

# “IT’S NOT YOUR EVERYDAY CLASSROOM”: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF STUDENT EXPERIENCES IN SCHOOL-BASED ENTERPRISE

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## **Introduction**

A school-based enterprise (SBE) is an entrepreneurial operation that is managed and operated by students in a school setting (DECA, 2018). These hands-on learning laboratories fuse career preparation and classroom instruction and can produce a myriad of benefits, including higher GPAs, lower suspension rates, higher attendance rates, and improved math and reading scores (Fitzgerald, 1999; Pilot, 2011). Examples of SBE include raising crops and farm animals, manufacturing household items, operating a radio station, selling beverages and pastries, managing a restaurant, repairing old homes, maintaining local parks, and providing child-care services (Arenas, 2003).

Many SBE pursue certification through DECA, a nonprofit organization preparing emerging leaders and entrepreneurs in marketing, finance, hospitality, and management in high schools and colleges around the globe (DECA, 2018). Chapters receive certification through a written project and individuals receive certification

through a comprehensive exam. Participants are required to demonstrate mastery of financial analysis, operations, human resources management, critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, innovation, and several other content areas (DECA, 2018). Though few studies have examined the community-level effects of SBE, several communities have integrated these programs into local and state policy agendas to spur economic activity (Fitzgerald, 1999).

This paper utilized the systems view of school climate framework to assess differences in affective and cognitive perceptions of school climate between students participating in SBE and students not participating in SBE. Five focus groups were conducted among 36 students at a high school in the Mississippi River Delta Region. The qualitative analysis examined differences in student-student and student-teacher relationships, values, and beliefs between the two groups of students.

## **Literature Review**

### **History of School-based Enterprise**

Though the SBE model is a recent discovery for many educators, this model has existed for decades (Pilot, 2011). Prior to 1990, many institutions separated vocational education from academic curricula. However, the United States Congress implemented new laws revising the funding requirements for vocational education in 1990. After the law was implemented, funding was dependent upon integrating both the academic and vocational curricula and this shift resulted in the creation of more SBE (United States Department of Education, 2004). As early as 2001, the model had been implemented at 53% of U.S. high schools (Ross, 2002). SBE became increasingly popular as schools recognized the importance of fusing career preparation and classroom instruction to prepare students for their transition from high school (DECA, 2018).

### **School-based Enterprise and DECA**

DECA certified 428 SBE in 27 states in 2018 (DECA, 2018). Certification requires adherence to the National Curriculum Standards developed by DECA, which include financial analysis, operations, marketing-information management, market planning, product/service management, pricing, distribution/channel management, promotion, selling, and human resources management. Chapters must also demonstrate mastery of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills including critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration and teamwork, communication, and creativity and innovation. Though certification is not required to operate a SBE, many schools adopt similar standards. Certification also offers opportunities to attend an annual professional development academy and access

lesson plans, instructional units, textbooks, e-learning tools, and other resources. In a focus group with Minnesota teachers who oversee DECA chapters at their school, SBE was described as a continuation of the classroom, a cornerstone of the school, and a source of school and community pride (DECA, 2018).

### **School-based Enterprise and Career and Technical Education**

In the United States, 94% of high school students participate in Career and Technical Education (Association for Career and Technical Education, 2018). Career and Technical Education (CTE) “integrates with academics in a rigorous and relevant curriculum, features high school and postsecondary partnerships, enabling clear pathways to certifications and degrees, and prepares students to be college—and career—ready by providing core academic skills, employability skills and technical, job-specific skills” (Association for Career and Technical Education, 2018). CTE is offered in many settings and encompasses several activities, one of which includes SBE. Students who participate in CTE have lower dropout rates and higher graduation rates than the national average (Association for Career and Technical Education, 2018). CTE participants also have higher motivation, engagement, grades, career self-efficacy, college aspirations, and employability skills than students who do not participate in CTE (Association for Career and Technical Education, 2018). Research specific to SBE can determine if participation in SBE produces similar outcomes.

### **School-based Enterprise and Applied Learning**

By bridging the gap between classroom instruction and the world of work, SBE transforms information into knowledge. When describing how to move from activity toward mastery, Hart (2002) writes,

The activity of schooling too often provides only superficial and sterilized encounters with ideas. Information remains uprooted from context, soil, and flesh, without relevance, immediacy, presence, or a sense of being part of lived experience. Information must be utilized, applied, and integrated in one's mind and in one's life in order for it to move toward knowledge and mastery. We must actually “do math” in order to learn it: learning formulae is insufficient; we must practice reading in order to master it, and so on. And often, mastery comes only when knowledge is applied in our life beyond the schoolroom (p. 78).

### **School-based Enterprise and Career Exploration**

Preparation for adulthood and the world of work begins early in life and evolves throughout elementary, middle, and high school (Carter et al., 2010; Kohler & Field, 2003; Weidenthal & Kochhar-Bryant, 2007). Career exploration opportunities are

integrated into various aspects of the school curriculum to expose students to the vast array of career possibilities. Students are frequently encouraged to explore their interests, preferences, and strengths (Sitlington & Clark, 2006). Though this exposure begins as early as preschool, the experiences that youth have during high school are especially salient for career exploration and preparation. Adolescence is a critical developmental period during which most youth are exposed to educational, employment, and community service opportunities that shape their future aspirations (Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff, 2000; Vondracek & Porfeli, 2006). In addition to students being exposed to diverse career paths, practice-based learning opportunities in SBE allow students to acquire skills that can be utilized in various work settings (Pilot, 2011).

### **School-based Enterprise and Student Learning Communities**

The structure of SBE facilitates the creation of student learning communities (SLC), which Blessinger (2017) defines as “a curricular-based program and learning-centered social network that moves learning beyond the confines of the classroom” (p.1). Though SBE and SLC are two distinct models, they share many similarities. In student learning communities, the course content is integrated, which allows students to make curricular connections across courses. An example of this in SBE would be linking a biology course with an agriculture enterprise. These curricular connections help to boost academic achievement. Furthermore, student learning communities aim to foster integrative, holistic learning and promote healthy student-student and student-teacher interactions (Blessinger, 2017). In this setting, teachers have the opportunity to attend to the whole student and cultivate an environment for optimal academic, social, and emotional wellbeing.

### **Benefits of School-based Enterprise**

Operating SBE at high schools can produce a myriad of benefits to students, school administrators, employers, and the local community (Pilot, 2011). SBE fosters positive, productive learning environments by “[providing] relevance, context, and concreteness to abstract material learned in the classroom [and] challenging the individualized nature of modern education by engaging students in a cooperative endeavor” (Arenas, 2003, p. 107). SBE also immerses students in environments where they acquire valuable entrepreneurial skills and business savvy (Pilot, 2011). Students who participate in SBE report gaining the knowledge and skills necessary to run a successful business, such as customer service and communication skills (Haltinner, 2012). In addition, Thompson (2016) found that participation in SBE can generate sustained interest in entrepreneurial activity and influence engagement in

entrepreneurial endeavors. Nobre (2002) describes entrepreneurship as a field that embraces innovation and change and forces individuals to challenge inadequate, ineffective responses to social problems. These findings indicate that SBE has the potential to produce positive social change while enriching students, schools, and communities.

In an evaluation of a high school entrepreneurship curriculum, students reported increased feelings of responsibility, maturity, optimism, confidence, and motivation. They also remarked on their improved public speaking skills and writing abilities. Students expressed that the program gave them a sense of purpose and inspired them to pursue their dreams (Doucet & Hiatt-Michael, 2011). Though this model is distinct from SBE, students involved with SBE may experience similar outcomes. The creativity, innovation, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills students acquire from SBE can benefit them in many spaces.

Involvement in SBE can also improve academic outcomes. Pilot (2011) found that high school students enrolled in special education who participated in SBE had higher GPAs and fewer out-of-school suspension days than students enrolled in special education who did not participate in SBE. He asserts that students perform better in school when they feel their education is relevant and recognize its application to the real world. In three Chicago high schools, students who participated in SBE had higher attendance rates, math scores, reading scores, and GPAs than students who did not participate in SBE (Fitzgerald, 1999). Studies conducted with high school students across the United States indicate similar results. Data from the National Education Longitudinal Study indicated that students who participated in SBE were less likely to drop out of high school (Kim & Hull, 2011). Schools that operated SBE also noticed increased parental involvement. Parents were excited about the SBE and eager to volunteer their time (Fitzgerald, 1999).

While it is clear that SBE participation is associated with many positive academic, social, and emotional outcomes for students, research has yet to identify the mechanisms that produce these outcomes. These outcomes are also associated with a positive school climate, which has been found to improve academic achievement and improve student behavioral and emotional functioning (Kutsyuruba, Klinger, & Hussain, 2018; Loukas & Murphy, 2007). By assessing differences in affective and cognitive perceptions of school climate between students participating in SBE and students not participating in SBE, I aim to determine if SBE involvement is associated with an improved perception of school climate and how this involvement contributes to positive academic, social, and emotional outcomes for students.

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for the qualitative analysis is the systems view of school climate. Rudasill, Snyder, Levinson & Adelson (2018) define school climate as “the affective and cognitive perceptions regarding social interactions, relationships, safety, values, and beliefs held by students, teachers, administrators, and staff within a school” (p. 46). In a positive school climate, social interactions are characterized by trust, cooperation, and openness (Fraser and Walberg, 2005; Haynes et al., 1997; Moos, 1979; Rhodes et al., 2009). Social interactions also focus on the degree to which support and encouragement are offered to students (Bottiani et al., 2014). Relationships are the products of social interactions (Koth et al, 2008). Feelings of attachment, belonging, acceptance, and support are shaped by the strength and quality of relationships (Payne et al., 2003; Rodgers & Rose, 2001). Beliefs focus on the perceptions of experiences, such as the quality of instruction across multiple classrooms (Esposito, 1999; Rhodes et al, 2009). Values, such as expectations for success, are informed by these perceptions and observations.

Classroom nanosystems, nested groups within microsystems (e.g. peer groups, sports teams, and academic tracks), were the focus of the analysis. Nanosystems help to identify and explain differing experiences of students within a given school. The analysis examined differences in affective and cognitive perceptions of school climate between students in SBE and non-SBE nanosystems.

## Methods

### Research Design

The Center for Safe and Supportive School at Vanderbilt University led a 2015 study entitled “Social Enterprise: Producing School Climate.” The study examined social enterprise initiatives as a mechanism for connection and belonging throughout the school and within the community. Researchers were also interested in the relationship between social enterprise involvement and academic, social, and emotional competencies for students. The researchers hypothesized that social enterprise fosters a positive school climate and wanted to determine if student involvement in social enterprise increased student engagement. The study consisted of surveys and focus groups with high school students involved with SBE and high school students not involved with SBE.

## **Community Context**

Vo-Tech High School was the site of the study. Vo-Tech was chosen as the site of the study because of its existing relationship with the Center for the Safe and Supportive Schools. This relationship developed after the center received a grant from the Department of Education to support schools interested in improving school climate. Vo-Tech is located in a city in the Mississippi River Delta Region with a population of 67,162. The median household income in this city is \$39,747, which is almost \$20,000 lower than the United States median income. The poverty rate is 23%, which is nearly twice as high as the national poverty rate. African-Americans and women ages 25-34 in this city experience the highest rates of poverty. Over half (56%) of the city's African-American population and 12% of women ages 25-34 live in poverty. The lack of economic opportunity may help to explain the city's relatively high violent crime rate, according to information from Data USA.

Several organizations in the area are responding to this need by promoting economic and community development. One organization in the area operates a Regional Economic Development Initiative, which seeks to impact the region through entrepreneurship, education, workforce development, technology, and capacity building. In 2016, the city's Chamber of Commerce created a new position, Manager of Workforce Development. This individual works in collaboration with the school system to increase workforce development opportunities for students. The Chamber of Commerce also launched a five-year campaign focused on regional and local economic development, tourism, workforce development, and small businesses.

These initiatives mirror the focus of the Career and Technical Education academies at Vo-Tech. The former school superintendent had a background in vocational and technical education and envisioned a state-of-the-art, academically rigorous high school where students could also acquire advanced technical skills. The facility provides opportunities for practical observation and hands-on application for grades nine through twelve. The school now operates five academies, or school-based enterprises, focused on agriculture, hospitality and tourism, manufacturing, transportation, and information technology. Three-quarters (75%) of the students at Vo-Tech are involved in a school-based enterprise.

## **Participants**

Vo-Tech administrators identified students to participate in the focus groups. Demographic data was not collected from the focus group participants and focus group data was not linked to survey data. All 759 students present on the day of data collection completed the survey. One quarter (25.6%) of respondents were in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, 26.7% of respondents were in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, 25.4% of respondents were in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, and

22.1% of respondents were in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. A majority (62.4%) of the respondents identified as Black, 34.6% identified as White, 1.9% identified as Hispanic, and the remainder identified as other. Over half (53.7%) of the respondents were male and 46.1% of the respondents were female.

At the time of data collection, the school operated eight school-based enterprises: culinary arts, manufacturing, automotive repair, agriculture, marketing, information technology, web design, and business. Several of the respondents participated in multiple school-based enterprises. Over half (54.6%) were involved with business, 34.6% were involved with agriculture, 12.1% were involved with web design, 9.6% were involved with culinary arts, 8.9% were involved with marketing, 6.7% were involved with manufacturing, 6.3% were involved with automotive repair, and 4.7% were involved with information technology.

### **Data Collection**

Letters were sent home to obtain parental consent and students were provided assent forms prior to participating in the focus groups. Students provided no identifying information. The survey was distributed on the same day when the focus groups were conducted. All 759 students present on the day of data collection completed the 26-item survey. School administrators selected 36 students to participate in the six focus groups. Four focus groups were conducted for students involved in one or more SBE and two focus groups were conducted for students not involved in SBE. Two to four researchers were present at each focus group. One facilitated the focus group and the other took detailed notes. The focus groups were audio recorded and lasted an average of 28.2 minutes (SD: 12.6 minutes). One of the focus groups could not be transcribed because of poor audio.

### **Measures**

Graduate students at Vanderbilt University collaborated with the Center for Safe and Supportive Schools to develop the focus group questions (see Appendix A). The questions broadly focused on engagement and environment. Questions on engagement included, “Has the existence of this program impacted your desire to attend school?” and “What impact has social enterprise had on your experience at Vo-Tech?” Questions on environment included, “Have you noticed any differences in your teacher's and/or administrator's attitudes about Vo-Tech as a result of the social enterprises?” The questions were designed to capture the impact of SBE involvement on personal growth, interest in school, career and college aspirations, and relationships with students, teachers, and community members. While these questions did not focus specifically on school climate, they helped to uncover students' affective and cognitive perceptions of



their experiences at Vo-Tech. Students not involved with SBE were asked to share their perceptions of SBE.

### **Data Analysis**

The systems view of school climate framework informed the qualitative analysis. The analysis examined differences in affective and cognitive perceptions of school climate between students in SBE and non-SBE nanosystems. Specifically, the analysis explored affective and cognitive perceptions of relationships, values, and beliefs.

I used NVivo to code the data from the focus groups for relationships, values, and beliefs discussed by the participants. These concepts were broadly defined. Thus, all data related to the concepts were coded. However, the transcript from the first focus group revealed that the 'relationships' code needed to be more specific. Thus, the coding scheme was refined and I coded the data for student-teacher relationships, student-student relationships, values, and beliefs. For example, a student recounting an interaction with a teacher was coded as 'student-teacher relationships'. A student describing their relationship with a peer was coded as 'student-student relationships'. A student describing their post-high school ambitions was coded as 'values'. A student sharing their opinion on the quality of instruction at the school was coded as 'beliefs'. I used these codes as the themes for my analysis.

### **Findings**

#### **Student-teacher relationships**

Both SBE and non-SBE students had positive, healthy interactions with teachers. One non-SBE student described her relationship with a caring teacher who altered her life path. She explained,

[My] freshman year teacher, I really tell him a lot because he leads me in the right direction. If it wasn't for him, then I would probably be in [alternative] school right now. I don't get in trouble anymore, and he has really changed it around.

However, many non-SBE students felt their relationships with teachers were superficial. Their communication was limited to coursework and they had few opportunities to build meaningful connections. One student shared,

I don't have a relationship with the teachers only because I only talk to them when I have a question about the work or something like that. I don't see them after school or anything like that, so no point any further than that.

Non-SBE students explained that their class sizes contributed to this distance. SBE courses were smaller and students received more individualized attention. One student expressed,

If you're not doing well in class or something like that, the teacher may take the time to ask why, but she has so many students that she might just not notice, or it might be multiple students so she had to focus on everybody instead of the individual, so that's why I would say that with this other outside-of-school-related-thing's teacher they have more time and fewer individuals to focus on.

Non-SBE students recognized that their teachers had limited opportunities to connect with students given the demands on their time. In contrast, SBE students established familial bonds with their teachers. One student remarked, "You're all in much deeper connection with them. It's not just, 'How is your school day going?' It's like, 'How is your mother? How is your brother? How is work going?' They're really like family to you." SBE students described their teachers as caring, attentive, dedicated, passionate, and inspiring. They also felt that school would be more enjoyable for all students if more teachers focused more on building connections. One student explained,

I think if teachers were more like that, math teachers or English teachers, school would be a much better experience for kids because they actually care about you and they want you to do good. They want to get you far in life, not just you graduate and you're gone now. They're just another face that they see every day. It's not like that in the [SBE] program. They know you, they know your personal life, and they really care about you.

Similarly, SBE students felt more motivated to succeed because of their interactions with their teachers. One student shared,

If your math or your English or your science teachers had that connection with you, you would want to come in and sit down and get straight to work just because you feel like you owe that to your teachers and you want to do good for them. I think the connection that we have with our teachers is the biggest thing in [SBE].

SBE students appeared to form deeper connections with teachers than their non-SBE peers and these relationships fostered an optimal learning environment.

### **Student-student relationships**

Both SBE and non-SBE students raved about the welcoming, accepting environment at their high school. One non-SBE student explained, "People here, they seem like family to [me]. That's why I like high school so much. Haven't ever been around a school like this. Like everybody talk to everybody. Like you feel welcome when you come to Vo-Tech." Students described their peers as friendly, approachable, and

non-judgmental. Their peers felt more like family than friends and they dreaded the separation that will come with graduation. One non-SBE student explained how the positive peer pressure at Vo-Tech has contributed to her growth. She shared,

I'm not the best student. I do a lot of stuff, and since I came to Vo-Tech [...] Like, I kind of started out on the rough side, but then, now, I don't really get in trouble at all. And that's because I have people that motivates me because at my other school, they used to indulge me, like make me do things that get me in trouble, but now it's like, everybody just don't want to be in trouble. Everybody want to do things, stuff like that, and I got a lot of best friends, so [...] I have people that talk to me and guide me through the right path, and they be like, 'You don't need to do this'.

Several non-SBE students expressed appreciation for the supportive, encouraging environment at Vo-Tech.

SBE students interacted with fewer individuals during the school day because of their smaller class sizes. Consequently, many of their closest friends were involved with the same SBE. When discussing her friendships, one student shared, "Most of mine are in my [SBE]. Yeah, I do have friends that are here and there, but most of mine [share] common interests with me." Though some of these students tended to have smaller social circles, they felt that their participation in SBE afforded them opportunities to build deeper connections with peers. One student described how the large number of students at Vo-Tech made it difficult to get acquainted with his peers. He continued, "[In SBE], especially with our Vo-Tech Acres, all the programs work together. The [agriculture] students are working with culinary, and culinary's working with marketing. I think it's helped a lot to get to know [students]". These collaborations were valuable spaces for cross-disciplinary learning and were a medium for students to establish meaningful relationships. Teamwork was essential for student success in SBE and required students to move beyond superficial interactions. One student shared,

I think that's a good thing about the [SBE] here, is everybody work together, and that's the big thing, is communication and being able to get along. You may not like some students, but once you work with them, you see past the surface level of people and you understand to look at people [deeper].

The cooperative nature of SBE forced students to work across interpersonal differences. While both SBE and non-SBE students had positive interactions with their peers, SBE involvement presented additional opportunities to foster valuable connections.

## Values

Both SBE and non-SBE students valued education. Most students were planning to attend college and intended to pursue careers that would propel them to success.

However, some non-SBE students felt their high school education was of little value. They had little motivation to attend school and were more concerned with their post-high school educational pursuits. One student shared her frustration with having no control over her course load and being forced to enroll in courses to earn graduation credits. She explained,

I tried to get it switched and everything they wouldn't let me because they didn't know where else to put me, they said they wanted to put me in a lower class because of my grades, they wanted to put me in a lower class so I just got stuck with that. Which once again which is why I can't wait to go to college where you have choices, you can leave any class you want really.

Several non-SBE students felt that their high school education would be more valuable if a wider array of classes were available. In contrast, many SBE students were more motivated to succeed because of their participation in SBE. They felt that the courses aligned with their personal and professional goals. One student expressed,

It impacted me a lot because usually when I come to school I kind of don't want to come. It's just that thing about waking up so early in the morning but being in a marketing class it makes me want to come to school. It makes me dedicated to being at school, to achieve my goals and going to my career choice. Because of our marketing classes I feel that I will be comfortable in my career choice more than I was in the first place.

Unlike their non-SBE peers, SBE students appeared to be experiencing less post-high school anxiety. SBE students valued the professional exposure they gained from these courses.

## **Beliefs**

Though SBE and non-SBE students both valued education, many non-SBE students wished their courses offered more practical knowledge. One non-SBE student explained,

Sometimes I feel like there's a little bit that they're teaching us that is unnecessary, and that there some things that we need to learn that's not really academic, there's some things we need to learn how to get through in life that we're going to be missing when we get out there because they were so busy cramming some stuff into our brains that we have no use for.

Several non-SBE students complained about being ill prepared for their post-high school transition. Similarly, they felt that too many courses were tailored to students who planned to attend college. One student shared,

I think if high schools, in general, every high school at least that I know of, lack is the life experience, because they say they're getting us ready for college but some

people may not be going to college, or some people might be going to military or something like that, so I don't think, well, no, I don't believe that our school at least is getting us ready for life experience, just [college].

These students were concerned that Vo-Tech overlooked students whose post-high school plans did not include college. Many of them attributed their lack of motivation to attend school to their unstimulating courses. One student explained,

I [rarely] come to school only because I feel that coming here is a waste of time sometimes for my first, second, no my first, third and fourth periods are unrequired classes, and most of the times we either have sub or aren't really doing anything. And I'm still passing - that's all my classes, and I rarely come. But it's not like I have the most to do outside of school. It's just that coming here and staying home, I'd do the same thing - just would sit and do nothing when I could just be at home doing that. So I feel it's no reason to come sometimes.

These experiences drastically differed from the SBE students who were eager to attend school each day. Much of this can be attributed to the practical application of their courses. One student shared,

I don't know what schools don't have [SBE], but if you don't have that, you just go to science and leave, but here you go to chemistry and then you go to the green house and you actually use the chemistry. That, I think, has improved all of our grades for sure.

Students linked these applied learning opportunities to improved academic performance. They were excited to learn and eager to disseminate their learning. One student explained,

It helps a lot because students go to class and leave and they never think about school again, but whenever you have a [SBE], you get to go home and be like, 'Mom, I did this today and I did this and I learned this.'

For SBE students, learning was not confined to the classroom. These students also felt better prepared for their post-high school pursuits. Participating in SBE helped many students refine their personal and professional interests. One student shared,

I always wanted to be a vet, and then I worked in a vet's office for a few weeks and I was like, 'No, I can't do this.' Then I was like, 'Oh my gosh, what am I going to do?' As soon as I got in the green house, I was like, 'This is what I'm going to do. I love this.' Without that, I don't know what I would've done in high school.

SBE provided many students with direction by exposing them to a vast array of career possibilities. Students also appreciated the opportunity to interact with the larger community. One student explained,

With community leaders, when you go out and present, you can meet the mayor, city council members. We've spoken to [the USDA]. We've been to Boston, North Carolina. It's just a network that you're building up. We know a lot of people. These students interacted with influential individuals in their neighborhood and beyond and appeared to have established robust professional networks. While many non-SBE students described their high school education as inadequate, SBE emphasized college and career readiness to ensure each student's success regardless of their post-high school pursuits.

### **Discussion**

The focus groups revealed that SBE offered meaningful, transformative educational experiences for students. It is important to acknowledge the healthy school climate at Vo-Tech. Non-SBE students had positive interactions with their teachers and formed valuable connections with their peers. However, SBE was a distinct environment that offered unique opportunities. Students established familial bonds with their teachers that fueled them to strive for success. The collaborative nature of SBE allowed students to form authentic, genuine relationships with peers. Students were excited to attend school each day and eager to learn. They identified clear connections between course content and their future aspirations. They also had an opportunity to develop a professional identity and refine their career interests.

Though the focus of the analysis was the classroom nanosystem, SBE participation uniquely impacted students while enhancing peer nanosystems and the school microsystem. The SBE nanosystem facilitated higher quality instruction with its smaller class sizes, abundant opportunities for applied learning, and personalized attention to each student. In these nanosystems, students experienced personal growth and developed valuable interpersonal skills. Students' motivation to succeed and commitment to learning enriched the school microsystem.

Collecting demographic data on the focus group participants would have enhanced the findings of the study. It is possible that race, gender, and other identities impacted how students experience SBE and Vo-Tech. Similarly, the homogeneity or heterogeneity of each SBE could affect how students function in these environments. Demographic information would have provided important context for the focus groups and added depth to the findings.

For some students, focus groups may not be the optimal form of data collection. There may have been students in the focus groups who dominated the conversation and caused others to feel apprehensive about sharing conflicting opinions. Interviews

eliminate groupthink and create space for open, honest dialogue. Conducting both interviews and focus groups would have expanded the findings by incorporating more perspectives.

### **Future Directions**

As indicated by the literature review, most studies of SBE have focused on the benefits to students and to schools. Several researchers have made claims about the ways SBE impacts employment, entrepreneurship, and economic development (Keel, 1998; Stern, 1994; Stone, 1993), but these assertions lack empirical support. Though these topics are not the focus of the paper, these assertions are frequent in the literature and present opportunities for future research.

### **Employment**

Keel (1998) asserts that SBE participation can combat unemployment for students of color in urban communities. No studies have examined post-high school employment outcomes among students who participated in SBE. Furthermore, for SBE to improve employment outcomes, they must equip students with skills that prepare them for the job market. Many schools may establish SBE in response to student needs instead of market demands. This may create a better educational experience, but students may not graduate equipped with the necessary skills to secure employment. Additionally, it seems unlikely that a school would cease to operate a SBE that students are eager to participate in but is not increasing post-high school employment opportunities. Schools choose to operate SBE for several reasons and it is important to explore differences between SBE with distinct aims, such as a SBE focused on improving post-high school employment and a SBE committed to reducing drop-out rates. Research on the planning, monitoring, and evaluation of SBE can begin to answer some of these questions.

The assertion that SBE can combat unemployment also requires information on employment trends in areas where SBE operate. Students in areas with more employment opportunities may have better employment outcomes and this may occur independently of their involvement with SBE. Conversely, SBE may equip students with skills that diversify their employment opportunities. For example, a student in a rural community with no farming experience may have more employment prospects after participating in an agriculture SBE. Examining the community context can begin to illuminate the relationship between SBE and employment outcomes.

## **Entrepreneurship**

Several researchers suggest that SBE participation increases the likelihood that students will pursue entrepreneurship post-high school. Similar to the assertion about employment outcomes, there is little evidence to support this claim. Several studies report that SBE participation results in increased interest in entrepreneurship, but few of these studies track students beyond high school (Keel, 1998; Stern, 1994; Stone, 1993; Hoffman, 2011). Though students do acquire entrepreneurial skills, establishing a successful business also requires access to capital. There was no mention in the literature of SBE focused on securing resources to support post-high school entrepreneurship.

Guthrie (2013) asserts that entrepreneurs are a valuable resource in economically depressed communities with fluctuating employment opportunities. In these communities, relocation is common among the younger generation and the loss of local talent can be extremely damaging for the economy. These individuals often migrate to locations with better employment prospects. Entrepreneurs can reverse this trend by creating employment opportunities while revitalizing the economy. Baker (1990), who studied SBE in rural communities, asserts that SBE teaches students how create their own jobs so they can remain in their communities after they complete high school. She claims that students involved with SBE develop stronger ties to their community and feel empowered to improve their surroundings. These students are less likely to abandon their community and migrate to larger cities. As mentioned previously, no longitudinal studies have been conducted with SBE students after high school. First, research must determine if SBE involvement reduces the likelihood of relocation. If relocation rates are lower among SBE students, research can then determine what facilitates this process. Similarly, research can explore whether SBE students are more likely to establish businesses in their home communities and what contributes to this process. If SBE reduces the likelihood of relocation and increases entrepreneurship, this model can significantly impact economically depressed communities.

More research is needed to examine the relationship between SBE involvement and entrepreneurship. If more students are deciding to pursue entrepreneurship because of their exposure to SBE, research can determine how to best support this process. Research can also identify predictors of success and failure for SBE students who pursue entrepreneurship.

## **Economic development**

Several researchers have asserted that SBE contributes to economic development (Baker, 1990; Stern, 1984). Baker (1990) describes SBE as a community-focused curriculum integrated into the local economy. She studied several SBEs in the rural



Southeast affiliated with Rural Entrepreneurship through Action Learning (REAL) that consisted of a one-year course in enterprise and a one-year course in small business management. These students conducted community assessments, wrote business plans, operated the business, and strategized on how to expand the business. They were responsible for developing viable, self-sustaining businesses that filled a niche in the local economy. The rigor of this model demonstrates the potential of SBE. Baker defines success as students acquiring entrepreneurial skills and meaningfully contributing to their communities. However, measures could be developed to quantify the impact of SBE on the local economy, such as revenue generated and number of jobs created.

It is important to note that no universal curriculum exists for SBE. There are many SBE that include none of components described above and do not aim to produce viable, self-sustaining businesses. Understanding the relationship between SBE and economic development requires acknowledgment of the distinct aims of many SBE. A SBE that increases the number of available jobs and a SBE that reduces the school's dropout rate are both contributing to economic development, but these outcomes must be measured differently. Though SBE can contribute to economic development, research has yet to measure this contribution. Research can also help determine what facilitates this process. Furthermore, economic development may look different in rural, suburban, and urban contexts. Researchers who have suggested a relationship between SBE and economic development can aid with the operationalization of this concept in different settings.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

Existing research demonstrates the significant potential of SBE. The findings from this study indicate that SBE produces distinct educational experiences for students. These experiences can be attributed to smaller class sizes, the practical application of course content, and the deep connections established between teachers and students. This study could be expanded to other schools to identify patterns and trends in student experiences in SBE. It is possible that student experiences vary by geographic location, type of SBE, and other factors. This information could then be utilized to develop best practices for establishing and maintaining successful SBE across different educational contexts.

Future research could examine additional aspects of SBE to add depth to the systems view of school climate framework. An examination of how SBE interacts with the community exosystem can begin to uncover how SBE could be utilized to spur employment, entrepreneurship, and economic development. Analyzing the social and

educational macrosystem could help predict the future of SBE. These empirical analyses are essential for ensuring the relevance of SBE in an ever-changing society.

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**Appendix A: Focus Group Protocol**

1. With what social enterprise(s) are you involved at Vo-Tech?
2. What impact has social enterprise had on your experience at Vo-Tech?
3. How has your involvement in social enterprise impacted your relationships with students, teachers, and community members?
4. Has the existence of this program impacted your desire to attend school? If so, how so?
5. For the students who are not involved in any social enterprise, what is their perception of them?
6. In what ways has this project influenced how you view career and college opportunities or interests?
7. Have you noticed any differences in your teacher's and/or administrator's attitudes about Vo-Tech as a result of the social enterprises?
8. Because of the opportunities these social enterprises have provided, how do you think you have grown as a student and teenager?