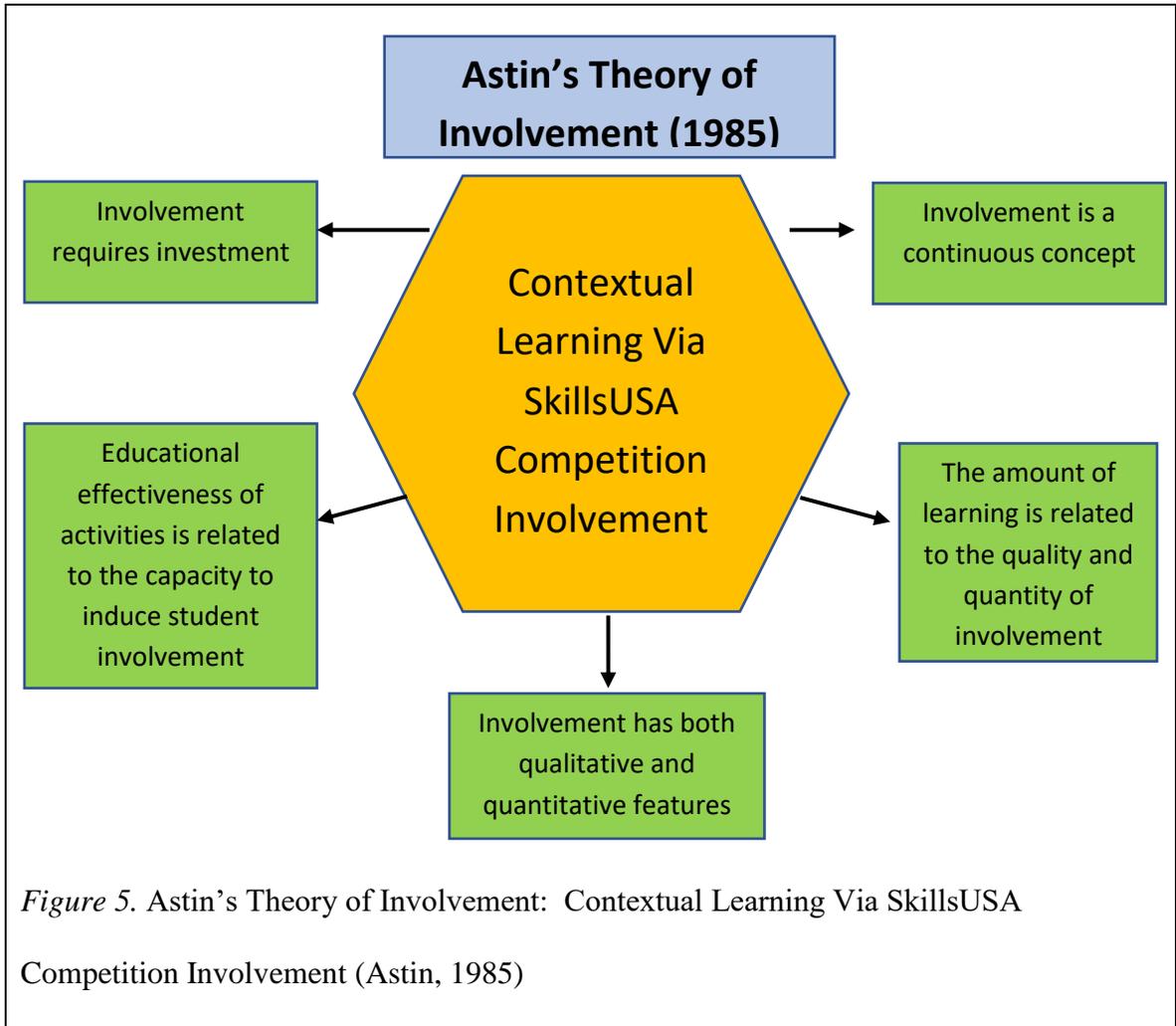
Astin's theory of involvement merges contextual learning and CTSO student involvement. Astin's theory asserts that student involvement takes the form of active participation in interactions with faculty, staff, peers, and academic activities inside and

outside of class time. Students participating in CTE CTSO's develop academically, occupationally, and personally by improving these skills through this involvement. Figure 4 depicts the relationship between CTE and CTSO's.



Therefore, being actively involved in a CTSO like SkillsUSA in a contextualized setting such as the CTE classroom would naturally lead to enhanced learning, student growth, and academic success. The primary framework that will guide this study is Astin's theory of student involvement (Astin, 1984; Astin & Sax, 1998). Astin's theory

will be used to show how involvement in SkillsUSA is of great benefit to students who actively participate. Figure 5 shows how contextual learning via SkillsUSA fits with Astin’s theory of involvement.



The following information will give a more in-depth analysis of SkillsUSA at the national, state, and local levels. The pseudonym “Midwestonia” is utilized in some cases to replace the actual state that is being referenced in an effort to maintain confidentiality of study participants.

SkillsUSA at the National, State, and Local Level

National SkillsUSA Overview

Today, SkillsUSA is the largest CTSO in the United States serving over 335,000 middle school, high school, and college/post-secondary students enrolled in training programs that prepare these students for technical, skilled, and service occupations around the globe. When combined with alumni membership, this membership number exceeds 395,000. A table of the National SkillsUSA Membership Report FY 2017 is shown in Appendix A.

SkillsUSA has served over 12.5 million members since it was founded in 1965. SkillsUSA's mission is to prepare students to become world class workers, leaders, and responsible American citizens. SkillsUSA's vision is to produce the most highly skilled workforce in the world through providing every member the opportunity for career success. SkillsUSA strives towards their mission and vision through application of a framework of skills, shown in Figure 6, that includes personal, workplace, and technical skills grounded in academics.



Figure 6. SkillsUSA Framework (SkillsUSA, 2016)

SkillsUSA has a structured, national program that is designed to assist students in reaching their stated mission through co-curricular leadership training as well as organized skills and leadership competitions at the state and national level where students can demonstrate their learned skills in these areas (SkillsUSA, n.d.). Leadership training is vital to the members of SkillsUSA. SkillsUSA at the national level has developed a program called SkillsUSA Career Essentials, which is designed to take students beyond being skilled in their occupational training program. This program gives students the leadership and employability skills that will set them apart from other competitively skilled applicants in the skilled labor marketplace. SkillsUSA Essentials is an online curriculum delivered in conjunction with the curriculum for each member's occupational training program.

National SkillsUSA Leadership Development

National SkillsUSA officer leadership. One of the most recognizable ways in which leadership development takes place is through becoming a SkillsUSA officer. The SkillsUSA officer leadership program is considered by many as the ultimate growth and leadership experience in SkillsUSA. Some key elements are responsibility, communication, teamwork, leadership, and professional development. Becoming a national SkillsUSA officer requires being elected at the local level, then the state level, and finally to the national level. There are two divisions of officer teams: high school and college/postsecondary. The national officers of SkillsUSA High School Division are comprised of a slate of five, elected at large. Additionally, there are five Regional High School Officers elected from the region in which they reside and elected by the House of Delegates. The National College/Postsecondary officers are comprised of five elected at large by the House of Delegates at each annual national meeting and shall serve from September 1 through August 31.

The delegate session is held at the SkillsUSA National Leadership and Skills Conference annually. This is a high energy and very competitive event where each state sends candidates to campaign to be elected. Once elected, the national officers become the voice for the rest of the membership and serve as presiding officer's at all national SkillsUSA activities and they serve in a variety of capacities in state and local events, such as guest/keynote speakers and delivering greetings from the national office. Figure 7 depicts the 2017-2018 SkillsUSA national officer team with SkillsUSA Executive Director Tim Lawrence at the SkillsUSA national headquarters in Leesburg, VA. (SkillsUSA Midwestonia and SkillsUSA Midwestonia Alumni and Friends, 2017).



Figure 7. 2017-2018 SkillsUSA National Officer Team

National SkillsUSA Washington leadership training institute. One of the most exciting components of the leadership development program that national SkillsUSA administers is Washington Leadership Training Institute (WLTI). This is advanced training for SkillsUSA students and advisors that has a stronger focus on more professionalism, communication, and leadership skills (SkillsUSA, n.d.). WLTI brings together 500 student leaders and educators in mid-September, annually, for five days of training in leadership. This training is held in Washington D.C. and permits the attendees a chance to visit and share with elected officials in the House and Senate what SkillsUSA and CTE has done in their lives. This opportunity is a once in a lifetime event. Some students and advisors have never traveled outside of their state or ever visited with their

local legislators. A former SkillsUSA attendee described it as follows, “Seeing the nation’s capital and the White House really brought home the history of our country. I was nervous about visiting with congressmen and senators, but enjoyed telling them about SkillsUSA. WLTi changed my life [huge smile]”! Figure 8 is a group photo taken of the 2017 WLTi attendees at the capitol and Figure 9 shows a group of WLTi students visiting Congressman Tom Cole (SkillsUSA Midwestonia and SkillsUSA Midwestonia Alumni and Friends, 2017).



Figure 8. 2017 SkillsUSA WLTi Attendees at the Capitol



Figure 9. 2017 WLTI Students Visiting Congressman Tom Cole

National Business and Industry Partners

Business and industry partners are critical to the success of the mission of SkillsUSA. More than 600 business, industry, and labor organizations actively support SkillsUSA at the national, state, and local levels through financial support, in-kind contributions, and personnel involvement in many SkillsUSA activities. Business and industry partners have contributed more than 36 million dollars to the annual SkillsUSA national championships. Lowe’s is the largest corporate donor in SkillsUSA history in giving 1.5 million dollars alone in 2017 and over 15 million dollars since 2006. Tim Lawrence, SkillsUSA Executive Director, stated, “Lowe’s is one of our finest partners, providing millions of dollars that go directly to enriching local and state SkillsUSA programs” (SkillsUSA, 2017). James Frison, director of community relations at Lowe’s stated:

Our partnership with SkillsUSA is important to helping address the growing demand for skilled workers in the United States... Lowe's support of the SkillsUSA community service grants program provides students with hands-on experience using their skills to make a difference and helps prepare them for future careers in skilled trades (SkillsUSA, 2017). Figure 10 shows a Lowe's donation to SkillsUSA (SkillsUSA, n.d.).



Figure 10. Lowe's Donation to SkillsUSA

Nick Pinchuk, CEO of Snap-On, is a member of the SkillsUSA Foundation Committee. This committee, comprised of key business leaders from corporate companies, is the philanthropic division of SkillsUSA and is responsible for oversight of these efforts that generate as much as 25% of the SkillsUSA annual budget. Nick is a staunch supporter of SkillsUSA because he recognizes the value that it plays in developing a skilled workforce with life skills that give not only the students, but also business, an edge to succeed. In 2012, Pinchuk was honored, shown in Figure 11, as the

SkillsUSA Champion of the Year for his contributions personally and through his work at Snap-On in supporting SkillsUSA.



Figure 11. Nick Pinchuk SkillsUSA Champion of the Year (NC3, 2012)

Another big supporter and believer in SkillsUSA is Mike Rowe. Mike Rowe has been known as the host of the popular television show “Dirty Jobs,” and is also the founder of the mikeroweWORKS foundation. Rowe is an avid proponent of the skilled trades who has been very active in highlighting career and technical education (CTE) as an alternative to higher education. He believes that if more focus is placed on SkillsUSA, it is the key to closing the skills gap that we have in the United States. The mikeroweWORKS Foundation has donated travel scholarship funds to assist SkillsUSA students in attending the SkillsUSA National Leadership and Skills Conference (NLSC) annually. Since 2011, that represents an investment of over \$365,000 in the future of America’s skilled workforce. Rowe stated:

The skills gap is not only real, it’s a reflection of what we value...to close the gap, we need to change the way the country feels about work. My foundation supports SkillsUSA because it celebrates the kind of skills that are actually in demand. Through excellence and competition, SkillsUSA encourages real-world training, and in the process, lays the

foundation for thousands of careers in the skilled trades. SkillsUSA works. (SkillsUSA, 2017)

In Figure 12, Mike Rowe was the keynote speaker at SkillsUSA NLSC (SkillsUSA, n.d.).

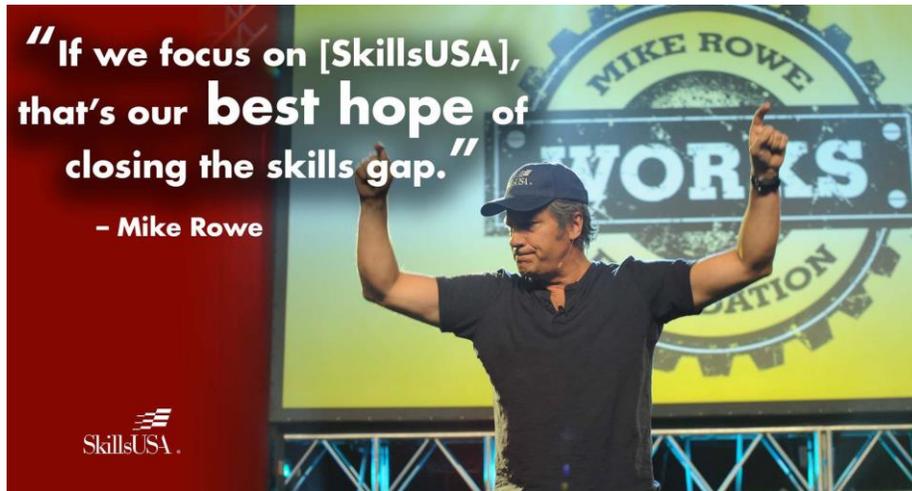


Figure 12. Mike Rowe NLSC Keynote Speaker

National Leadership and Skills Conference

The capstone event of the SkillsUSA annual calendar is the weeklong National Leadership and Skills Conference (NLSC) during the last full week in June, attended by more than 16,000 students, friends and family, educators, volunteers and VIPs from business, education, and government. NLSC features leadership training for state and chapter officers and advisors, SkillsUSA University seminars, commercial and educational exhibits, opening and awards ceremonies, delegate sessions and student national officer elections, meetings and social events, and a community service project. The highlight event of the NLSC is the two-day SkillsUSA Championships. The 2017 SkillsUSA Championships featured 6,500 student competitors, all state-level winners, competing in 100 leadership and hands-on occupational skills contests, occupying more

than one million square feet of contest space at the Kentucky Exposition Center in Louisville (Figure 13).



Figure 13. SkillsUSA NLSC Competition Floor – Kentucky Exposition Center

Two thousand volunteers from SkillsUSA’s business, industry and labor partners served as contest judges or as technical committee members that design, manage and provision the contests.

Occupational skills contests are related to occupational training areas each competitor may be enrolled in at their local schools. Examples of occupational contests would include carpentry, masonry, cosmetology, culinary arts, and information technology services. Leadership contests require students to demonstrate employability skills such as teamwork, interviewing, public speaking, and how to conduct meetings. Examples of leadership competitions include extemporaneous speech, prepared speech, chapter business procedure, job interview, employment application process, and opening and closing ceremonies. Examples of the different competitions are shown in Figure 14.



Figure 14. NLSC Competitors

Only the top three contestants in each contest will make it to the stage to be recognized as the very best competitors in the nation. Figure 15 shows winning contestants bringing home the hardware.



Figure 15. SkillsUSA Medalists at 2017 NLSC

SkillsUSA at the State Level

SkillsUSA Midwestonia Overview

SkillsUSA Midwestonia was one of 26 charter states that formed the SkillsUSA national organization in 1966. SkillsUSA Midwestonia is a vital component of trade and industrial occupational training programs in high school and technology centers.

SkillsUSA Midwestonia has thrived in providing opportunities for students to learn and practice personal, employability, and technical skills. Total membership numbers in Midwestonia for 2017 were 12,865 which is eighth in the nation. Membership numbers for 2018 are already at 13,100 with the membership acceptance deadline only a few weeks away. Since 1966, SkillsUSA Midwestonia's total membership is 528,317. 2017 marked the fifth straight year that SkillsUSA Midwestonia has surpassed its membership record, which shows tremendous growth in the organization.

SkillsUSA Midwestonia's alumni association is called SkillsUSA Midwestonia Alumni and Friends. The SkillsUSA Midwestonia Alumni and Friends association has a total membership of 3,958 which is the largest SkillsUSA alumni association in the nation. This next largest alumni association in the nation is SkillsUSA Florida Alumni and Friends with a total membership of 3,189. SkillsUSA Midwestonia Alumni and Friends association was the first to surpass 3000 members and is on pace to be the first in the nation to surpass 4000 members.

SkillsUSA Midwestonia follows the SkillsUSA Framework and SkillsUSA Career Essentials programs put in place by the national SkillsUSA organization to help students and advisors strive for success creating a skilled work force with superior employability skills. SkillsUSA Midwestonia functions under the Midwestonia Department of Career

and Technology Education (MDCTE). This is the state agency that provides oversight to all CTE programs in the state of Midwestonia. It is important to note that not all states have support by a dedicated agency. In many cases CTE oversight in other states is done by integrating that into state departments of education governing two-year community colleges. Many of these states do not have numbers as high or success that Midwestonia has in SkillsUSA, and that may be due to their inability to focus efforts the way that the MDCTE governing agency can.

SkillsUSA Midwestonia utilizes an Executive Council to govern, plan, and conduct business that is important to the operation of all SkillsUSA activities in the state. The Executive Council is comprised of all state officers and their local advisors, district presidents and their local advisors, four post-secondary representatives (two from the Western Region and two from the Eastern Region) and their local advisors, any SkillsUSA Midwestonia national officers and their local advisors, district advisors, state officer advisors, SkillsUSA Midwestonia Alumni and Friends Association board members, a representative of the Alumni state officers, a member of the State Advisory Council, State SkillsUSA Director, and staff members of the Midwestonia Department of Career and Technology Education, Trade and Industrial Education Division. The SkillsUSA Midwestonia Executive Council meets a minimum of twice per school year and conducts business that relates to topics such as finances, membership, leadership development activities, and competitions to name a few. It is evident that this framework of organization within the state has fostered much success for SkillsUSA Midwestonia.

SkillsUSA Midwestonia Leadership Development

Leadership development for SkillsUSA Midwestonia is multifaceted, much like the national organization. The same way that SkillsUSA has national officers, each state has their own officers as well. An excerpt from the Midwestonia SkillsUSA Constitution states,

At the annual state meeting, the secondary delegates of the Midwestonia Association of SkillsUSA shall elect a secondary state officer team consisting of the seven candidates with the highest votes. The respective delegates will also elect one secondary and one post-secondary national officer candidate. The seven members elected to the State Officer Team will be interviewed during the first officer training session following the state conference to determine President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, Parliamentarian, Reporter, Sergeant-at-Arms. The State SkillsUSA Director and the State Officer Advisor will conduct the interviews. The State Officer Team, State SkillsUSA Director and the State Officer Advisor will determine the specific offices. If the national officer candidates are not elected to a national officer, he/she will become part of the state officer team...At the fall leadership conferences, the post-secondary delegates of the Midwestonia Association of SkillsUSA shall elect the following officers: two representatives from the Western Region and two representatives from the Eastern Region. A national officer candidate shall be elected at the annual state meeting. If the national officer candidate is not elected to a national office, he/she shall become an officer-at-large. (SkillsUSA Midwestonia, n.d.) Potential candidates for these positions come from each of the high schools or technology center school districts. There are other opportunities for leadership development for those who do not wish to be a SkillsUSA Midwestonia state officer.

Annually, there are leadership training opportunities that are organized by SkillsUSA Midwestonia. SkillsUSA Midwestonia offers state officer training for the newly elected officers each year to provide guidance and instruction on the duties of state officers, train them on how to conduct their business and the activities sanctioned by SkillsUSA Midwestonia such as fall leadership conference and the state leadership and skills conference. They are also provided training on teamwork, public speaking skills, and citizenship.

District officer training is also conducted each year. This training is held for newly elected district officers from the six districts within the state. This training serves the same purposes as State officer training only focused more on the duties at a more local level. Perhaps the most popular and recognizable leadership development activity sponsored by SkillsUSA Midwestonia each year is Summer Leadership Institute or SLI. SLI is geared more towards secondary participants and is a four-day leadership development camp for SkillsUSA Midwestonia district officers, district advisors, state officers, potential SkillsUSA leaders, and instructors throughout the state. Some of the activities offered are leadership training covering the SkillsUSA Framework, SkillsUSA Program of Work, and the SkillsUSA Chapter Excellence Program (CEP). By design, this is a time where each district elects officer positions, plans their calendar year activities including their fall conferences, and social activities designed to get students learning to network and communicate with each other. To those who attend, it is obvious that SLI is very focused in its purpose, but those who attend also experience the time of their lives while learning what it means to become a leader. SLI has been recognized as the “single greatest activity” that is offered by SkillsUSA Midwestonia (SkillsUSA Midwestonia,

n.d.). Dalton Garrett, SkillsUSA Midwestonia director, attended SLI for the first time as a district advisor over ten years ago and he said that “SLI changed my life and my career!” (D. Garrett, personal communication, May 1, 2017). A former national SkillsUSA officer who attended SLI before running for that office stated that SLI was the “single greatest thing that ever happened to her as a high school student” and that it took her from “being an introvert to someone who had the confidence to try new things and achieve things I never dreamed I could do! [huge smile]” (V. Simpson, personal communication, April 15, 2012). A few examples of activities at SLI can be seen in Figure 16 and 17.



Figure 16. SLI Opening General Session Led by State Officer Team



Figure 17. SLI Community Service Project – Midwestonia Veterans Center

SkillsUSA Midwestonia Business and Industry Partners

Business and industry partners at the state level mirror the types of support for national SkillsUSA. Lowe's is one of SkillsUSA Midwestonia's largest supporters just as they are at the national level. Lowe's commitment to providing grants in support of local communities, schools, classrooms or advisors/instructors in each state will continue to improve the educational experience for students and the communities in which they live. Grants are awarded ranging from \$5,000-\$25,000. (SkillsUSA, 2017). Figure 18 shows Midwestonia SkillsUSA director accepting a donation from Lowe's at the SkillsUSA Midwestonia State Leadership and Skills Conference.



Figure 18. Lowe's Donation to Midwestonia SkillsUSA

Another big supporter of SkillsUSA nationally and in Midwestonia is Lincoln Electric. Lincoln Electric provides support for the welding competition at the state conference as well as welding supplies and equipment. It is not uncommon for employers like Lincoln Electric to seek out the winners of these competitions for employment before they even leave the conference. Lincoln Electric shows their support monetarily to Midwestonia SkillsUSA because they believe in what SkillsUSA does to prepare a future skilled workforce. Figure 19 shows SkillsUSA Midwestonia director accepting a donation from Lincoln Electric.



Figure 19. Lincoln Electric Donation to Midwestonia SkillsUSA

While not an exhaustive list, other business and industry partners that provide support to Midwestonia SkillsUSA by contributing financial donations, equipment donations, and judges for competitions include DeWalt, Irwin Tools, Lincoln Electric, Bosch, and Snap-on. This helps to show the kind of support from business and industry that SkillsUSA has in helping to bridge the continually widening skills gap that exists in America today.

SkillsUSA Midwestonia State Leadership and Skills Conference

The 2017 State Leadership and Skills Conference was the largest in Midwestonia SkillsUSA history with 2,750 registered attendees and 2,212 registered contestants competing in over 100 contests. The gold medal winners in each competition at this conference earn the right to move on and compete at the SkillsUSA National Leadership and Skills Conference (NLSC). 2017 was the second straight year for Midwestonia to win the total medal count at the NLSC with 68 medals. The most ever medals at NLSC that Midwestonia has ever had was 75 in 2016. SkillsUSA Midwestonia has had a historical total of 61 national officers, second only to Texas with a total of 81 national officers.

The leadership and skills contests are not the only things going on at this conference. There are professional development and leadership development training sessions, state officer election activities, awards activities like the SkillsUSA advisor of the year interviews, and all of these are happening on the first day along with the leadership contests. The second day of conference activities includes the skills contests and the opening general session which includes the leadership and job readiness awards session, new state officer installation, advisor of the year announcement, and other SkillsUSA professional awards. The final day of this three-day conference is the skills competitions award ceremony. Figure 20 shows a student that won the gold medal in her contest area.



Figure 20. SkillsUSA Midwestonia State Champion in Job Skills Demonstration A

The state conference provides additional opportunity for student involvement through a large student volunteer Courtesy Corp that assists SkillsUSA Midwestonia staff

and state officers in taking care of some of the smaller details throughout the conference. In addition, a critical component that leads to success is state and local advisors. SkillsUSA advisors are a critical part of the heart and soul of SkillsUSA locally, in Midwestern, and across the nation. At this conference the Midwestern advisor of the year is selected and announced. This award goes to the advisor that has gone above and beyond normal advisory duties and contributed to the mission and vision of SkillsUSA in bettering not only the organization but also to the betterment of fellow advisors, the community, and most importantly the students they help prepare with personal, professional, and workplace skills. Midwestern has had the most regional advisors of the year with 12. Midwestern has also had the most national advisors of the year with four. Midwestern has the oversight and support with SkillsUSA and CTE to produce some of the very best advisors and, in turn, Midwestern produces some of the best students in the country.

SkillsUSA Midwestern has been highly effective in being a great support system for all stakeholders involved in the organization. Through the efforts of the SkillsUSA Midwestern association there is true evidence of SkillsUSA as a partnership of students, teachers/advisors, and industry working together. SkillsUSA Midwestern emphasizes this framework and a dedication to the personal growth and development of those who participate in the program.

SkillsUSA at the Local Level

SkillsUSA at the Local Level (Midwestern Technology Center)

The local school level is where people get involved and see the value of SkillsUSA. Students and advisors first learn about SkillsUSA at the high school or

technology center where they are enrolled. There are two primary types of membership: secondary and college/post-secondary. In recent years SkillsUSA has expanded membership to middle school students, but for the purposes of this study, only secondary and college/post-secondary are discussed. Typically, only students who are enrolled in a Trade and Industrial occupationally related program will be introduced to and be able to participate in SkillsUSA. When SkillsUSA eligible students are first introduced to Career and Technology Education (CTE) they have a good idea about the type of Trade and Industrial occupational program they are enrolling in and most likely some idea of what to expect when it comes to the workplace skills they will be learning. The same holds true for a new CTE instructor.

Typically, only an instructor teaching an occupational trade in a Trade and Industrial related program will have an opportunity to be a SkillsUSA advisor. Some students and instructors will choose not to be involved in SkillsUSA. Many times, this is because of a lack of awareness about the opportunity to do so and sometimes it is because it is not considered as an important part of the CTE educational experience by some. Because it is not a required component of the programs that are being taught, there will be students and advisors who do not take advantage of what SkillsUSA can offer those who participate. This is most likely because they are not aware, yet, of what SkillsUSA offers in the way of professional development, personal, and employability skills training and education. For some, it will be because they simply do not have an interest, so they will choose to only take advantage of the skills training being delivered. For instructors and potential SkillsUSA advisors, this awareness will most likely come in the form of advisement from fellow peers and administrators and possibly even an expectation of

involvement from administration at each location. For students and potential SkillsUSA members, the most likely way they will become aware of SkillsUSA will be through their instructor/advisor or their peers. Most of the time, it is through the encouragement of an active SkillsUSA advisor that students will become interested in SkillsUSA. In addition to that, peers who are involved will many times foster encouragement to become involved in SkillsUSA. Again, because SkillsUSA is not a mandatory requirement of occupational programs, the support to become involved does not always exist. Those who are the most actively involved tend to be enrolled in a Trade and Industrial occupational program at a secondary or college/post-secondary school where the ideals, mission, and vision of SkillsUSA are valued and promoted by administration, instructional staff/advisors, and fellow students.

At the local level, most potential SkillsUSA members when introduced to the possibility of being involved in SkillsUSA will ask the question, “What’s in it for me?” The answer to that individual is that success in the workplace involves more than a simple set of technical skills. Technical skills alone will not ensure that you have the soft and other employability skills you need to keep the job once the technical skills get your foot in the door. This is the message that most instructor/advisors explain to each and every student who walks through their doors who believe in what SkillsUSA can do for those who choose to get involved. It usually after this explanation and an introduction to SkillsUSA that the SkillsUSA member’s journey begins.

At Midwestern Technology Center (MTC), there is a broad and strong belief that advisors and students be involved in SkillsUSA for all Trade and Industrial training programs. The culture of the school encourages participation by administrators, advisors,

and students. The 100% Total Participation membership plan chosen by MTC is proof that SkillsUSA is an important part of the educational experience at MTC.

Introduction to SkillsUSA starts the moment an advisor or student becomes a part of MTC. The orientation that advisors and students go through at MTC covers many of the school's policies, procedures, rules, and general introduction. Part of that orientation includes an introduction to SkillsUSA and the importance of becoming an active part of the association. Advisors in each of the program areas assume responsibility when the students start classes. Students in each program will be introduced to the SkillsUSA framework, elect officers, and develop programs of work for the year. Because of the strong support that is exhibited by administration at MTC, every student and advisor who chooses to, will have the opportunity to participate in fall leadership conferences and other professional and leadership activities. Students can run for district or state officer positions, go to leadership camps like SLI, and compete in district, regional, and possibly state and national competitions if they qualify. Teachers and advisors communicate the message that "you will only get out of it, what you put into it." Some will choose to only go to leadership activities, some will choose to go to skills competition activities, and some will go to both. MTC seems to have a belief that the more you immerse yourself into all the opportunities that SkillsUSA has to offer, the better student and advisor you will be.

Summary

The above literature review indicates that CTSOs like SkillsUSA exist to assist members in acquiring job-related technical skills, leadership skills, and increase academic achievement. The review of literature also reveals that there are studies that conclude that

student academic achievement is enhanced by participation in CTSOs such as SkillsUSA and others. The literature also provides evidence that contradicts the claims that involvement in CTSOs leads to increased academic achievement by all students. These gaps in the literature suggest that more research needs to be done to explore CTSO experiences.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Chapter III provides an overview of the methods and data collection procedures used in this case study. The purpose of this study was to explain the role that involvement in SkillsUSA played in overall perceived value of their educational experience at a large, Midwestern Career and Technology Education Center.

Research Design

The research design was an explanatory case study involving a selected group of students and advisors involved in the student organization SkillsUSA. Data sources included interviews, participant observation, and artifacts such as documents and photographs. Yin (2014) stated, “The case study’s unique strength is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence – documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations” (p. 12).

Yin (2014) also stated that “how” and “why” research questions are more explanatory and likely to lead to the use of case study. Consequently, the following research questions guided this study:

1. How do participants explain the value of their experience in SkillsUSA?
2. What benefits and weaknesses do they perceive in their involvement with SkillsUSA?

3. How do participants explain how the value of their experience in SkillsUSA is influenced by other factors?

Astin's theory of involvement was the lens used to explain the answers to the questions in this study.

Methodological Procedures

Participant Selection

The study was comprised of selected students at a technology center in Midwestonia. The center consists of secondary and post-secondary students that range in age from eighteen to sixty years old. In 2016, the demographic data showed there was a blend of upper, middle, and lower income families served by this technology center. The ethnic breakdown includes roughly 69% Caucasian, 8% African American, 7% Asian, 9% Hispanic, and 7% American Indian. The data collection was conducted primarily within classroom settings but also consisted of other settings where participants were engaged in miscellaneous student organizational leadership and competitive event activities.

Participants were purposively selected from students who were participating in active SkillsUSA chapters or had been active in chapters within the past year at the technology center. In 2016, approximately 100 participants were actively participating in SkillsUSA at the chosen school district. The criteria used for participant selection was those participants that are actively involved in their SkillsUSA chapters in either competition and/or leadership activities currently or within the past year. Participants were comprised of chapter advisors, secondary, or post-secondary students. Participants were involved in SkillsUSA for a minimum of one year. Student participants were

enrolled in their program of study at least half time. Participants were involved in Engineering, Information Technology, Cosmetology, and Carpentry training programs. All participants either participated or were participating in SkillsUSA skills and/or leadership competitions. Participants may have been exposed to other student organizations but their primary focus would have been limited to SkillsUSA. Many participants were observed and several interviewed. Permission was sought by direct communication with the district superintendent and each site director asking for permission to use each site for the purposes of the study. Once permission was granted, each chapter advisor was contacted and asked if their chapter will participate in the study. Participation in the study was completely voluntary. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants to ensure that identities were protected.

After specific participants were selected, consent forms were completed and collected for each one. Those potential participants who chose not to agree to the consent form were removed from the participation list and the process of administering the data collection was begun.

Data Collection

Data were collected in the participants' customary or natural setting within their career training programs. In addition, data was collected in settings outside of the classroom where CTSO activities occur. Yin (2009) emphasized that it is beneficial to collect data from a variety of sources and settings to strengthen a study's validity. Yin (2009) and Creswell (2009) also asserted that identification of strengths and weaknesses of each data collection method served to strengthen the study. The different types of data

sources that were utilized are explained below as well as the strengths and weaknesses of each.

Interviews. Yin (2009) described interviews as one of the most important sources of case study information. Interviews were used to collect the thoughts and ideas of the participants while investigating the answers to the study questions. I interviewed two SkillsUSA advisors and five SkillsUSA student participants for a total of seven interviews. Of the 10 student participants emailed to solicit participation in the study, only six responded. Five of the six agreed to participate and be interviewed. Four SkillsUSA advisors were solicited for participation and interviews and I chose two of the four to interview due to limited availability for two of the four to participate in the study. I chose each of the participants because they all met the criteria and were actively involved in SkillsUSA and would be able to give data that would answer the study questions. The interviews were conducted using a structured set of questions designed to elicit answers that would help answer the study questions while at the same time being open-ended enough to allow the interview to elicit additional follow-up questions. All participants were contacted by email or in person to arrange the interview times and preferred locations. Each interview was audio taped and then later transcribed as soon as possible after the interview. I also recorded as much observational data, while on site, as possible before leaving any observation site. Transcription data was reviewed multiple times for accuracy and in order to process and reflect on the content in greater detail and depth. Listening to the interviews in depth and multiple times allowed me to reflect on the perceptions of the participants and better understand the data as it unfolded. This was a major benefit of this data collection technique. One of the possible weaknesses is that

my presence could have influenced/biased responses as well as my interviewing technique may not have been as strong in early interviews versus later interviews.

Interview questions included the following:

1. Why did you decide to participate in SkillsUSA?
2. What skills have you developed from participating in SkillsUSA?
3. How have these skills benefited you? In life? In your academic experience?
4. How do you feel that you would have done in your program of study without having participated in SkillsUSA? Explain.
5. How do you balance SkillsUSA activities and school activities?
6. How do you think that your school enhances or limits your involvement in SkillsUSA?
7. In what way(s) do you think your teachers/advisors influence your involvement in SkillsUSA?
8. How can SkillsUSA be improved?

Observations. Merriam (1988) stated that observation is one of the best methods to collect meaningful, relevant information. In this study, observation was used to glean information about relevant facts that helped answer the study questions through the participants' behavior and their environment. Observation data was collected during multiple occasions at a variety of different settings such as SkillsUSA activities, events, and settings that occurred at school and away from the school site. I observed school sponsored SkillsUSA member activities, officer team meetings. I also observed state sponsored leadership conferences, state officer team Executive Council meetings, and various other activities where SkillsUSA members were present. Merriam (2014) stated

that it takes enormous energy and concentration during observation and that field notes should be written as soon after observation as possible. The observational data was noted through detailed field notes and later recorded into electronic documents. Due to the fact that I was already a part of many aspects of the environment that the participants were in at many of the events I witnessed, I was able to informally observe on multiple occasions, and this was not out of the ordinary for the participant's to routinely see me as a part of their environment. The strengths of observations include being able to immerse myself into the environment and witness the natural actions of participants. This lends a much greater ability to gain insight to answer the study questions. A possible weakness of observation is looking at this participation through my personal lens and bias. Another weakness is that it could influence the behavior of participants, especially those that were not used to having me in their environment.

Documents and artifacts. Yin (2014) stated, "For case study research, the most important use of documents is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources" (p. 106). Another important use of documents would be to analyze artifacts in relation to other data collected and draw inferences that can lead to more specific data collection. In this study, documents were collected such as participant competition events, leadership conference agenda's and programs, and paper/electronic communication among participants and local/state SkillsUSA staff. These kinds of documents can help to describe and explain the context in which participants participate in SkillsUSA and related events. Physical artifacts were collected to demonstrate the byproduct of participation in SkillsUSA. Artifacts included awards, trophies, and contest project results. Much of this evidence was photographed for ease of inclusion in the resulting

data. Creswell (2009) summarized some of the strengths of gathering and using documents:

- Enables a researcher to obtain the language and words of participants.
- Can be accessed at a time convenient to researcher – an unobtrusive source of information.
- Represents data which are thoughtful in that participants have given attention to compiling them.
- As written evidence, it saves a researcher time and expense of transcribing (p. 180).

Potential weaknesses of documents/artifacts are that the information may be incomplete, out of context, missing, or not accurate.

Photographic materials. Photographs were also used as a form of data collection. I collected photographs that showed various levels of participation in SkillsUSA activities. These photographs help to paint the picture of the environment and fill in gaps that non-graphical data cannot convey to anyone that has not witnessed SkillsUSA activities and participation before. I took photographs of students and advisors participating in meetings, attending leadership activities, attending conferences, and participating in competitive events that allow them to show off their vocational and leadership skills. I also took photographs of trophies, medals, and other physical artifacts that helped to complete the picture of what happens during participation in SkillsUSA. Strengths of this method of data collection are that it is less intrusive to the study areas, it captured moments that give the essence of the experiences of participants in SkillsUSA, and it helps to provide that thick, rich description I was looking for in gathering and

presenting the data. It helped to tell the story of the data in a visual way. Weakness of this method could be possible misrepresentation of the data or taking it out of context.

Data Analysis

Merriam (2014) wrote, “Probably the best-known strategy to shore up the internal validity of a study is what is known as triangulation” (p. 244). Patton (2015) explained, “Triangulation, in whatever form, increases credibility and quality by countering the concern (or accusation) that a study’s findings are simply an artifact of a single method, a single source, or a single investigator’s blinders” (p. 674).

Every effort was made to fairly and accurately represent the data collected while analyzing the data. I found that I was analyzing the data from the very start of when I began to collect it. Creswell (2009) referred to data collection as “an ongoing process involving continual reflection about the data, asking analytical questions, and writing memos throughout the study” (p. 184). Creswell (2009) gives a mostly linear representation of six steps involved in qualitative data analysis and suggests using these steps to help guide the data analysis process. The six steps are organizing and preparing the data, reading through all data, coding the data, generating themes/categories, convey findings of the analysis, and interpretation of findings (interpret meaning).

Organizing and preparing data. The process of organizing and preparing the data for this study included transcription of interviews, transcribing field observations, and collection and organization of documents, artifacts, and photographic data.

Organization of all of this data was done by collecting all of it electronically in folders that represented each type of data whenever possible. Physical artifacts are organized in binders or kept in boxes where appropriate and necessary. I have thoroughly read through

all data sources multiple times in order to glean as much meaning and understanding as possible.

Coding data. Creswell (2009) identified a few common strategies when coding data, “(a) develop codes only on the basis of the emerging information collected from participants, (b) use predetermined codes and then fit the data to them, or (c) use some combination of predetermined and emerging codes” (p. 187). For this study I used (c) some combination of predetermined and emerging codes. It is important to note that I started with just a few predetermined codes and many others emerged after analysis of the transcripts. I utilized Microsoft Word and used the review tab to document the codes. I selected important words or phrases and then generated a note as a code in the margin. I also made comments, when necessary, concerning interesting findings or recurring language between participants. I then extracted all codes and notes into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for ease of sorting codes and identifying emerging themes. This process generated close to 600 codes.

Generating themes/categories. Once I had generated and organized the codes into spreadsheets, I then cut and pasted the codes onto notecards in order to put the codes into groups or chunks of data that were similar in significance to start generating themes/categories that began to develop. Creswell (2009) described how these themes connect to the study:

These themes are the ones that appear as major findings in qualitative studies and are often used to create headings in the findings sections of studies. They should display multiple perspectives from individuals and be supported by diverse quotations and specific evidence. (p. 189)

Constant comparison methodology was used to sort and categorize themes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I then utilized the themes/categories to generate Chapter IV of this dissertation to describe the environments/settings, participants, and the context of the participants during their participation in SkillsUSA activities. Astin's Theory of Involvement was not used to categorize themes, but I did utilize the thematic information from Chapter IV and processed it through the lens of Astin's theory of involvement to finish the data analysis in Chapter V.

Convey and interpret findings. The study findings were conveyed using a combination of rich, descriptive narrative format and different figures and tables throughout to assist in understanding/interpreting the findings of the study. The narrative included detailed descriptions of study participants, participant activities, participant environments, and the themes that developed.

Researcher Role

Researcher Bias

My background as an educator began in 1998. I was hired by a technology center to teach Information Technology (IT). I was hired from the private IT sector because for certain disciplines the belief was that it was better to take an IT professional and teach them to teach rather than taking a teacher and trying to make them knowledgeable enough in IT to educate others effectively regarding the topic. I went on to get my Master's degree in Adult Education and am currently working on my Ed.D in School Administration. I have been teaching for almost twenty years. In that time, I have had the good fortune to be a SkillsUSA advisor and I have personally witnessed the great things this student organization can do for students and advisors if they get involved. The thing

that sparked my interest in this study is that while we, as advisors, claim that involvement in SkillsUSA has great positive outcomes for students, there is very little available proof that it does what we say it does. I am aware of my own personal bias regarding this and have been very careful to collect and analyze all data collected in a way that is both credible and trustworthy. I have been open to contrary evidence that may negate my personal bias about SkillsUSA and let the data tell the story. I have followed all university, state, and local policies and standard protocols required for qualitative research.

Ethical Considerations

“A good case study researcher, like any other social scientist, will strive for the highest ethical standards while doing research” (Yin, 2014, p. 76). Examples of this could be either plagiarizing or falsifying information, being honest, and taking responsibility for the work I have done. Trustworthiness and credibility was achieved in this study by being aware of ethical considerations regarding data collection, analysis, and interpretation of findings.

Data collection ethics. It is important in the data collection process to protect the participants and sites where research is being done. There are several considerations that were addressed during the data collection phase of the study. Creswell (2009) listed several things to be considered:

- Informed consent of study participants
- Confidentiality
- IRB Approval
- Gaining the agreement of site authorities to gain access to study participants

- Limiting disruption to the physical setting at the research site
- Ensure that both the researcher and participants benefit from the research
- Ensure interview protocols are followed to be sensitive to those being interviewed

With these things in mind, I developed an informed consent form that each participant signed before the research began. It was clear in the form that their rights would be protected in all phases of the research. This form also made clear that their participation in the study was completely confidential and that their names and locations would not be disclosed. IRB approval was gained before the research started. A letter was sent to the site director(s) and district superintendent asking for permission to conduct my study at the site location. Permission was granted by all parties. Much of my observations of the participants occurred outside of the physical location where the participants reside from day to day limiting any disruption to the setting. When possible, I scheduled interview times that took place outside of participant's scheduled class time to limit disruption as well. Full reciprocity of study data and findings was made available to the study site and participants in an attempt to make them a part of the process. Interview protocols were carefully followed to ensure that there was no coercion or attempts to guide the study findings.

Data analysis and interpretation ethics. Creswell (2009) listed ethical considerations for data interpretation and analysis:

- How will the study protect the identity of the individual, roles, and incidents in the project?
- How long to keep data once analyzed?

- Who owns the data?
- An accurate account of study information needs to take place

The identity and anonymity of the study participant's, site, and incidences was protected by using pseudonyms and was used in all phases of the study. All study data and materials were kept in a locked file cabinet during the study will be kept indefinitely in that locked file cabinet. I plan to ensure clear and accurate study information by using member checking, using thick, rich description to convey findings, and peer debriefing to enhance accuracy.

Trustworthiness of Findings

Lincoln and Guba (1985) created four criteria for how to ensure the trustworthiness of findings in qualitative case studies. These criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility provides confidence in the integrity of the findings of the study. I utilized strategies recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to help establish credibility for this study. Prolonged engagement is one of these strategies. Because I work in the study setting, I already have established prolonged engagement in the field. But there was additional time to build trust through developing relationships between the participants and myself. Persistent observation is a second technique. I spent a good deal of time observing participants in order to better understand the characteristics and elements that are relevant to this study. I was also able to observe other SkillsUSA participants that were not included in this study to enrich my understanding. Triangulation is a third technique. I achieved triangulation by collecting multiple data sources from interviews,

observation, documents/artifacts, and photographic data. This allowed for the collection of rich, comprehensive data collection that lends itself to a deeper understanding of this topic in this study. I used the combination of these data sources to give me a better interpretation and understanding of the role that participation in SkillsUSA plays in the perception of value of this CTSO to study participants. Peer debriefing is a fourth technique. I used peer debriefing in an effort to uncover any biases on my part and make the study as focused as possible. Member checking is a fifth technique. I used member checking as a way to ensure the validity of the data I collected for accuracy and credibility by providing interview transcripts to participants to verify accuracy of the accounts. I also sent follow-up emails, texts, and phone calls to clarify answers given during interviews and other methods of data collection.

Transferability

Transferability describes the extent to which the results from a study can be “transferred” or be applicable in other contexts or settings. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.125) stated that the best way to ensure the possibility of transferability was to create a “thick description of the sending context so that someone in a potential receiving context may assess the similarity between them and...the study.” Therefore, I utilized thick, rich description of the study participants, environment, and findings of this study to allow the reader to determine the applicability of this study to them.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability is being able to show that the results of the study are consistent and could be repeated. Confirmability has to do with the extent to which the findings of the study are shaped by the participants and not influenced by the researcher bias. To address

dependability and confirmability requirements, all findings will be available for external audit to confirm accuracy and validity of the data. In addition, I will seek to focus on reflexivity as it pertains to being aware of how myself as the researcher shapes the research process. Table 1 offers an overview of the trustworthiness strategies.

Table 1

Trustworthiness Criteria and Strategies

Criteria	Strategy Employed	Field Examples
Credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prolonged engagement • Persistent observation • Triangulation • Peer debriefing • Member checking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During the time of this study communication and verification occurred through follow-up • Observation of participants in multiple settings • Multiple sources of data: interviews, observations, documents, artifacts, photographs • Requested advice on interview questions. • Copies of transcripts sent to participants for verification of accuracy.
Transferability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing thick, rich description 	Descriptions of participants, activities, and environments.
Dependability/ Conformability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide access to data for audit 	Interview questions, field notes, email exchanges, transcripts, and other data available for audit.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations are statements that expose the weakness of the study. The following are limitations to the study:

1. Researcher bias was naturally a possibility because I am an educator in CTE and strongly believe in the benefits of being involved in CTSOs. This is a fact that I was constantly aware of and did my best to control.
2. The study is limited to advisors of the district and students who are enrolled in a single large technology center district in the Fall of 2017. Students are SkillsUSA members identified by their SkillsUSA advisors.
3. The timeframe for this study is limited to one academic school year.
4. There were three of the five student participants from the same training program. While that may be seen as a limitation of the study due to them being in the same environment, this might also be seen as leading to an important finding in the study that advisors play an important role in student involvement and positive perceived value in SkillsUSA.

Summary

For this study, I used explanatory case study methodology as described by Yin (2014) and trustworthiness strategies as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Data sources included interviews, observation, as well as documents, artifacts, and photographs. I used a constant-comparison analysis strategy and Astin's Theory of Involvement was used *ex post facto* to explain the findings. Chapter three provides in-depth review of the methodology used for this study. I addressed my role in the study, areas of potential research bias, and the trustworthiness of the findings are clearly demonstrated.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Chapter IV presents a narrative portrait of the data collected in this study. SkillsUSA is described on national, state, and local levels. The study's participants and their experiences in SkillsUSA are also explained. Observations and participant quotations are used to provide a clearer picture of the many ways that students, advisors, and other entities are involved in SkillsUSA and to depict their experiences.

SkillsUSA at National, State, and Local Levels

Today, SkillsUSA is the largest CTSO in the United States serving over 335,000 middle school, high school, and college/post-secondary students enrolled in training programs that prepare these students for technical, skilled, and service occupations around the globe. When combined with alumni membership, this membership number exceeds 395,000.

SkillsUSA Midwestonia was one of 26 charter states that formed the SkillsUSA national organization in 1966. SkillsUSA Midwestonia is a vital component of trade and industrial occupational training programs in high school and technology centers. SkillsUSA Midwestonia has thrived in providing opportunities for students to learn and practice personal, employability, and technical skills. Total membership numbers in Midwestonia for 2017 were 12,865 which is eighth in the nation. Membership numbers

for 2018 are already at 13,100. Since 1966, SkillsUSA Midwestonia's total membership is 528,317. 2017 marked the fifth straight year that SkillsUSA Midwestonia has surpassed its membership record, which shows tremendous growth in the organization.

The local school level is where people get involved and see the value of SkillsUSA. Students and advisors first learn about SkillsUSA at the high school or technology center where they are enrolled. There are two primary types of membership: secondary and college/post-secondary. Typically, only students who are enrolled in a Trade and Industrial occupationally related program will be introduced to and be able to participate in SkillsUSA. When SkillsUSA eligible students are first introduced to Career and Technology Education (CTE) they have a good idea about the type of Trade and Industrial occupational program they are enrolling in and most likely some idea of what to expect when it comes to the workplace skills they will be learning. At the local level, most potential SkillsUSA members when introduced to the possibility of being involved in SkillsUSA will ask the question, "What's in it for me?" The answer to that individual is that success in the workplace involves more than a simple set of technical skills. Technical skills alone will not ensure that you have the soft and other employability skills you need to keep the job once the technical skills get your foot in the door. This is the message that most instructor/advisors explain to each and every student who walks through their doors who believe in what SkillsUSA can do for those who choose to get involved. It usually after this explanation and an introduction to SkillsUSA that the SkillsUSA member's journey begins.

Participant Profiles

Interview participants for this study included five students and two teachers at MTC for a total of seven interviews. All participants met the selection criteria. Of the 10 student participants emailed to solicit participation in the study, only six responded. Five of the six agreed to participate and be interviewed. Their anonymous pseudonym identifiers are S1, S2, S3, S4, and S5. Four SkillsUSA advisors were solicited for participation and interviews, and I chose two of the four to interview due to limited availability for two of the four to participate in the study. Their anonymous pseudonym identifiers are A1 and A2. I chose each of the participants because they all met the criteria, were actively involved in SkillsUSA, and would be able to give data that would provide more accurate information to better answer study questions.

S1. S1 was working a job in sales when she decided to go to school to learn a career in cosmetology. S1 exhibits a very strong drive to succeed in her chosen career field as compared to the other student participants. She is very excited to be a student in her cosmetology program and endeavored to be a part of all class activities as they occurred. S1 is recently married with a stepson. She said that she had been interested in the beauty business for a long time and with plans to start a family it was time to start training for a new and more consistent career. S1 recently graduated from her training program and is now a licensed cosmetologist. When asked why she chose cosmetology, she said, "I always knew I wanted to do hair" (S1, interview, October 21, 2017).

S2. S2 was seventeen when she started the adult cosmetology evening program at Midwestern Technology Center, which is a young age for a student to start an adult program. S2 had an interest in pursuing a four-year college degree but her parents, especially her mother, wanted her to look into the cosmetology program at MTC. S2's natural tendency is to be a more reserved and introverted. When asked what was a big change in her life after attending the cosmetology program and participating in SkillsUSA, she said, "I noticed I was talking to people more and just socializing with everyone instead of one specific group" (S2, interview, October 31, 2017). While she tends to be more reserved, it was easy to see that she was comfortable talking to others. S2 just graduated the cosmetology program and is awaiting the results of her state board exam to be a licensed cosmetologist so that she can start working in the cosmetology career field. Currently, she is hosting at a local restaurant until she gets her license, at which time she will start applying for work as a cosmetologist.

S3. S3 was originally enrolled in the Carpentry program at MTC as a junior in high school. He graduated from that program. He is very interested in joining the military but realized he could get some additional free education as a first-year adult student through a scholarship that is offered at MTC. He decided he would take advantage of that and explore what a career in the Automotive program at MTC would be like. Currently, he is enrolled as an adult in the Automotive program at MTC and works for his former high school part time in facility maintenance and driving a bus. After he finishes his current training program, he plans to decide whether to pursue a career in one of his

chosen career training programs or put those learned skills to work in the military full time as his career. S3 is a self-described introvert who did not feel comfortable in larger social settings. He credits his first SkillsUSA advisor with helping him to break out of his shell. His advisor asked him to go to Summer Leadership Institute and this is how he described his time there:

You know, I didn't really talk to people I wouldn't talk- wouldn't normally talk to. So I decided to try it. You know, first time for everything. So, after I tried it a few times, I found out you learn a lot more just talking to people and you get way better communication skills - and I mean you just-you find out stuff you normally don't know cuz you are closed in- you know - in your personal bubble. (S3, interview, November 14, 2017)

S4. S4 is currently enrolled full time as a freshman at one of Midwesternia's state universities. She came to MTC as a sophomore in the pre-engineering program there because of her interest in pursuing a future career in an engineering related field. She credits her dad and advisor for getting her involved in SkillsUSA, and she became a member of her Pre-engineering chapter of SkillsUSA. She credits her involvement in the Job Interview competition as one of the biggest contributing factors that helped her become an officer in a CTSO as a freshman in college:

I'm a freshman and I mean I didn't really expect to get it just with my experience with job interview and I thought that might help me with interviewing just

practiced for something that I might really want along the lines of college. And then I ended up getting the position. (S4, interview, September 28, 2017)

S4 still returns to MTC and shares with her teachers how her experience there still helps her with college.

S5. S5 is currently enrolled in the adult evening cosmetology program at MTC. She works a part time job while going to school. S5 was a home-schooled student and always had an interest in the cosmetology field. She originally enrolled in an Esthetician program but decided she was interested in more than that, so she enrolled in her current program where she will learn more about skin and hair treatments. S5 is a gifted makeup artist and really cares about having good skin. She has a very friendly and fun-loving style about her. She seems open to trying new things. When asked how she became involved in SkillsUSA, she stated:

So I kind of jumped in last minute and was able to go. I didn't know much about it, I was excited and just started school, um, I didn't know much about the process or going or where it was all the stuff it was just kind of a few weeks before they asked me to do it and then we have made our speech and we went together. And so that's kind of how I got there and into it without even knowing anything about it. (S5, interview, October 31, 2017).

S5 exhibits a strong professional approach to life and situations that arise. This will likely help her in her professional career as she learns to be a licensed cosmetologist that deals with multiple personality types on a daily basis.

A1. A1 is a veteran CTE instructor who has been teaching for about twenty years. He began his education career in common education and experienced some burnout and decided to use his IT knowledge in that career field for several years. He realized that he could use his IT knowledge to teach in the CTE system and help change people's lives by helping them gain meaningful employment in the IT career field. A1 was employed at a couple of different CTE schools that did not endorse involvement for SkillsUSA as much as some others so in the beginning of his CTE career, his involvement was limited to advising students in IT skills-related SkillsUSA competitions. He felt that there were other teachers at the time who were the only ones at these schools that got to participate in all that SkillsUSA had to offer advisors and students. While his students were often very successful in the competitions they went to, he always felt that there was a lot that he and his students were not reaching the program's full potential. Since then, A1 has been employed at another CTE school and says that things are much different and therefore he has more opportunities to experience all that SkillsUSA has to offer. A1 seems genuinely happy with his role as an instructor and SkillsUSA advisor at MTC.

A2. In high school, A2 wanted to be a fashion designer, work in the fashion industry, or be a landscape architect. She stated, "My whole life has been driven by God and mistakes" (A2, interview, December 15, 2017). She stopped going to college to get a business degree because she found out about a job in the fashion industry on the west coast. During that time, she said she made a mistake and became pregnant with her first child and knew she had to make a choice. She chose to move back home to her roots and

start over and raise her baby. That is when A2 came to MTC as a student in the CADD/CAMM program. A2 was a great student and after finishing the CADD program at MTC, they hired her on as an instructional assistant. “So, I am now teaching CADD in the pre-engineering academy, doing both things, at the age of 58, that I've wanted to do my whole life. All by the grace of God with mistakes intertwined” (A2, interview, December 12, 2017). A2 is a strong advocate of her students and a huge cheerleader for SkillsUSA:

I got hooked. I became an addict. I saw what this does for people and I knew it could change. So, to this day, all these years later, 17 years later, I still push SkillsUSA for my kids. They drink the Kool-Aid, is what I call it. Once you drink the SkillsUSA Kool-Aid. That's all it takes. (A2, interview, December 12, 2017)

Major Themes and Categories

There are three main components of the SkillsUSA Framework: Personal, workplace, and technical skills. The framework highlights the skills needed for student success and career readiness. These are obtained through SkillsUSA programming, CTE classes and industry partnerships. The SkillsUSA Framework delivers a skill set demanded by business and industry and is lacking in many of today's employees. Every activity and program within SkillsUSA is developed to support the three distinct components of the framework. By basing the organization on this framework, members are more likely to possess these essential skills after successfully taking part in SkillsUSA programs and activities (SkillsUSA, 2016).

Five major themes emerged with sub-categories that fit into these. The first three match the SkillsUSA Framework, and the other two emerged from the study. The major themes that emerged provide insight into what the participants identified as having meaning to them, which were the attainment of technical skills, personal growth/skill development, workplace/employability skill development, support systems, and potential weakness/improvements of SkillsUSA.

Attainment of Technical Skills

The goal of all students when they enroll into a trade and industrial training program is to obtain the skills necessary to go to work. SkillsUSA is an important part of technical skills attainment through the programs in which students enroll. SkillsUSA is a major contributor to honing these skills because it provides a fun avenue for students to further practice these skills through competitions designed to develop and enhance the skills the students have been learning in the classroom. Through the spirit of competitiveness, many students will practice and hone their craft even more to try and be the best they can be and win their competition. Over half of the study participants mentioned the value of competitions to them. S5 commented that she knew the value of practicing and learning the skills of her trade:

A part of being in cosmetology and doing services on people is also selling that product to them after, and it's uh, another way you make money in the industry and in your business once you get out of school is selling product with your services. (S5, interview, October 31, 2017)

Being a part of SkillsUSA allows the opportunity to practice these skills. Being involved in skills competitions drives students to want to work harder at developing the skills to be the best at their work by seeing the hard work and technical skills of other competitors. S5 also commented:

I watched to see everybody's ability to make all the different hairstyles that made me come back and want to work on my styling more and work on my cutting more because I saw how incredible the other people were doing at skills. And it made me excited to come back and to be in cosmetology and have the ability and time to work on those things, and I have the chance next year to go back and to actually participate. The skills of being in hair cutting and styling and that skills made me so excited to learn different techniques. I'll take that with me once I graduate. (S5, interview, October 31, 2017)

She knows that these technical skills will help her to be job ready. S1 stated competing was something that challenged her to be better:

[Competing pushes] me to do something I hadn't done before and then once you got to the Regional level once you -- It gets your adrenaline pumping of once you know you can get past Regional. Then you can go to State just getting that practice and it's more of a giving myself like, 'Hey you're actually good at this,' you know, and you can make yourself better (S1, interview, October 31, 2017).

Skills competitions creates a drive for students to become more competent in their skills. S1 felt that the competition helped her realize that she could be successful in her chosen

career, because she was validated in her ability to place well at a local and regional competition.

From the advisor perspective, technical skills contests provide a way to engrain what the student is learning in the classroom. A1 describes his commitment to SkillsUSA and competitions by commenting:

My buy-in was pretty quick because I saw that it helped reinforce what we were doing in the classroom. It gave those students a chance to engage themselves against others students, their peers so to say, and to see where they stood in their education and their training. (A1, interview, December 12, 2017)

That is an important part of what advisors do with SkillsUSA and probably the biggest way that students are introduced to the SkillsUSA technical skills competitions. A1, when speaking about what participation in SkillsUSA skills contests has done for his students, said “It gave them a chance to apply those skills in somewhat of a real-world environment” (A1, interview, December 12, 2017). The SkillsUSA skills competitions are important to the students, advisors, and business/industry employers. Each stakeholder knows that these competitions help to create a skilled workforce.

Personal Growth and Skill Development.

SkillsUSA strives to develop each member’s personal growth by enhancing their personal skills through the different activities and curriculum that is introduced to each student and advisor. Personal skills include essential values, personality traits and personal characteristics that are commonly attributed to success in life. The categories

that emerged in this theme will demonstrate what was most commonly shared by the participants as the data was coded and the categories assigned.

Personal growth. Over 50% of the participants had “personal growth” as one of their categories. From a student perspective, several stated how SkillsUSA helped them grow personally. When reflecting on how SkillsUSA has benefitted her outside of the classroom, S1 said applying what she has learned in the cosmetology program to her own practices of her make-up, nails, and hair, that she felt more prepared and presentable for class and interviews. S5 talked about stepping outside of her comfort zone when it came to speaking in front of others:

That was something I'm not very good at so it kind of shook me out of my comfort zone and um, in that way because I wasn't-- I'm not a very good public speaker. So, it showed me that maybe I do need to work on that. (S5, interview, October 31, 2017

Advisor, A1, had a few different personal and professional experiences when it came to personal growth that he has experienced from participating in SkillsUSA. Personally, SkillsUSA has given him an opportunity to develop and grow as an individual:

I've always been, as many people in the IT field are, we're-- we tend to be introverts. Um, it has helped me, um, step out of that comfort zone that I've had over the years and to be more extroverted. Um, I still am a work in progress. I still haven't become that fully extroverted person, but it has given me that opportunity

to become more at ease and become better at doing that myself. (A1, interview, December 12, 2017)

Professionally, A1 believes that SkillsUSA also provides opportunities that lead to personal growth. When speaking about students, A1 said:

They're gonna be in a position of management or position of responsibility or--
They're gonna be training other employees at some point. And so, um, these skills that they're obtaining in SkillsUSA, they're gonna make them a better employee, they're gonna make them more apt to be able to grow within that organization and help the organization in self-growth. (A1, interview, December 12, 2017)

Participation by all of these participants has led to a realization that they are growing as individuals towards the goals of being not only better in a professional environment, but also better and more productive citizens.

Motivation. Motivation emerged as a more common category in the personal growth theme. Five of the seven participants had responses that fit this category. A motivated student, more often than not, is an engaged student. Thijs & Verkuyten (2009) described student engagement as “the tendency to be behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively involved in academic activities...engaged students demonstrate more effort, experience more positive emotions, and pay more attention in their classrooms” (p.268). Students who participate in SkillsUSA activities in this study are more engaged and appear to be more motivated. When speaking of how being involved in SkillsUSA helped her in her academic experience, S1 said, “It's pushed me to make myself better in here

because I'm planning on competing again next year.” S5 indicated that seeing other competitors who had learned how to do more hairstyles made her want to improve her skills, “[I] want to work on my styling more and work on my cutting more because I saw how incredible the other people were doing at skills” (S5, interview, October 31, 2017). She saw how good others were in competition, and that motivated her to want to work on her cosmetology skills even more. S5 also commented that from an academic aspect, being involved in SkillsUSA made her want to learn even more skills:

Academically, I guess it's just the fact of coming back and being excited about the work I was learning about and wanting to really dig into all of the-all of that and skills...um, all of those different skills and then the skills of being technically hair cutting and styling and that skills made me so excited to learn different techniques and different things. (S5, interview, October 31, 2017)

For S4, participating in SkillsUSA was a big help in her educational experience. When asked about it she said, “I’d say it really motivated me to work harder in school” (S4, interview, September 28, 2017). A1 spoke about being motivated from an advisor’s perspective and how being involved with other advisors helped him want to be more involved and grow within his role in the organization. He said “There are many advisors here that are more involved, I think, to some degree than I am and that's helped me to want to grow within the organization” (A1, interview, December 12, 2017).

Soft skills. Soft skills are often times referred to as personal (interpersonal) skills, communication, transferrable skills, or social skills. It is important to note that while the

data presented soft skills as an emergent category, soft skills will be used to explain data findings in other emergent themes/ in this study. Examples of soft skills might include positive attitude, time management, problem solving, confidence, adaptability, and there are many others. Soft skills are the kind of skills that are attained from an early age as people mature and are taught to us by parents, educators, and other influential people and experiences in our lives. Soft skills are many times considered by employers as the intangible skills that are a part of the kind of person you are and critical to success in the workplace. The SkillsUSA Framework, Career Essentials program, and the sum of other activities that students become involved in help to shape a member's set of soft skills. SkillsUSA advisor A2 commented on the soft skills that she felt SkillsUSA had taught her. "So, soft skills that it taught me were to-to re-strengthen my speaking skills, to not be afraid to walk up and shake somebody's hand, to not be afraid of who I needed to be" and in relation to teaching her students she commented "I am teaching them how to shake people's hands, teaching them every aspect of soft skills that they don't get any more" (A2, interview, December 15, 2017). A2's students come to her as sophomores and are with her for three years before they graduate. In that time A2 uses SkillsUSA to teach them soft skills that many young people do not understand that are important to their future. Her students are speaking in public and building confidence and other soft skills that took them from being so dependent on technology for communication rather than face-to-face-skills that are needed in the workplace. A1 stated the importance of adding soft skills to technical skills. He commented:

We have to work on those soft skills with those students because no matter how smart or good that student is with their technical skills, if we don't work on those soft skills and those interpersonal skills with other individuals, they're not gonna be successful in the field...and so SkillsUSA was that avenue that I used to help develop those interpersonal and soft skills to help them be more successful in the career field. (A1, interview, December 12, 2017)

Confidence. Confidence/self-confidence is at the center of most other soft and professional development. Without confidence in one's abilities and skills it is very hard to develop personally. By participating in SkillsUSA competitions, leadership development training programs such as Summer Leadership Institute (SLI), and the multitude of other programs and activities that are offered by SkillsUSA, members develop more confidence. When asked about what skill(s) she felt she had developed from participating in SkillsUSA, S4 responded "I would say my confidence in like being able to talk to adults and just being able to stand up for myself and just like arguing for myself, in a way that's polite, of course" (S4, interview, September 28, 2017). S2 realized she could participate in a leadership contest, like the T-Shirt Design contest, that was not so intimidating. She gained confidence just from stepping out of her comfort zone and trying something new. From that experience, S2 explained:

I don't feel as nervous to start taking charge and helping others. I feel more confident in that area as well...I'm not afraid now to help the newer students. Um, I feel confident with teaching them what I already know and helping them as

well...I feel like it just gave me a lot of confidence because I went there not knowing anyone and I got to branch out and meet a lot of people. (S2, interview, October 31, 2017)

S1 showed the most instances where she explained how much her confidence had improved during her interview. This may correspond to her enthusiasm and drive that she also exhibited during her interview. When asked why she decided to participate in SkillsUSA, S1 explained how the competitions really helped her see her potential. As she advanced through the regional level to the state level, she gained confidence and wanted to push herself to be better. She received positive feedback from peers and mentors, which also helped to build her confidence.

Time management. Time management includes being on time as well as being able to deliver things before a deadline and even being on time for work and meetings. SkillsUSA is a co-curricular association and members who become involved must learn to manage their time. Students become aware of limitations on their time and they learn what they have to do to address everything that places limitations on their time. This category was a prominent occurrence for 100% of the study participants.

One interview question specifically asked each participant how they managed their SkillsUSA and school activities. S4 commented that other students in the Pre-engineering Academy struggled to manage their activities, but that it was important to her to have a planner to schedule and write down all of her activities. She learned that keeping a calendar and prioritizing activities allowed her to manage her time effectively

so that she looked forward to her events. S2 also uses a planner to manage and balance her time between normal school activities, work, and participating in SkillsUSA. She also understands the need to prioritize as shown through her comment, “I go to school, I work too and I was doing [SkillsUSA], so it was all kind of a bit [challenging], but just scheduling time for things and knowing that your school comes first [is] the most important” (S2, interview, October 31, 2017). S5 explained that time management was not as much of a challenge because of the way her cosmetology training program was segmented and organized with time to work on curriculum, hands on work, and book work. She is at the school six hours most evenings and they have a free time to work on mannequins and a time when customers come in so they can practice on people.

In contrast, A2 had a more difficult time organizing her schedule, because when she started at MTC, she was already an adult with small children and had to learn to juggle life as a single mother, be a new student at MTC, and try to be involved in SkillsUSA. Originally, when she heard about SkillsUSA, she told herself that she had no time for it. When asked how she balanced everything she said:

I don't think there's anybody better you could have that question to...I'm in my early 40s now, I'm on welfare, I have babies at home in diapers, and I'm an officer and I have my schoolwork. So, I maintained it all knowing how to time manage

A2 lived in a one bedroom apartment with her mother and two babies, and in order to study at night, she would sit in the bathroom because that is only place she could turn the

light on and study without disturbing her mother and children. She gave credit to SkillsUSA for providing time management techniques to high school students.

Time management is different for everyone because people come from all different places and backgrounds. Being involved in SkillsUSA was an experience that helped to expand time management skills for each of the study participants as it fit each of their situations.

Workplace and Employability Skill Development

The last of the themes that emerged from the data that correlate to the SkillsUSA Framework is workplace skills, also known as employability skills. Workplace skills are essential attitudes and abilities for success in the workplace. While some of these skills could be perceived as overlapping with personal skills, the categories that were developed in this theme show how they developed from the workplace emphasis based on the SkillsUSA Framework and the way that they were attained by participants based on their experiences while participating in SkillsUSA programming and activities. There are many workplace skills that could be described, however, the ones that follow were the most prominent ones identified in this study.

Leadership. Leadership in today's workplace involves the ability to influence other people and to create a better outcome for an organization or group of people. SkillsUSA recognizes the need to prepare its members to not only succeed in the workplace, but to also give its members the opportunity for leadership training and a way to practice that training. This occurs through specific leadership training in SkillsUSA

curriculum like the SkillsUSA Career Essentials, attending leadership conferences that has leadership development content, members who decide to become local, state, or national officers and the associated training for that, and through leadership contests at the local, state, and national levels. Five out of seven participants revealed leadership as an important part of their SkillsUSA experience. When asked about important skills she felt she attained through participation in SkillsUSA, S2 said, “I think leadership was a big one, especially at SLI...SLI is a summer leadership camp with SkillsUSA and it's kind of like almost a training camp... if you were to be an officer.” (S2, interview, October 31, 2017). Another participant found great value in SLI. S3 got his start with SkillsUSA by attending SLI at the encouragement of his advisor. He had friends who had tried it and told him how fun it was, so he decided to attend. S3 commented, “I decided I’m gonna try it, you know, there is nothing wrong with trying it. So I went to SkillsUSA, had a blast, and then later found out that I got voted in as a chaplain” (S3, interview, November 14, 2017). By going to SLI, S3 took a chance and as a result got leadership training, and was voted in as a district SkillsUSA officer. S4 found that through participating in the leadership competition, Job Interview, that she was confident enough to explore opportunities when she went to college. She described her experience:

I had an email come through my inbox and it said that this graduate chapter of an industrial engineering club was opening up positions for undergraduate students. And I decided I'd apply, you know, and just see if I can get it. I'm a freshman and

I mean I didn't really expect to get it...then I ended up getting the position. (S4, interview, September 28, 2017)

Advisors in SkillsUSA are often regarded as leaders by fellow advisors and students, and their involvement as advisors also continues to develop leadership skills. When asked about the skills he had developed as an advisor through SkillsUSA, A1 said:

The skills that I've personally developed, beyond the technical stuff, it's helped me grow as a leader. Taking a leadership role has not always been something that's been natural to me. I've always been, as many people in the IT field are, we tend to be introverts...it helps me reflect on my own abilities, and it's helped me to grow personally. (A1, Interview, December 12, 2017)

A1 described that modeling desired behaviors is important when teaching and advising students, and that through modeling these behaviors, it has helped him develop his own skills.

A2's experience with SkillsUSA has actually come full circle for her. She started out her journey with SkillsUSA as a student and is now an advisor working with students. A2 relates how going to a fall leadership conference, competitive events, and becoming an officer impacted her life:

I think one of the biggest things that happens every year is in the fall, it's called The Fall Leadership Conference. They have one for secondary, one for post-secondary. And that introduction to that and that excitement and that electricity in the air that happens at that event is what will get anybody sold on SkillsUSA. I

rode a bus to go somewhere to something I didn't know what it was and I came out a changed person because they teach you how amazing it is and you feel it instantly once you get to this event.

Following the event, A2 felt more connected to her students and the students involved her in everything. Through the encouragement of her students, A2 continued to get more involved and became an officer as a vice president. She commented:

I have value added in my life from my business side of success in industry and everything that I had done before as management, but I had no idea that avenue of leadership that I was truly missing in my life till I took part of-- in SkillsUSA.

Communication. Communication skills are vital to everything we do in life.

Some have these skills inherently, while others have to work on these skills to be effective at communication with others in their personal lives and especially at the workplace. All study participants spoke of how their ability to communicate was enhanced by their participation in SkillsUSA. S4 talked about how the Job Interview competition helped her hone her skills to communicate with others, "Certainly, it is your ability to promote yourself to a potential employer that will test your skills to communicate effectively." S4 commented that her confidence increased in being able to talk to adults and stand up for herself, which is very important when going to job interviews. Through her participation in SkillsUSA, S4 felt more prepared to go to a job interview.

S1 explained how she uses communication in cosmetology. Her training program uses live work as a way to help the students practice their skills and she uses communication as a component of the cosmetology SkillsUSA competition. “So, when you're behind the chair working on your client...you talk to them back and forth and you get to know them. It makes you feel like you can relate to everybody” (S1, interview, October 31, 2017). S3 believed that communication skills were probably central to his SkillsUSA experience. He spoke of how it helped him to not only communicate with others and why that was important, but also how it made a difference in how he communicated with his parents. He commented:

You know, I didn't really talk to people I wouldn't talk- wouldn't normally talk to. So I decided to try it. You know, first time for everything. So after I tried it a few times, I found out you learn a lot more just talking to people and you get way better communication skills - and I mean you just-you find out stuff you normally don't know cuz you are closed in- you know - in your personal bubble... I've definitely noticed a change in myself through communication skills. You know I- I talk to people I normally wouldn't have and going along with that is, uh, speaking in front of crowds. I was terrified, I mean I was shaking -- I still shake whenever I get up there but I think that pushes me even harder now to strive for my best -- you know don't slur my words don't say um like I'm saying now. (S3, interview, November 14, 2017)

S3 talked about the importance of how attending SkillsUSA SLI and being an officer really helped him to communicate better and how that will help him in his career by being able to take the customer's idea and his knowledge then develop a plan for a finished product. He said:

So let's say you were building a roof and it had to be an A-pitch (just a normal roof) and the homeowner wanted attic space then you have to talk to everybody: the homeowner, the builders, and general managers - everybody on it. And if the homeowner wants an A frame roof and they want attic space, you may have to, you know, say that won't give you this (you know room is what you wanting) but you may have to do a gambrel roof which is more barn-style which gives you more room but it takes away from that traditional house look -- so you just have to talk it through. Give them ideas. They'll give you ideas. And, like I said, just talk it out (S3, interview, November 14, 2017).

S3 also found that his ability to talk with his parents improved. He started taking the time to go to them and find out how they were doing more. SkillsUSA has changed his ability to relate with everyone in his life. S5 talked a lot about how her involvement in competitions improved her communication skills. "I think I've realized it's more important to uh, knowing how to do public speaking...that was something I'm not very good at so it kind of shook me out of my comfort zone...I'm not a very good public speaker. S5 also spoke about how they practice communication in her classroom because of how important it is in the cosmetology profession. "We have to act like we have a

product that we have to sell to the whole class and that's something we have to learn here". (S5, interview, October 31, 2017). When asked what skills she would take away from her experience in SkillsUSA, S2 said "I started talking in front of people more. So public speaking...I feel a little bit more confident talking in front of people" (S2, interview, October 31, 2017). A1 had a lot to say about the role that SkillsUSA plays in imparting and enhancing communication skills for his students and personally. In regards to student competitions that help with communication skills among others he said "many times in the business world, we're confronted with situations that we have to come up with a solution, and it's not coming up just with a solution, but we've got to be able to communicate that solution to others" (A1, interview, December 12, 2017). A1 then speaks about how he has benefited in his personal life from participating in SkillsUSA. "It has taught me to become a better parent because of the patience and the communication skills...it's also helped in my relationship with my wife, as far as communication" (A1, interview, December 12, 2017). A2 talked about how SkillsUSA helped to strengthen her soft skills which included better communication skills. "I've never had a problem speaking very much. But again it strengthened my speaking skills, to not be afraid to walk up and shake somebody's hand" (A2, interview, December 15, 2017). A2 said one of the biggest challenges she has is with teaching her students the soft skills to succeed once they graduate. They come to her without very good public speaking skills because they utilize electronics extensively to communicate. However, through SkillsUSA activities this all changes. "The new millennials, they don't

understand how to talk to people. But by their senior year, all the wallflowers that couldn't even look at you are now professional speakers because they have to be giving speeches all the time” (A2, interview, December 15, 2017).

Support Systems

In order for SkillsUSA to be a benefit to its membership there has to be systems in place to help members to take advantage of what it has to offer. Support can take different forms. When it comes to SkillsUSA, sometimes that support is through encouragement, sometimes financial, sometimes it is having resources available, and sometimes it is being at a school that promotes SkillsUSA. The key to becoming a member of SkillsUSA and realizing its benefits is becoming aware that it exists and what it can do for you. When this awareness occurs then involvement will usually follow. Support for SkillsUSA usually comes from three primary sources that showed in the data that was collected.

Administrative support. Without support from administration it would be difficult for any local SkillsUSA chapter to thrive. Administrators that believe in what SkillsUSA does for students will find a way to provide the needed financial support and resources for advisors and students to attend leadership conferences, competitions, and to be a part of local, state, and national leadership. Many times, students don't see this side of support systems, however, they can recognize when they have what they need to pursue their interests in SkillsUSA. S1 talked about what she noticed in regards to support from the school and administration. She didn't see administration every day, but

she did notice that she was able to participate in any events that she needed to as far as competition. When asked about the support she saw from the school regarding competition she said “Um, I know I had a lot of support from bosses and staff...and then afterwards, of course, I got the “great job” when it went up on our web page” (S1, interview, October 31, 2017). So S1 could see the support from administration when it came to the school paying for her way to competitions and leadership conferences. She also received verbal admonishments, too. When S5 was asked how she felt the school enhanced or limited her involvement in SkillsUSA she said “I really feel like it gives us limitless possibilities with all the supplies they give us” (S5, interview, October 31, 2017). A1 has known what it was like to have an administration that didn’t necessarily support equal participation for their advisors but he talks about what it was like to go from that situation to one where his new school supported involvement from everyone who was interested. With “the previous employer I was somewhat limited in my involvement with Skills...now with MTC,...it's something that they wholeheartedly believe in and they encourage, their instructors to participate in” (A1, interview, December 12, 2017). A2 talks about how the success her students have generates a lot of support from administration, and from the students, for her role as being an advisor to students with a lot of success as a result of their involvement in SkillsUSA. A2 said:

So, I guide them and lead them into contests for job interviews, for job skill demonstration, for prepared speech, for extemporaneous speech. Not for a medal, not for winning, not for anything like that, but to better prepare them for the rest

of their life. So, I hear all my seniors after three-- on their third year of being here, get up and talk to all the sophomores. This happens every year and every senior says, "You guys you will be doing this in two years, and the sophomores are thinking, "Oh, no, I won't." And the sophomores are always up there two years later saying the same thing. So, it is an incredible-incredible event to get to watch unfold. Plus, every fall, graduating seniors that start at universities throughout Midwestern and beyond, I get texts and phone calls saying, "Miss Cooper, you cannot believe how SkillsUSA changed my life...we have two success stories that SkillsUSA got their foot in the door to get to be first time ever freshman on teams that have never ever taken freshmen before. One is, um, working in the concrete industry, the training program up there. She was there civil and architectural program, they've never had a freshman be part of that, because of SkillsUSA now she is. And I have another girl, I-- I'm sorry, I can't think of the organization that accepted her because of her outstanding interviewing skills, and she placed top 10 in the nation for job interview. So, I get Kudos every year" (A2, interview, December 15, 2017).

Stories like this generate support from administration because it is a good thing for the students but also the school. A2 spoke very positively about the kind of support that she receives from her administration when it comes to SkillsUSA. "We have an incredible outstanding, understanding team that believes and supports and encourages us to encourage our students to take part in this" (A2, interview, December 15, 2017).

Peer support. Many times, we get involved in things because we have friends or co-workers talk to us about things that we might be interested in. That is also a common occurrence when it comes to students and advisors of SkillsUSA. When asked how her advisor influenced her involvement in SkillsUSA, S5 said that one of the ways that he encourages his students is for them to also encourage other students who may not know what SkillsUSA can do for them. She stated:

He wanted us, the students, to really talk to other students about what it was like coming from student to student -- to tell them and let them know how exciting it is. Because we were really excited about it talking to each other when we were there on the way back and he really wanted us to share it with the other students (S5, interview, October 31, 2017).

Peer support is how S5 got started in SkillsUSA. “Two girls were taking a T-shirt design so they asked me to be a part of their group to help with their speech and the creation of their T-shirts” (S5, interview, October 31, 2017). Before this, S5 really did not know much about SkillsUSA, but now, she is competing in competitions and very involved. S4 talked about how peers helped to get you involved to try new things in SkillsUSA. She spoke about how the idea was “getting other kids involved to just trying new things...because you're in high school you can try when everyone is high school students” (S4, interview, September 28, 2017). In her training program there are so many activities and student organizations to be involved in, so S4 recognized the value in her peers encouraging others to try new things. S3 had a similar story in how he became

involved because of peer supporting and encouraging him to try SkillsUSA. “I had friends that said it was awesome. So, I decided I’m gonna try it, you know, there is nothing wrong with trying it. So I went to SkillsUSA and had a blast” (S3, interview, November 14, 2017). A1 spoke of the encouragement he had from his fellow advisors that he felt enriched his experience in SkillsUSA:

This year was my first year to actually have a post-secondary student run for a state office and that student was elected. It is a process that I was somewhat foreign to. I knew a little bit about the process, but didn't quite completely understand the whole process. So, this past year, with the encouragement of co-workers that have been involved in that process, it has helped me to be more willing to encourage that in my own students. Had I not been in the environment that I'm in with co-workers that feel that way, I'm not sure that I would have been able to push it as well as it was pushed and encouraged to that student. Um, I would have given it-- I would have given that student that opportunity but I don't know that we would have been as successful as we were had it not been for those co-workers. (A1, interview, December 12, 2017)

Advisor support. Those who know CTE and SkillsUSA know that the support from an advisor is critical to getting students involved in SkillsUSA. The advisor is usually the student’s instructor as well, so this is the first person the student is introduced to and spends every day with in their career training program. Encouragement and

guidance by SkillsUSA advisors is one of the biggest ways to inform and excite students about the benefits of the program.

All student participants credited advisors as one of the reasons that they got involved in SkillsUSA. In regard to the role that her advisor played, S1 said, “I would say, from the get-go, as soon as I got here, he saw what I could do and I guess you could say he was confident and in my ability,” (S1, interview, October 31, 2017). S1 also commented on how her advisor interacted with other students, “If he sees potential, he will push you to practice, and try to build you up. He definitely pushes them and gives them everything that they need” (S1, interview, October 31, 2017).

When asked how her advisor influenced her involvement in SkillsUSA, S5 said, “He really, he pushes us to do it. He wants us to get the experience. He wants us to expand on our knowledge and our craft” (S5, interview, October 31, 2017). S2 explained how her advisor encouraged her to get involved in SkillsUSA when she first started her program, “We went to the SkillsUSA t-shirt design contest and that's when I started getting involved... he was the one that really got me started in it” (S2, interview, October 31, 2017). S4 said that her advisor was very instrumental in her involvement in SkillsUSA. One surprising thing she mentioned is that her dad first suggested competing in the Job Interview contest:

I decided to participate, so I came here my sophomore year and my dad found out the opportunity to do the job interview competition and- as a sophomore and he was like, ‘You need to do this. It's a great opportunity, you're gonna become an

adult soon, you need to get these skills.’ And [laughs] I didn't do anything about it my sophomore year 'cause I was just-- There's so many things going on and you kinda forget about one certain thing, but then my junior year I was like, I'm gonna do this, get it done. And that's why I started the SkillsUSA, because of the competition itself (S4, interview, September 28, 2017).

While it might have been her dad that got her attention, it was her advisor that first year that kept telling and showing what SkillsUSA could do that ultimately led to S4's eventual participation. “She was just advising us and like really loving on us as students and encouraging us” (S4, interview, September 28, 2017). S3 talked about how his advisor helped to encourage and support his involvement with SkillsUSA, too. “I sat down with him and we talked for a while and I decided that I wanna try it. You know, he - he kinda talked me into it [laughing]” (S3, interview, November 14, 2017).

A1, an advisor, described what motivates him to encourage and support students to be involved in SkillsUSA. He wanted to go above and beyond the job requirements of an instructor, and equip students with the skills needed for their jobs. He encourages students to participate in both, leadership and technical skills, events. A1 realizes the importance of students needing both skills to be successful in the workforce:

I believe in my heart of hearts that we're giving these students that-that edge they need to not only be competitive, but to stand out among their peers...and so, um, these skills that they're obtaining in SkillsUSA, they're gonna make them a better employee, they're gonna make them more apt to be able to grow within that

organization and help the organization in self-growth...if I wasn't doing that then I think, um, we're limiting the opportunities those students have. (A1, interview, December 12, 2017)

A2 said that she knows when one of her students has a contest that is perfect for them, but she encourages all students to be involved in SkillsUSA:

So, it's something that I do throughout the year as my old advisor did, throughout the year to everybody. You just, when you get that student, you know what contest would be perfect for them, technical or skill, either one. So, it's something you-- it becomes part of how you teach. So, to this day, all these years later, 17 years later, I still push SkillsUSA for my kids. They drink the Kool-Aid, is what I call it. Once you drink the SkillsUSA Kool-Aid. That's all it takes because you see productive, productive, productive people as the outcome. (A2, interview, December 15, 2017)

Potential Weaknesses and Improvements.

Thomas Reid (1786) said, "In every chain of reasoning, the evidence of the last conclusion can be no greater than that of the weakest link of the chain, whatever may be the strength of the rest" (p. 402). In other words, a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Any organization that wishes to be strong always evaluates areas in which they can improve and acts on them in order to remain strong. So, when looking at improving the experience that each member has in SkillsUSA, it is helpful to understand what SkillsUSA members see as weak points or improvements that could be made to better

that experience. Each of the study participants either mentioned areas that they thought might be weak or how they thought SkillsUSA might be improved. S1 felt that the contests and the regional and state level could have been run better. “I think it could be a little bit more organized. Um, I know that the judges that I had could have been a little bit more specific on what they needed turned in at what time” (S1, interview, October 31, 2017). S1 observed that the contests could have been more organized and judges could have been clearer on expectations for the competition. S3 mentioned that between the two advisors he had, that they did not necessarily support SkillsUSA activities with the same effort. “And uh, my new instructor, no offense to him, I wouldn't say as hard as my old advisor would” (S3, interview, November 14, 2017). This shows that an advisor can have a big impact on the experiences a student has in SkillsUSA.

S3 also mentioned that he thought that SkillsUSA was structured well but that there could be more activities and more awareness about opportunities available to students. S4 also made comments similar to S3's about there being a need for more awareness of SkillsUSA offerings and general knowledge about the program. “I'd say the biggest struggle I had was with my home high school just because nobody understood what SkillsUSA was and why it was such a cool thing” (S4, interview, September 28, 2017). For S4, it was hard for students and teachers at her high school to understand what SkillsUSA was and why she might miss classes at high school to attend SkillsUSA functions. For her it would be beneficial if there were more awareness and education focused towards high schools for SkillsUSA high school students that attend CTE

programs part time. S2 felt that there needed to be more campus involvement and awareness:

Our campus isn't quite as involved as maybe another campus would be and I think that that's important in that this campus might get a little bit more into it... I think that maybe like the higher-ups in the office don't know quite as much about it and I think that if they knew more, they'd be even more involved...maybe just spreading knowledge more. I don't know if it's my campus and we just haven't gotten that information but I would like to know even more about it and more in depth. So that way, I could be able to share with others students. (S2, interview, October 31, 2017)

A2 touched on several areas that she felt were weaknesses in SkillsUSA. She pointed out that not all SkillsUSA advisors have the same level of involvement as others. “What happens is people who have never touched it and don't understand it, don't grasp or see what I see and will never get it” (A2, interview, December 15, 2017). This is a reality of many students and advisors who have the opportunity to participate in SkillsUSA. Some will fully utilize it and others will only utilize parts of it or none at all. She gives an example of this as well when it comes to students that do not have active advisors:

Well, their student success rate isn't as high as others -- other programs. Uh, I can tell you, every former student that comes back here and speaks has been a SkillsUSA student...I know they had the opportunity because their advisor did,

but what we did not see coming back as guest speakers, that I have ever noticed, are any former students from advisors that didn't take part in SkillsUSA...there are, um, I don't know where they go, I don't know what happens to them, I don't know because, in my opinion only, they did not get the proper skill set and leadership skills when they left here because their advisor had not bought in to such an outstanding organization to help set them up with a set of tools for their toolbox for life (A2, interview, December 15, 2017).

One last area that A2 touched on is the need for improvement in the way SkillsUSA competitions are judged:

We don't find professionals in the field of that competition. We need to work stronger and harder at that. Finding professionals in the field of the specific competition rather than just picking people. At the national level I even have filed a grievance because I had student's competing and I watched the main judge's silliness, antics, goofiness, bad behavior, rudeness happen, and I filed a grievance. It wasn't for us to get a gold medal. It was to get this man removed from what he was doing because he was not doing the students a service. My students came out of there and said, 'A2, the level of expertise, of excellence was higher at district and state level than it was here. This is a joke.' So, other than that, nothing can I see improving SkillsUSA. (A2, interview, December 15, 2017)

When speaking about weaknesses or improvements that he thinks could be made to benefit SkillsUSA members, A1 touched on a couple of things. He commented that some schools limit involvement:

The previous employer that I had, I was somewhat limited in my involvement with Skills because our school actually had two individuals that were pre-designated as school advisors and there were some activities where those advisors were the only ones allowed to go with the students. (A1, interview, December 12, 2017)

He also said that the focus seems to be mostly on secondary and post-secondary students. He also felt that we could be getting students involved at a younger age by putting more focus on middle school level students:

Something that I found kind of interesting when I was at the National Leadership Conference in the summer of 2017, there were several middle school kids that were actually competing at the national level...I always thought it was limited to, um, basically juniors and seniors, uh, our-our secondary students and of course adults or post-secondary students and to see secondary students that were of such a young age, I thought that was a good thing...I think that is something that we should try to encourage is to get more kids involved at younger age. Um, it just gives them more time to develop those skills, and to enhance whichever skill set you're working on. Whether it's an actual, um, vocational skill or if it's a

leadership skill it just gives them more time to develop those skills and to become, I guess you might say polished. (A1, interview, December 12, 2017)

The participants really had nothing too negative to say about areas that they thought were weaknesses. Most of their comments focused on improvements like awareness, organization and judging of contests, and getting advisors and students more involved or engaged.

Summary

Chapter Four presented an explanation of SkillsUSA at the national, state, and local levels, highlighting the vast number of initiatives, programs, and opportunities available to SkillsUSA and why they are important. Finally, the stories of the participants and the major themes/categories presented that tell how SkillsUSA had an impact on their lives. Chapter Five analyzes the data findings through the lens of Astin's theory of involvement.

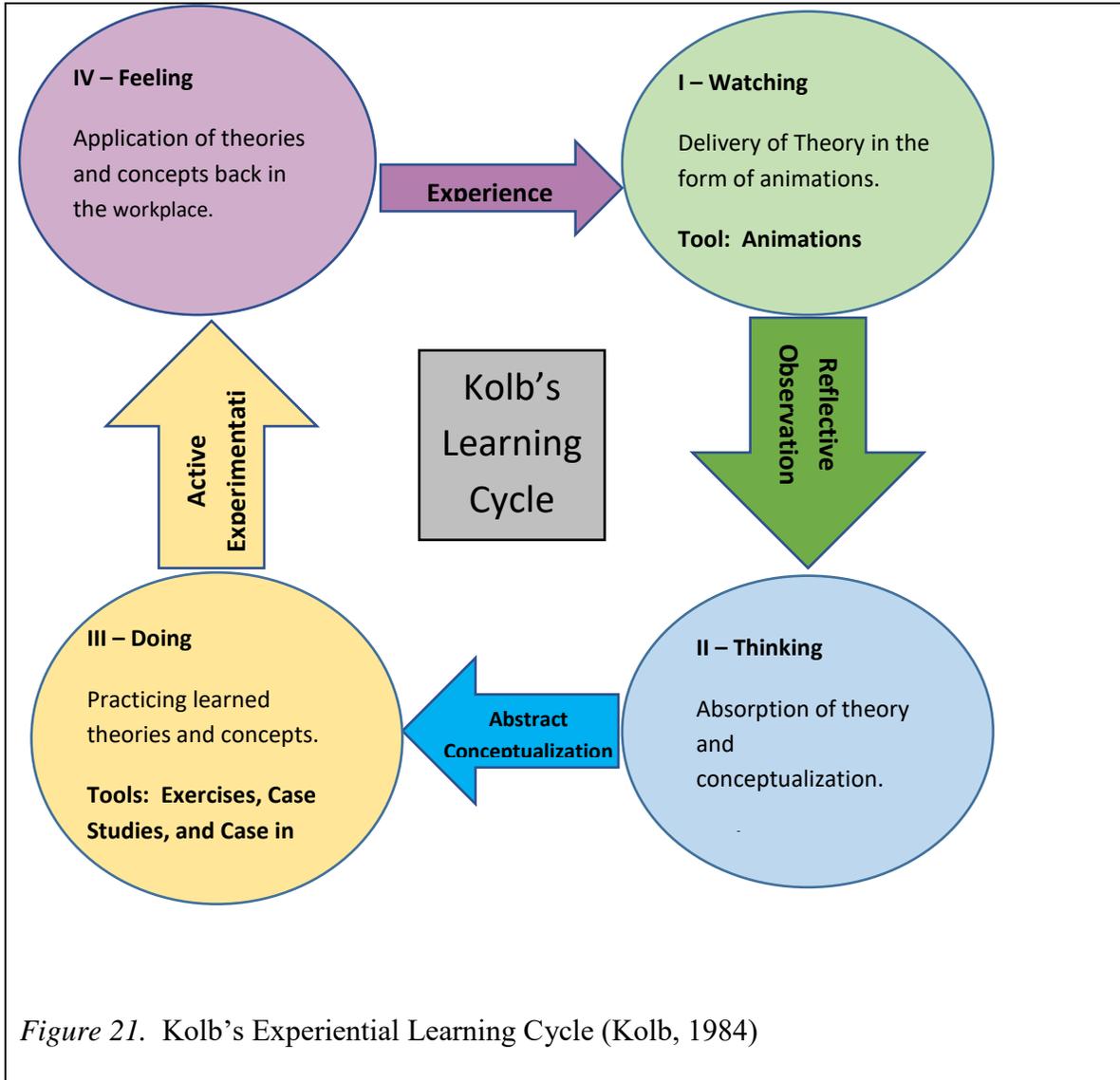
CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The purpose of this study is to explain the role involvement in SkillsUSA plays in overall perceived value of educational experience. Data were collected from a variety of sources including observations, interviews, documents, artifacts, and photographs. Two theoretical frameworks were reviewed that helped focus this study for analysis. CTE and SkillsUSA are co-curricular and blend well together.

Kolb's Learning Cycle

A theory that helps to explain the type of learning that occurs for students in CTE programs is Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, shown in Figure 21. Students get essential workplace skills through a learning strategy known as contextual learning. Contextual learning theory asserts that learning occurs when students process new information or knowledge in such a way that it makes sense to them based on their own experience (Kolb, 1984).



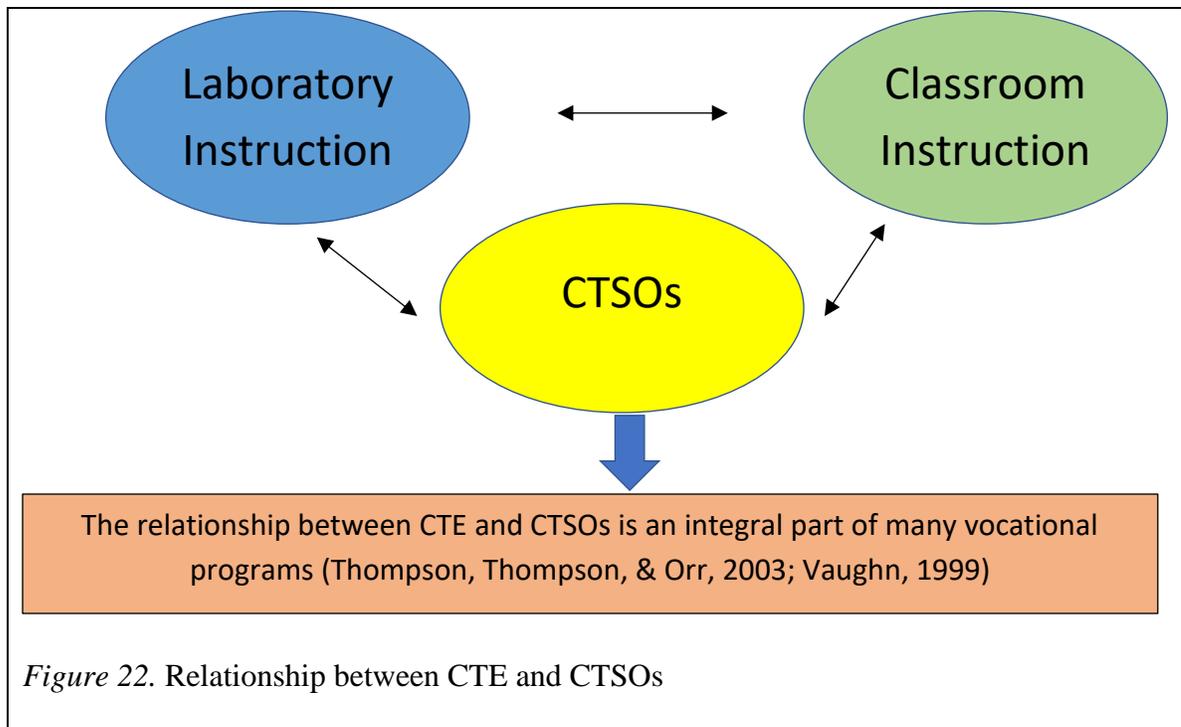
The terms, contextual learning and experiential learning, are often used interchangeably. CTE programs help students glean cognitive knowledge through theory and make learning meaningful through hands-on exercises intended to reinforce learning. These experiences allow students to give meaning to what they plan to do in their careers. The typical CTE program of instruction implements classroom teaching, lab applications, supervised live work experiences, and active involvement. For example, in a cosmetology

program, students are taught necessary theory in the classroom. This is followed by practicing haircuts on mannequin heads. Additional practice and involvement in workplace technical skills is accomplished through live work on actual clients.

Another example is carpentry students learning theory in the classroom and then practicing technical skills acquired during classroom learning to build projects like storage buildings or cabinets. Additional hands-on learning is provided through live work where specific cabinets or storage buildings are built to order for clients. SkillsUSA involvement reinforces contextual learning in CTE classrooms through these activities.

Astin's Theory of Involvement

While much of what CTE is founded on can be applied to experiential theory through contextual application of occupational skills, it does not completely embrace all of experiential learning theory. What truly leads to positive outcomes for CTE students is their active participation in the learning process and involvement in CTSOs like SkillsUSA, shown in Figure 22.

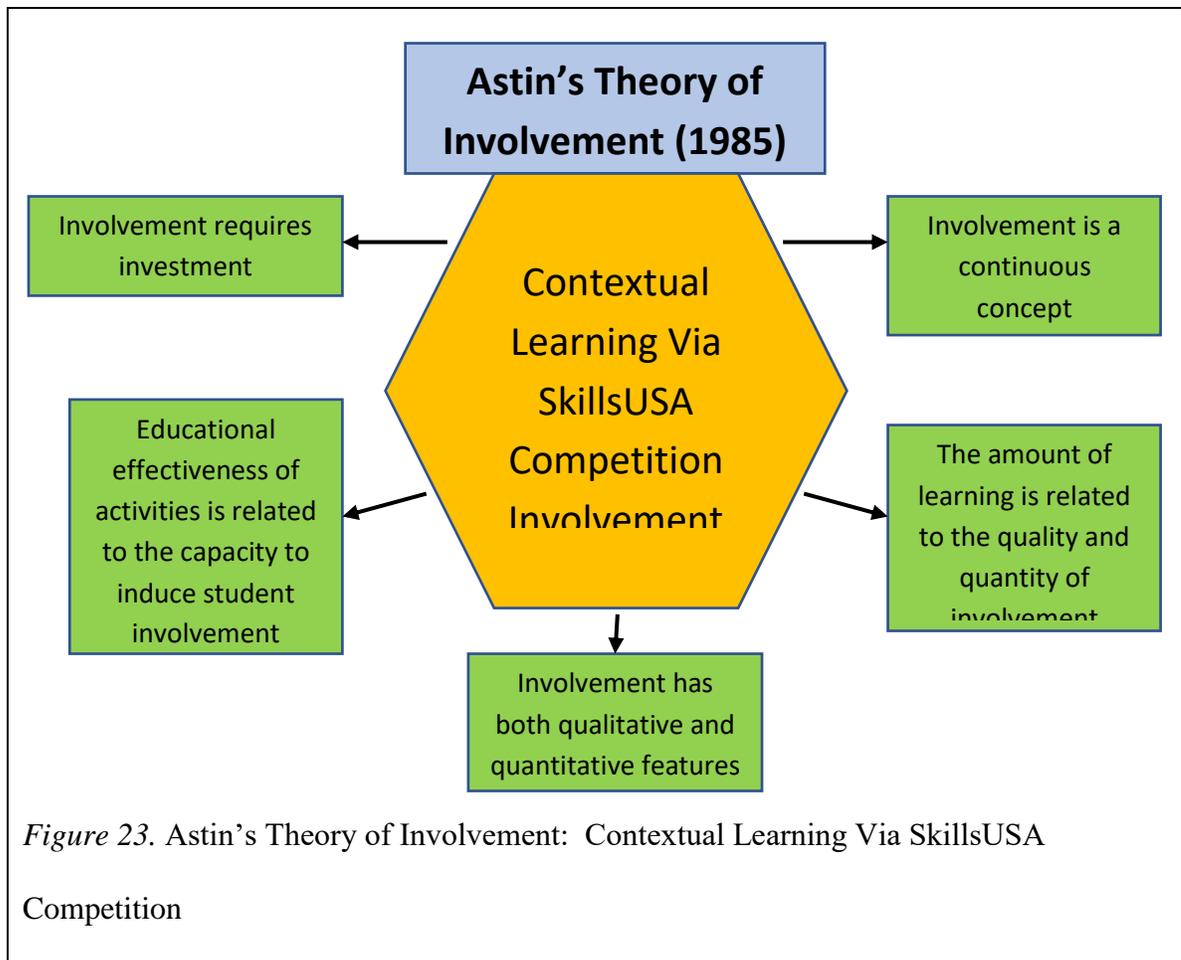


SkillsUSA builds on contextual learning by getting students more involved and therefore more invested in their educational experience. Astin’s theory asserts that student involvement takes the form of active participation in interactions with faculty, staff, peers, and academic activities inside and outside of class time. Students participating in SkillsUSA develop academically, occupationally, and personally by improving these skills through active involvement. Examples include SkillsUSA members participating in SkillsUSA, skills and leadership competitions, becoming SkillsUSA officers, attending leadership training, leadership conferences, and SkillsUSA student chapter activities. These activities involve learning but also increase the student’s opportunity to analyze and reflect on their experiences.

For example, when SkillsUSA members participate in a skill or leadership competition and are judged and discover their results, this gives them an opportunity to reflect on how they did and what they can do to improve upon those results. Another

example is when students attend leadership training. This training introduces ways in which the student can improve their leadership skills to benefit them personally and professionally. Students then take this information and analyze it giving the opportunity to reflect on how they can utilize this new training.

Therefore, being actively involved in a CTSO like SkillsUSA in a contextualized setting naturally leads to improved learning, student growth, and an overall outcome. This happens because students are able to intensify meaning through hands-on curriculum in the CTE classroom. Add to that, being actively involved in SkillsUSA where they continue to practice the contextualized learning from the classroom. The student's educational experience is more meaningful and greatly enhanced as a result. Figure 23 shows how contextual learning via SkillsUSA fits with Astin's theory of involvement.



Ultimately, when looking through the lens of Kolb's theory, it is evident how SkillsUSA participation reinforces the process of how contextual learning is applied in the CTE environment. This is important because this style of learning is prominent in the very foundation of CTE and is touted as the hallmark of what makes CTE a great educational system. When looking at SkillsUSA participation through the lens of Astin's theory, it completes the picture of how Astin's theory builds upon Kolb's theory helping to explain how SkillsUSA involvement utilizes contextual learning through additional application of skills through preparation of contests and other skills demonstrations, Astin's theory completes this interrelation by allowing additional reflection and analysis

of what was learned through increased involvement in the learning process. This leads to how involvement is utilized in this study. The primary framework that guided this study was Astin's theory of student involvement (Astin, 1984; Astin & Sax, 1998). Astin's theory was used to show how involvement in SkillsUSA is of great benefit and adds perceived value to the educational experience which is the purpose of this study.

Through the lens of Astin's theory, in this chapter, I analyze the data presented in Chapter Four. Astin asserted that students develop by becoming engaged in activities. Engagement in state and national CTSO competitions within SkillsUSA could be considered an example. Astin, however, feels this implies a psychological reason for outcomes. He posited that student involvement is more than a psychological frame of mind. Rather, it has more to do with behavioral manifestation of motivation. Behavioral manifestation would result in action towards educational goals, which results in involvement. The greater the involvement by the student in their educational goals by studying, participation in student activities, and networking with faculty and other students, the greater the amount of student learning and development.

Astin's (1984) Theory of Involvement has five fundamental postulates:

1. Involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects. The objects may be highly generalized, such as the student experience or highly specific, such as the student preparing for a chemistry examination.
2. Regardless of its object, involvement occurs along a continuum. That is, different student manifest different degrees of involvement in a given object,

and the same student manifests different degrees of involvement in different objects at different times.

3. Involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features. The extent of a student's involvement in academic work, for instance, can be measured quantitatively (how many hours the student spends studying) and qualitatively (whether the student reviews and comprehends reading assignments or simply stares at the textbook and daydreams).
4. The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program.
5. The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement.

The last two postulates give insight into how educators can design and create better educational programs and policies for all students. While most educators and administrators are guided by an educational theory, usually that theory is implicit in action only and rarely put into a formal statement or examined critically in a way that is testable. Regarding postulates one through three, participants in this study were actively engaged. They invested time and energy both psychologically and physically (postulate 1) and, at times, involvement varied depending on what the participants had going on at different times (postulate 2). For example, A2 was highly invested in SkillsUSA by going to leadership events, becoming an officer, and eventually becoming a CTE educator advising SkillsUSA students. We also know that at one point she was a single parent of two little children and had many responsibilities that required her to organize and

prioritize her time. Therefore, the energy invested increased and decreased at different times.

In addition, based on the data, at times there are quantitative and qualitative features of involvement (postulate 3). For example, a quantitative feature of involvement would be outcomes from competing in SkillsUSA competitions, because students compete and win medals. This was the experience for S1, S2, S4, and S5. They all had quantitative evidence of their participation in SkillsUSA. Qualitatively, the study participants all felt they had grown in various ways that were not necessarily quantifiable. For example, A2 explained how her experience in SkillsUSA changed her life. She went to great lengths to explain how her experience in SkillsUSA not only led to personal growth and development but it also changed her career. A2 became a CTE educator because of the positive value she associated with being involved in SkillsUSA. A former national officer in SkillsUSA exclaimed going to WLTI had changed her life.

Dalton Garrett, the SkillsUSA Midwestonia director talked about how being involved as a district advisor, over ten years ago, changed his life and career. Being involved in SkillsUSA helped every participant develop their communication skills, time management skills, soft skills, and many others. This is what was observed and what the students shared as their personal experiences with SkillsUSA during data collection. These facts corroborate the qualitative aspect of what Astin explained in his third postulate. Postulates four and five most effectively explain how Astin's theory apply to this study.

Analysis of Data through Postulate Four: Student Learning/Development Proportional to Quality/Quantity of Student Involvement

How a student develops from being involved is a reflection of the extent to which he or she is involved in both aspects of quality and quantity. In other words, you only get out of it what you put into it. This was demonstrated time and again with the participant's in the study. The study participants met the criteria for Astin's first three postulates because they had been involved in SkillsUSA for at least one year and had been actively involved in SkillsUSA during that time. Regarding perceived value, every one of the participants had positive things to say about having been a member of SkillsUSA and described the many ways that it added value to their educational experience. For example, when S1 was asked how SkillsUSA had helped her she responded:

Because I know what I can do. And I can show [clients] my portfolio and say this is what I've done or give them, um, offhand what I know I can do. I can describe to the client 'Hey this is what I can do,' and if they can give me ideas I'm like, 'Okay, now I know what I can do'...participating in competition with SkillsUSA, it probably made me push myself harder than if I wouldn't have gone" (S1, interview, October 31, 2017).

When asked the same question, S2, S3, and S5 all talked about how much it improved their ability to communicate with others. S2 said "For sure, public speaking. I feel a little bit more confident talking in front of people. Also leadership, I don't feel as nervous to start taking charge and helping others. I feel more confident in that area as well" (S2, interview, October 31, 2017). S3 stated:

I think I've definitely noticed a change in myself through communication skills. You know I talk to people I normally wouldn't have and going along with that is, uh, speaking in front of crowds. I was terrified, I mean I was shaking -- I still shake whenever I get up there but I think that pushes me even harder now to strive for my best. (S3, interview, November 14, 2017)

S5 noted:

In speaking and in front of groups of people and sometimes we have to do um, like selling in class. We have to act like we have a product that we have to sell to the whole class and that's something we have to learn here and then when I took it to skills it just kind of reminded me that that's something that's important in the industry that I'll need to be able to speak to people" (S5, interview, October 31, 2017).

S4 talked about how SkillsUSA helped prepare her for interacting with others:

I would say my confidence in like being able to talk to adults and just like being able to stand up for myself and just like arguing for myself in a way that's polite, of course. Um, but with job interview like so many kids my age it's so difficult for them to speak publicly or like think through what they're gonna say and because of that, it's just really trained me to be prepared for that situation. (S4, interview, September 28, 2017).

A1 reflected that being involved in SkillsUSA has helped him develop personally:

Skills that I've personally developed, um, beyond the technical stuff, it-- it's helped me grow as a leader. Um, taking a leadership role was not always been something that's been natural to me. I've always been, as many people in the IT

field are, we're-- we tend to be introverts. Um, it has helped me, um, step out of that comfort zone that I've had over the years and to be more extroverted. (A1, interview, December 12, 2017)

A2 lamented:

I had no idea that avenue of leadership that I was truly missing in my life till I took part of-- in SkillsUSA... I got hooked. I became an addict. I saw what this does for people and I knew it could change. So, to this day, all these years later, 17 years later, I still push SkillsUSA for my kids. They drink the Kool-Aid, is what I call it. Once you drink the SkillsUSA Kool-Aid. That's all it takes because you see productive, productive, productive people as the outcome. (A2, interview, December 15, 2017)

Some students like S1 and S5 primarily utilized SkillsUSA for the competition aspect. And while they both talked about how competing increased their occupational skills and soft skills, they did not express the same value and experience as S2, S3, S4, and A2. S2, S3, S4, and A2 all participated in competitions. In addition, they were also SkillsUSA officers and went to leadership events and training like Fall Leadership Conference and Summer Leadership Institute. They invested more time and energy into SkillsUSA program offerings and experienced greater personal and professional development as a result.

Analysis of Data through Postulate Five: Effectiveness of Educational Policy/Practice Related to Capacity of Policy/Practice to Increase Student Involvement.

The data showed some very effective practices at MTC, which resulted in greater student involvement in SkillsUSA. In almost every student case, they attributed advisors as being the greatest factor in their decision to become involved (this includes A2 when she was a student). S4 and S3 also spoke about their friends as being a factor in encouraging them to participate in SkillsUSA. Advisors A2 and A1 spoke about how their fellow advisors increased their desire to grow and develop within SkillsUSA, which contributed to increased involvement for both. It is important to note that by comparison, A2 and A1 both indicated advisors that do not choose to become involved can also decrease involvement. Also, the administration at MTC provides complete support for any who choose to become involved at any level they choose. MTC provides funding, transportation, and staff to ensure that support is in place for students and advisors to be involved in all aspects of SkillsUSA. This definitely contributes to increased student involvement.

Summary

Information was collected from a variety of sources including observations, interviews, documents, artifacts, and photographs. This information was analyzed through the lens of Alexander Astin's (1984) theory of involvement. Discussion centered on how resulting data met the five postulates in his theory. The participants all matched the first three postulates by meeting the initial study criteria. Postulate four (Effort vs. outcome) was evident in the way that the value of experience perceived by the

participants appeared to increase with the level of involvement in SkillsUSA activities. Postulate five is represented because the data showed when there is support from administration, advisors, and peers, the level of involvement increases. Astin's theory holds true in the case of this study. MTC, creates an environment of support through resources, finances, and encouragement that paves the way for greater success and student involvement in SkillsUSA. As involvement increases so does the level of satisfaction and value of the participant experience. Chapter VI presents findings of the study through answering the study's research questions. Implications for research, theory, and practice are addressed and recommendations for future research are offered.

CHAPTER VI

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter VI presents the findings of the study through answering the research questions. Conclusions are drawn from the findings and implications for research, theory, and practice are addressed. Lastly, recommendations for future research are offered, followed by a summary of the study.

Findings

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explain the role that involvement by participants in SkillsUSA plays in overall perceived value of their educational experience at a large, Midwestern, Career and Technology Education Center. The research questions below guided the study and are addressed in the following section:

- 1) How do participants explain the value of their experience in SkillsUSA?
- 2) What benefits and weaknesses do they perceive in their involvement with SkillsUSA?
- 3) How do participants explain how the value of their experience in SkillsUSA is influenced by other factors?

Research Question One: How Do Participants Explain the Value of Their Experience in SkillsUSA?

All participants in this study explained various ways being involved in SkillsUSA gave value to their experience in SkillsUSA including confidence building, motivation to improve their skills, and personally life changing experiences.

Confidence. Many participants described how SkillsUSA increased their confidence in building their technical and leadership skills. S1 talked a lot about how participating in SkillsUSA gave her a more positive outlook on her future career as a cosmetologist. Her experience in SkillsUSA gave her a sense of confidence in knowing that she had the skills and abilities needed to be successful. Likewise, S2 and S3 both expressed how they used to be more introverted before getting involved in SkillsUSA. S3 said he used to start shaking at the thought of having to speak in front of other people. Involvement in SkillsUSA offered S2 and S3 opportunities to step outside their comfort zone. They developed more social abilities, which allowed them to feel more comfortable reaching out to other people and communicating with others in more productive ways. They expressed that this will help them when they become employed.

Motivation. S5 said that the SkillsUSA competitions motivated her to practice her occupational skills so that she could be the best and win at the local, regional, and state levels. She said that having the opportunity to see the good skills of others during competition, motivated her to become even better. She realized the same skills that allowed her to win at competitions would also help her get a job in the field for which she has been training. All participants spoke of how having the support of their advisors

provided motivation to compete and take advantage of the opportunities provided by SkillsUSA.

Personally life changing. A2 described how she had been a member of SkillsUSA since 2000 because of the value it had brought to her life. She overcame the challenges of being a single mother and learning a new career because of the leadership and occupational skills training she received while participating in SkillsUSA. She attributes her career success to SkillsUSA and as a SkillsUSA advisor, continues to spread the value of SkillsUSA to her students. The director of SkillsUSA Midwestonia started as a student participant in SkillsUSA before becoming a welding instructor and advisor for SkillsUSA. This involvement changed his life and led to his eventual hire in his current position.

Level of involvement. Those who were involved in the overall SkillsUSA opportunities, which included leadership conferences, leadership development, leadership training, and contests, gained a greater sense of value than those who participated in fewer of these opportunities. For example, S3 was involved in SkillsUSA competitions and being a district officer and describes his experience as being a lot of fun and helping his to speak to others more. S4 was involved in competition, went to leadership conferences, and was a district officer. She attributes all of this involvement to preparing and motivating her to campaign and be elected to her college engineering student organization. A2 was involved in competitions, was an officer, and attended multiple leadership conferences including SLI. As a result of that involvement, she has made a career as a CTE educator and SkillsUSA advisor because of how it changed her life for the better. A2 continues to be actively involved professionally because of the value she

attributes to being involved in SkillsUSA. Each example shows progression of the level of involvement to increased perceived value of the participants.

All participants explained the value of their experience in SkillsUSA as gaining the necessary skills in order to succeed in the workplace and life in general.

Research Question Two: What Benefits and Weaknesses Do They Perceive in Their Involvement with SkillsUSA?

Students and advisors described their perceived benefits and weaknesses of participating in SkillsUSA.

Benefits. Participants expressed numerous benefits. They cited many experiences and acquired skills through their participation. For example, competing in the SkillsUSA competitions is one of the main ways that students get involved in SkillsUSA and is consistently identified by students as one of their favorite part of being involved. S1, S2, and S5 were all very involved in the competitions aspect of SkillsUSA and attribute the competitions as a big benefit and contributing factor to the success they had.

S2, S3, and A2 described the benefit of being involved in leadership through becoming an officer and going to SLI. It is through these activities that each learned how to expand their soft skills. This is a benefit because many who choose not to take advantage of the leadership development do not have the skills employers are looking for when they get a job. The soft skills developed through SkillsUSA leadership training along with the occupational skills that each participant learns create an employee that is job ready.

All participants described the value of having support systems as a result of participation in SkillsUSA. They described how active advisors helped them to prepare

for competitions and see value in leadership preparation and training. They were able to see how they have grown personally and professionally to better prepare for becoming skilled and work ready in their chosen career training areas.

Weaknesses. While none of the participants expressed explicit weaknesses of the SkillsUSA, nor regretted their involvement in the program, some expressed how SkillsUSA could be improved. For example, A1 and S1 mentioned that there could be more awareness about SkillsUSA to all students and advisors so that possibly more would become involved. A1 felt there should be a greater emphasis on getting younger students more involved at the middle school level. S1 and A2 both felt some competitions could be more organized. S1 said that the judges should do a better job of communicating contest rules and expectations before the contests begin. A2 expressed that judges for the various competitions should come from the areas of business and industry in which competitions are related. None of the participants noted any weaknesses or areas of improvement that would negatively impact their decision to be involved or stay involved in SkillsUSA.

Research Question Three: How Do Participants Explain How the Value of Their Experience in SkillsUSA is Influenced by Other Factors?

The primary influence participants realized is support they receive from their school's administration, their advisors, and their peers. This was mentioned by every participant in the study. Each participant described how their advisors or friends encouraged them to become involved. Once involved, they talked about how their advisors encouraged and pushed them to take advantage of all the opportunities within SkillsUSA. They also talked about how they knew that MTA's administration supported

their involvement by providing resources (funding, transportation, recognition) needed to participate in activities associated with SkillsUSA. Without support and encouragement from these sources, it is doubtful that any of them would have chosen to get involved in SkillsUSA.

Awareness of SkillsUSA is a factor that influenced a few of the participant's experiences. S4 talked about being a high school student who spent half a day at MTC and half a day at her home high school. She said it was sometimes difficult to articulate to others at her high school what she was training for at MTC and what SkillsUSA was. This is because while high schools have student organizations, they are not very familiar with CTSO's. So, S4 sometimes struggled with explaining to her teachers at her high school why she was going to be gone from class and that she was not just skipping out on her high school responsibilities. S3 commented that his current advisor was not as involved in SkillsUSA as the first advisor he had in his first occupational program. S3 may not have had as positive an experience with SkillsUSA had he gotten an advisor who was not very involved when he first started at MTC.

Adult SkillsUSA students face challenges that have potential to influence their educational experience. Many adults who come into CTE programs expressed they do not have time to be involved in activities in addition to their training programs. They have responsibilities, such as children and part time or full-time jobs, that they must take care of while trying to attend school full or part time. When asked to participate in SkillsUSA, the thought of adding more responsibility intimidates them and many will choose not to become involved. They discover, once they decide to try it, they learn project and time

management that helps them overcome the stress of juggling so many responsibilities. They find they can get involved and still take care of their responsibilities.

Conclusions

The findings from this study indicate that those who become involved in SkillsUSA have a very positive overall sense of value in their educational experience. As was discovered from Chapter IV, it is not any particular thing that adds this value. SkillsUSA is a well-developed organization with multiple levels of occupational and leadership activities and training that is merged together to offer various ways for students to get involved. It is by members getting involved in these opportunities that they acquire knowledge, skills, and experiences that add value to their personal and educational experiences.

Findings indicated that the more SkillsUSA activities the participants chose to get involved in, greater value was associated with the educational experience. For example, students only involved in competitions had a positive experience, but those who were involved in competitions and additional SkillsUSA activities indicated a stronger value from the increased involvement.

Implications

The findings from this study have implications for research, theory, and practice. Examples of these implications are explained below.

Implications for Research

SkillsUSA has stated for many years that the results of involvement in their student organization results in producing the best and brightest future workforce available. Business and industry partners and advisors have seen the quality of the

students who participate in SkillsUSA leadership development programs and competitions. Those who have been actively involved believe in what SkillsUSA stands for and its mission and vision because they have experienced it firsthand. There have been a few studies that focused on SkillsUSA. Threeton et al. (2008) looked at the relationship between SkillsUSA and student contest preparation. Another notable study was by Alfeld et al. (2007) that looked at the value added by CTSO's to students' high school experience. This study reviewed elements of the studies by Threeton et al. (2008) and Alfeld et al. (2007) in creating a study that focused specifically on SkillsUSA and the overall perceived value by adult students from their involvement in SkillsUSA. The study by Threeton et al. (2008) focused on contextual development within Astin's Theory of Involvement as the foundation of looking at how involvement in SkillsUSA prepares contestants for competition. Like Threeton et al. (2008), this study utilizes Astin's Theory of Involvement to analyze the data but includes all aspects of SkillsUSA and not just involvement in competitions. Alfeld et al. (2007) examined how the degree of involvement in CTSO's was associated with increases in students' positive outcomes. This study took that idea, but focused on SkillsUSA specifically. Findings of this study confirm similar findings from Alfeld et al. (2007) in that a positive association does exist between the amount of involvement and increased value of motivation, engagement, and employability skills (occupational and soft skills).

Using involvement theory created by Astin (1984) as the theoretical framework for this study expanded the research base to include CTE and the CTSO SkillsUSA. Previously, Astin's theory of involvement was mainly utilized to explain involvement by students in higher education and excluded CTE. There was very little research found that

tried to substantiate the value of SkillsUSA to students. While the student populations of higher education and CTE are somewhat different, the idea behind student involvement is the same. Each of the five postulates that Astin created around student involvement were analyzed against the data that was gathered in this study to determine how involvement in SkillsUSA led to perceptions of value in the educational experience. Findings revealed that the more a SkillsUSA member is involved in SkillsUSA activities, the greater the value that was associated with the experience.

Implications for Theory

Astin's Theory of involvement (1984) was used to describe the manifestations of student involvement in SkillsUSA. This study contributed to student involvement theory by focusing on the types and amount of involvement by active members of SkillsUSA. Previously Astin's theory had been primarily used in higher education and this study expanded that to include Career and Technical Education to explain student involvement and the associated outcomes. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory and Astin's Theory of Involvement were used to narrow the focus of the study. Kolb's theory showed how CTE utilizes experiential/contextual learning to reinforce meaning through hands on learning. Astin's theory showed how involvement in SkillsUSA expanded on experiential/contextual learning by reinforcement of process through additional practice and experiences in SkillsUSA activities and then added to it the reflection portion of Kolb's learning theory for a more complete picture of how they interrelate. Students reflect upon many aspects of SkillsUSA involvement through participating in competitions and leadership activities. While Kolb's theory helped to focus the study, Astin's theory was used as the theoretical framework. This study showed how Astin's

theory can be useful in explaining the value added to the educational experience for those members who become actively involved in SkillsUSA.

Implications for Practice

This study has implications for showing the value that SkillsUSA contributes to its members in CTE. The ability of SkillsUSA to develop future workforce employees that are job ready with the appropriate technical and employability skills demanded by today's employers is something that is in high demand at this time. Funding for education is at an all-time low in many states, especially Midwestern. This study contributed to available knowledge on the value of SkillsUSA to America's workforce and has the potential to increase available funding for CTE programs and CTSO's by showing lawmakers the importance of increasing funding for valuable programs that increase the value of our nation's economic development.

This study also provided insight to educators in CTE the value and importance of how involvement in SkillsUSA improves the educational experience. It provided CTE institutions, administrators, instructors, and advisors with tangible data that can help identify strengths and weaknesses in current SkillsUSA practices that can lead to continuous improvement and value. It also showed the importance of providing ongoing support, educational awareness, and encouragement to potential and existing SkillsUSA members in all Trade and Industrial CTE programs.

Recommendations for Future Research

The following recommendations for further research are provided as possible extensions of this research study. This study could be conducted on a larger scale. It would help the applicability of this study to be done among several CTE school districts

that would include more diversity in demographics and observe the manifestations that occur in a much larger sample population.

This study could also benefit from opening up the participant population to include secondary students. This would allow the researcher to observe possible similarities or differences between secondary and post-secondary SkillsUSA members to observe the perceived value participation in SkillsUSA provides in their experience.

Finally, there could be possible benefit from taking a mixed methods approach to this study. A surprising result of this study was that there was no mention of SkillsUSA providing any perceived academic improvement to study participants as a result of involvement in SkillsUSA. In fact, a few participants specifically said that they did not notice any academic improvement. I suspect that there may be improvement that exists even though the participants did not perceive it. A mixed methods version of this study would include the qualitative portion of this study to show perceived value from involvement in SkillsUSA. It would also add to that a quantitative portion of this study that would add value by revealing how involvement in SkillsUSA might also have an impact on academic achievement. For the quantitative portion, variables like final course grades and GPA data could be collected for all participants and analyzed to compare before and after results of student's grades at the end of an academic school year. A correlational statistics analysis such as a Spearman Correlation could be used to determine statistical significance between academic achievement and involvement in SkillsUSA.

Additional variables that could be included and analyzed might be age and student classification (secondary vs. post-secondary). Surveys would be a useful methodology to

collect this additional data. The addition of this quantitative data could reveal any correlation between academic achievement and participation in SkillsUSA to go along with data from the qualitative portion of the study.

Summary

It is well known that the skills gap in America is getting wider due to increasing vacancies in skilled jobs. Businesses in many different trade industries are demanding technical skills in addition to employability and soft skills that create a more qualified worker. Some of the largest corporations in America like Lowe's and proponents of the skilled and technical trades like Mike Rowe recognize that SkillsUSA helps to fill these gaps through the opportunities that it provides. At a time when America needs qualified employees to fill the gap in skilled and technical trade vacancies, it is more important than ever to look at ways that this can be accomplished. Getting more CTE students involved in SkillsUSA can accomplish this need.

Chapter II reviewed the literature about CTSO's in general, SkillsUSA, and studies that have been done exploring the benefits of CTSO's like SkillsUSA to students and stakeholders. Little research existed that specifically explored how SkillsUSA benefited students. Of the research that did exist about student organization involvement, nothing was found in the literature that showed a definite correlation of the perceived value to the students involved. This resulted in the need and purpose of this study: to explain the role involvement in SkillsUSA plays in overall perceived value of educational experience.

Chapter III described the qualitative case study methodology selected for this study. Seven participants were chosen based on defined criteria. Data collection occurred

during the 2017-2018 school year and included observations, document reviews, artifact observations, and photographic collection. I observed students and advisors while they participated in regular classroom activities and SkillsUSA activities. SkillsUSA activities observed included contest preparations, chapter activities, leadership conferences, and officer elections. I conducted interviews of five SkillsUSA students and two SkillsUSA advisors. I collected information from SkillsUSA related websites. I also collected SkillsUSA artifacts, documents, and photographs. Collected data were analyzed using methods of triangulation (Patton, 2015). Selection of Astin's theory of involvement (1984) occurred prior to conducting the study and provided a guiding lens through which to analyze SkillsUSA student involvement.

The epistemological perspective guiding this study is constructionism. For this study, knowledge and experience was constructed by SkillsUSA students and advisors through their involvement in SkillsUSA. The meaning and actions resulting from that involvement defined the value of their educational experience through participation in SkillsUSA activities. Accordingly, Chapter IV presented the stories of the participants by describing their experiences and resulting data using thick, rich description. Chapter V analyzed this data through the lens of student involvement theory as created by Astin (1984).

The findings from this study suggest those who become involved in SkillsUSA have a very positive overall sense of value in their educational experience. Not one single part of SkillsUSA involvement was responsible, but rather it was a combination of many different aspects of SkillsUSA that led to increased value of the member experience. Findings also revealed that support of the school district, administrators, advisors, and

peers was an important part of being involved in SkillsUSA. Weaknesses were identified, but none impacted the perception of value the participants experienced as a result of their participation in SkillsUSA. Chapter VI concluded with implications for research, theory, and practice and recommendations for future research.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

National SkillsUSA Membership Report FY 2017

State	Students	Profession	Total	Honorary	Alumni	Grand Total
Massachusetts	29,407	1,116	30,523	4	2,763	33,290
Ohio	28,376	991	29,367	7	1,936	31,310
Texas	21,178	1,594	22,772	7	2,821	25,600
California	21,008	877	21,885	6	1,849	23,740
Pennsylvania	18,379	665	19,044	18	1,616	20,678
Tennessee	16,122	1,226	17,348	6	1,622	18,976
Arizona	14,104	666	14,770	8	1,125	15,903
Midwestonia	12,271	594	12,865	16	3,963	16,844
New York	11,271	905	12,176	4	1,502	13,682
Alabama	11,525	581	12,106	13	1,021	13,140
Virginia	10,737	628	11,365	17	1,144	12,526
Connecticut	10,882	47	10,929	1	520	11,450
Missouri	8,342	700	9,042	7	1,929	10,978
Georgia	8,063	735	8,798	5	2,529	11,332
Florida	6,612	496	7,108	8	3,150	10,266
Rhode Island	6,596	209	6,805	1	1,007	7,813
New Jersey	6,570	216	6,786	4	1,381	8,171
Puerto Rico	5,771	140	5,911	0	292	6,203
Maryland	4,753	266	5,019	15	1,369	6,403
Arkansas	4,524	440	4,964	7	1,096	6,067
North	4,308	633	4,941	7	1,484	6,432
Michigan	4,150	531	4,681	2	1,618	6,301
Kentucky	4,171	354	4,525	6	1,300	5,831
West	4,009	304	4,313	3	842	5,158
South	3,493	330	3,823	1	986	4,810
Mississippi	3,411	377	3,788	2	690	4,480
Indiana	3,329	279	3,608	1	1,012	4,621
Kansas	3,152	253	3,405	8	1,032	4,445
Wisconsin	2,774	309	3,083	7	1,098	4,188
Washington	2,498	344	2,842	5	1,033	3,880
Nevada	2,639	184	2,823	4	758	3,585
Utah	2,440	279	2,719	1	1,313	4,033
Nebraska	2,467	212	2,679	1	1,053	3,733
Colorado	2,259	178	2,437	4	752	3,193
Illinois	2,048	241	2,289	7	1,276	3,572
Idaho	1,981	179	2,160	3	552	2,715
Louisiana	1,601	158	1,759	2	596	2,357

Minnesota	1,368	182	1,550	8	1,022	2,580
Maine	1,021	163	1,184	0	1,154	2,338
New Mexico	968	126	1,094	2	821	1,917
Vermont	832	159	991	1	570	1,562
Oregon	666	88	754	1	545	1,300
Wyoming	618	98	716	0	494	1,210
North Dakota	625	73	698	4	351	1,053
New	553	90	643	1	342	986
Delaware	536	39	575	2	550	1,127
Montana	494	52	546	4	182	732
Iowa	417	85	502	1	549	1,052
South Dakota	336	53	389	2	595	986
Hawaii	249	57	306	0	111	417
Alaska	213	32	245	1	102	348
US Virgin	66	2	68	0	62	130
District of	14	2	16	1	27	44
Grand Total	316,197	19,538	335,735	246	59,507	395,488

APPENDIX B

Letter of Permission for Access

August 30th, 2017

Dear Dr. Superintendent:

In fulfillment of the research component required of students in Midwestern State University's Doctorate of Education, I am seeking your permission to gain access to the staff and students of the _____ district.

I would like to conduct research this Fall 2017 and Spring 2018 that will involve interviewing SkillsUSA advisors and SkillsUSA student members. The primary method of data collection will be audio-taped interviews, supplemented with direct observation, documentation, archival records, and physical artifacts. If you desire, I can provide a copy of the entire research proposal.

I have received approval of the Institutional Review Board and the study will commence immediately. Data collection will extend throughout the Fall and possibly Spring semesters. Any necessary follow-up interviews will be conducted to ensure credibility; member checks of the transcribed interviews will ensure accurate representation of the subjects' words and ideas. Data gathering and analysis should be complete by May 2018.

If you are willing to allow me to proceed with this research, please indicate so with your signature below. If you require additional assurances, please contact me for further discussion.

Email address: darin.lackey@francistuttle.edu Cell phone: 405.412.5414

Sincerely,

Darin Lackey

Superintendent's Signature

APPENDIX C

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Tuesday, August 8, 2017
IRB Application No GC1713
Proposal Title: PARTICIPATION IN SKILLSUSA AND PERCEIVED STUDENT VALUE: A CASE STUDY

Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 8/7/2020

Principal Investigator(s):

Darin Lackey Edward Harris
308 Willard
Stillwater, OK 74078 Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

- The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

- 1Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI advisor, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
- 2Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
- 3Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of the research; and
- 4Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Dawnnett Watkins 219 Scott Hall (phone: 405-744-5700, dawnnett.watkins@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Hugh Crethar, Chair
Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX D

Informed Consent

Participation in SkillsUSA and Perceived Student Value: A Case Study

Investigator: Darin Lackey, Doctoral Candidate, Oklahoma State University

Purpose:

You are being invited to participate in a study that will attempt to explain the role that involvement in SkillsUSA has played in the overall value of your educational experience. You will be asked to share your insights regarding how SkillsUSA has affected your educational experience.

Procedures:

As a participant in this study, you have been purposefully selected to participate in an interview, where you will be asked questions regarding general information about yourself as it pertains to your involvement SkillsUSA. The interview should take approximately 30-45 minutes and will be conducted in the location of your choice. I will record the interview on a digital recorder or my iPhone so that I can later transcribe the interview.

Risks of Participation:

There are no known risks associated with this project which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

Benefits:

There are no direct benefits to you. The results of this study will inform other students, teachers, administrators, and even legislators as to the role that SkillsUSA plays in the educational experience.

Confidentiality:

The records and results of this study will be kept private and confidential. Any written results will compare group findings and will not include information that will identify you in any way. Pseudonyms will be assigned to all participants in the study. Consent forms will be kept separate from all other documents. Research records will be stored on a password protected computer in a secured location and only researchers and individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to the records. It is possible that the consent process and data collection will be observed by research oversight staff responsible for safeguarding the rights and wellbeing of people who participate in research. Interviews will be recorded on my iPhone or a digital recorder, and data files will be transferred to a flash drive that will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. Immediately following the interview, all transcriptions will be completed by the researcher to ensure maximum confidentiality. As soon as transcription is complete, the data



files will be permanently removed from the recording device. Data will be destroyed three years after the study has been completed.

Compensation:

No compensation will be provided for participation in research.

Contacts:

If you have any questions about this study, please contact:

Darin Lackey
Ed.d Candidate
2520 NW 162nd Terrace
Edmond, OK 73013
405-412-5414
Darin.lackey@okstate.edu

or

Dr. Ed Harris, Advisor
Oklahoma State University
College of Education
308 Willard Hall
Stillwater, OK 74078
405-744-7932
ed.harris@okstate.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact:

Dawnett Watkins
223 Scott Hall
Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, OK 74078
405-744-5700
irb@okstate.edu

Participant Rights:

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary, and you may choose to discontinue participation at any time with no risk or penalty.

Signatures:

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form has been given to me.

Signature of Participant

Date

I certify I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

Signature of Researcher

Date



APPENDIX E

Script for Soliciting Volunteers for Participation

(letter to be sent via email)

In fulfillment of the research component required of students in Oklahoma State University's Doctorate of Education, I have chosen to conduct a case study on participation in SkillsUSA and perceived student value. Both Dr. "xxx" and your principal have agreed to allow the staff members of this school to participate in the study. I am now seeking volunteers willing to participate in a 30 to 45-minute interview. I will record the interview on my iPhone or a digital recording device so that I may later transcribe the interview word-for-word to more effectively analyze the content.

Your decision to participate is entirely voluntary. If at any time you feel the need to withdraw from the study, you are welcome to do so. This study is in no way connected to your performance or evaluation at this school. Data gathered from this study will be used to inform ways in which participation in SkillsUSA is perceived by students to benefit/not benefit their educational experience.

Should you decide to participate, your identity will be carefully and respectfully guarded. All findings and subsequent published material referencing this study will be masked to maintain the confidentiality of the school site and the specific participants. To ensure accurate representation of participants' words and ideas, scripted copies of all interviews will be provided to interviewees prior to analysis of data. Corrections, additions, or deletions will be made as noted by participants.

If you are open to the possibility of an interview, please complete the attached Informed Consent Form attached to this email. You can either fill out the document on a computer and email it back to me, or print a hard copy and I will pick it up from you. I will make every effort to comply with your schedule and preferences for date and time. I will be contacting those of you who indicate an interest in participating.

Thank you,

Darin Lackey



VITA

Darin Ray Lackey

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: PARTICIPATION IN SKILLS USA AND PERCEIVED
STUDENT VALUE: A CASE STUDY

Major Field: School Administration

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education in School Administration at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2018.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Education in Adult Education and Community Service at University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, Oklahoma in 2004.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Wildlife and Fisheries Ecology at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in 1993.

Experience:

Network Technology Instructor

Francis Tuttle Technology Center, Portland Campus, Oklahoma City, OK

- Assist campus director/assistant director in administrative coverage for campus.
- Teach courses preparing students for CompTIA A+, Network+, Cloud+, and Security+ IT certification.
- Teach secondary and post-secondary students.
- Work with at-risk and drop out high school students.
- Work with industry to provide job placement, on-the-job training, and job shadowing opportunities for students which in turn meets industry needs.

Professional Memberships:

Association for Career and Technology Education, Oklahoma Association for Career and Technology Education, and Oklahoma Business, Marketing, and Information Technology Education