Skills for the future: an instructional systems design approach to youth development programming

by

Michelle Lee Gough

B.S., San Diego State University, 2008
M.S., Texas A & M University, 2017

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Curriculum and Instruction
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

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Abstract

Integrating social-emotional learning, digital literacy, and employability skills into an intentionally designed Positive Youth Development (PYD) program equips students with the competencies needed for skills-based hiring, expanding opportunities for hidden talent pools, promoting workforce diversity, and fostering economic growth. This study employed a qualitative conceptual content analysis of three competency frameworks, social-emotional learning, digital literacy, and employability skills, to identify overarching competencies shared across the frameworks. The analysis revealed six key competencies: self-management and adaptability, effective communication and collaboration, critical thinking and problem-solving, technical and digital literacy, ethical and cultural awareness, and lifelong learning and professional development. These competencies were evaluated against PYD principles using a rubric, ensuring alignment with core PYD goals such as viewing youth as resourceful assets, fostering agency, engaging them as community contributors, and creating environments that support skill-building. The conceptual Young Curators program was developed using the findings and the Instructional Systems Design (ISD) process to integrate these competencies into a structured, intentional, and holistic framework. The program aligns theoretical frameworks with practical applications, promoting scalability, equity, and measurable outcomes. This approach effectively prepares youth for diverse challenges, supporting PYD's mission to empower young people to be healthy, productive, and engaged members of their communities.

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Major Professor
Deepak Subramony PhD

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Integrating social-emotional learning, digital literacy, and employability skills into an intentionally designed Positive Youth Development (PYD) program equips students with the competencies needed for skills-based hiring, expanding opportunities for hidden talent pools, promoting workforce diversity, and fostering economic growth. This study employed a qualitative conceptual content analysis of three competency frameworks, social-emotional learning, digital literacy, and employability skills, to identify overarching competencies shared across the frameworks. The analysis revealed six key competencies: self-management and adaptability, effective communication and collaboration, critical thinking and problem-solving, technical and digital literacy, ethical and cultural awareness, and lifelong learning and professional development. These competencies were evaluated against PYD principles using a rubric, ensuring alignment with core PYD goals such as viewing youth as resourceful assets, fostering agency, engaging them as community contributors, and creating environments that support skill-building. The conceptual Young Curators program was developed using the findings and the Instructional Systems Design (ISD) process to integrate these competencies into a structured, intentional, and holistic framework. The program aligns theoretical frameworks with practical applications, promoting scalability, equity, and measurable outcomes. This approach effectively prepares youth for diverse challenges, supporting PYD's mission to empower young people to be healthy, productive, and engaged members of their communities.

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Chapter 1 - Overview of the Issues

Competency-based learning equips young people with the skills they need to stay competitive in today's quickly advancing employment landscape. Employers need people with skills, and many people are eager for work. As the need for a diverse set of skills continues to grow, the demand for diversity in the workforce also grows. The needs of people, economies, and society drive the demand for inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility. With burgeoning technology, hiring challenges, and talent shortages inhibiting prospective growth, skills-based hiring enhances equity in the workplace, opens opportunities for hidden talent pools, and closes economic gaps (Taylor, 1911; Krauss, 2017). Skills-based hiring relies on the ability to perform the work needed and opens employment opportunities for a hidden workforce to gain economic mobility. As several companies shed degree requirements while experiencing labor shortages, the need for competency-based learning grows (Fuller et al., 2022; McKinsey, 2022; Gonzalez Ehrlinger et al., 2023). The significance of skills in the workplace stems from the uneven progression of formal education and the job market. Restricting hiring individuals with degrees exacerbates the issue. A widespread recognition signals a collective understanding of the importance of competency-based education in meeting the evolving demands of the workforce. However, despite the acknowledged need, the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) notes a significant gap in implementing institutions incorporating a competency-based framework (CAEL, 2024). This gap between awareness and execution highlights the complexity of transitioning from recognizing the need for competency-based education to its widespread implementation in educational agencies.

Educational organizations, such as youth development programs, serve as effective channels for instilling vital skills such as personality development, technical achievement, and

prevention of high-risk behavior (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Arnold, 2020). The competency-based framework plays a role in developing youth programs and provides young individuals with skills desired by employers and employees. The observed rise in skills-based hiring, where major companies and governments are reconsidering degree requirements as indicators of job readiness, reflects a response to talent shortages, evident in the 8.8 million job openings in the US as of late 2023, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Employers can use skill-based hiring as a suitable method to identify qualified candidates. A study by the Society for Human Resource Management reports positive outcomes using skills-based assessments in the hiring process, with 78 percent of hiring professionals attesting to its success (shrm.org, 2022). Furthermore, educational organizations play a significant role in supporting and promoting the integration of skills and competency-based learning models.

Using skills- and competency-based learning to assess job readiness directly addresses the pressing need for closer alignment between educational institutions and a robust workforce. Meeting the evolving prerequisites of a well-prepared workforce requires an increasing number of skills- and competency-based learning programs. The substantial growth of competency-based education (CBE) programs in the United States has surpassed 1,000, particularly from 20 to over 500 between 2012 and 2015, as the Lumina Foundation (2017) reported. Furthermore, a 2020 survey by the American Institutes for Research and the CBE Network reveals that over 80 percent of institutions anticipate continuously expanding competency-based education programs over the next five years.

Competency-based education (CBE) learning models within youth program designs are instrumental in helping learners comprehend specific skills and competencies. These programs effectively communicate the skills and competencies learners acquire upon completion,

strategically designed to cultivate high-demand skills through various assessment activities. In a time when employers increasingly question the value of traditional college degrees, competency-based education programs focus on developing practical, job-relevant skills that meet workforce demands. Employers and stakeholders can rest assured that learners are masters of these skills, reinforcing the effectiveness and reliability of CBE in preparing individuals for the workforce. Notably, these programs integrate competencies and skills directly tied to careers, elevating the relevance of educational programs for both learners and employers.

Competency-based education programs are recognized for their capacity to cater to diverse learner needs, offering flexible credentials and tailoring realistic timelines according to individual student requirements (Evans et al., 2020; Lopez et al., 2017). These skills are not only acquired but are also demonstrable to employers both upon graduation and throughout the ongoing learning process. The ability to show skills at various stages of the educational journey instills confidence in learners, knowing they possess the requisite skills for open job roles. CBE emerges as a promising and impactful approach for learning organizations aiming to adjust to diverse learners and equip students with the necessary skills for employment. CBE's approach to learning features the value and confidence that skill building brings to learners and employers in the process of education and workforce preparation.

In the pursuit of fostering youth development through educational programming, program designers must give precedence to the unique needs of young individuals. A myriad of organizational principles, individual processes, and programming purposes characterize the landscape of youth development programs (Hamilton et al., 2002; Shek et al., 2019). Recognizing this variety, a targeted focus on the specific needs of young individuals helps design clear program outcomes. Heck and Subramaniam (2009) highlight that youth development

policy emphasizes providing services and opportunities to nurture a sense of competence and belonging among the youth. Additionally, Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003) emphasize the significance of youth development processes in building resilience to assist young people in navigating the challenges of adolescence. As observed by Catalano (2019), adopting a youth development approach not only influences youth to strive for positive outcomes but also works towards minimizing risk-taking behavior. It is important to understand youth development as a holistic concept, prioritizing young people and considering the complex interaction of personal (internal) and environmental (external) influences. These factors collectively shape a young person's growth, helping them navigate the challenges of adolescence and achieve a smooth transition into adulthood. Prioritizing the needs of young individuals illuminates the importance of competency-based learning within the intricate landscape of youth development programs.

Youth program design operates within a youth development framework, targeting specific health, employment, and academic outcomes. Designers intentionally craft programs to focus on workforce related skills, attitudes toward social awareness, and civic engagement, which play a significant role in helping youth acquire the skills for a successful future. It incorporates key elements of preventive and promotional approaches, where preventive efforts aim to reduce risky behaviors, and promotional activities concentrate on enhancing competencies and assets among the youth. Youth development values and enriches young individuals, providing them with the skills and opportunities for independence, empowerment, and an awareness of their potential. The research emphasizes the significance of intentional youth program design in fostering specific outcomes and promoting holistic youth development.

Rationale for the Study

A discernible gap exists in the components of comprehensive program design dedicated to fostering positive youth development (Eccles et al., 2002). Despite incorporating diverse approaches and perspectives in successful programs, there is a notable scarcity of specific design elements leading to effective program evaluations. This deficiency, underlined by Redmond and Dolan (2016), pointing out the lack of evidence-based program models for conceptualizing youth program components, highlights an area requiring attention within the realm of positive youth development. In response to this gap, research suggests that principles derived from self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017) and relational developmental systems theory (Learner et al., 2014) can serve as valuable guides for youth program design. Self-determination theory (SDT) offers a framework for understanding the factors that foster motivation and contribute to healthy psychological and behavioral functioning. Complementarily, relational developmental systems theory emphasizes relationships and contextual factors, such as family, peers, culture, and societal structures, in comprehending how individuals grow and adapt over time. The absence of evidence-based program models for conceptualizing youth program components draws attention to the potential focus on motivation and psychological well-being. It emphasizes recognizing the impact of relationships and contextual factors on the growth and adaptation of individuals.

Designers must intentionally craft youth development programs to yield measurable outcomes (Walker, 2006). This research seeks to incorporate three pivotal frameworks—social-emotional learning, digital literacy, and employability skills—into conceptual learning outcomes designed for integration into positive youth development interventions. Catalano et al. (2019) indicate the potential of positive youth development (PYD) programs to significantly enhance

the return on investment by deliberately targeting various predictors of behaviors and outcomes, spanning domains such as health, employment, and education. Catalano emphasizes the critical need for a comprehensive evaluation of program impact, encompassing measures of all potential outcomes associated with PYD. Effective youth programs, rooted in established positive youth development principles (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Hamilton et al., 2004; Witt & Caldwell, 2018), hinge on intentional design and alignment with PYD. Additional support comes from PYD programs concentrating on building leadership skills, providing youth with opportunities for skill development, practical application, and guidance from facilitating adults (Bates et al., 2020). Intentional program design not only meets the developmental needs of youth but actively promotes desired outcomes (J Walker et al., 2005). Furthermore, building skills through deliberate youth development program design strategies establishes connections for youth with future career options, fosters community building, and addresses social issues (Bates, 2020). Intentional design in positive youth development by integrating relevant competency frameworks helps to achieve measurable outcomes.

Critically examining youth development program design assists the understanding of how program mechanisms, practices, and processes contribute to developing specific skills and achieving positive outcomes for youth (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2016). Concentrating on narrowing the elements of program success, as indicated by Cioncanel et al. (2017), Durlak et al. (2010), and Roth & Brook-Gunn (2016), holds the potential to significantly enhance the understanding of the settings, participants, and purposes leading to specific outcomes for youth warranting a deeper understanding of these elements, foundational for effective youth program design. Further, young individuals entering the workforce must navigate digital media, employ social-emotional awareness, and enhance employability skills for sustained employment,

financial stability, and career growth. Alvarado et al. and USAID (2017) also advocate for more research to comprehend the effects of cross-sectoral outcomes. A holistic approach to Positive Youth Development (PYD), potentially serving as a foundational support system, positively impacts a broad range of outcomes with lifelong benefits (USAID, 2017). Recognizing the call for identifying practical ways to design and implement PYD programs with cross-sector outcomes, PYD programs focusing on general life skills can significantly impact multiple sectors by targeting more specific skills. There is a critical need to examine youth program design elements and the potential benefits of a holistic, integrated, cross-sectoral, Positive Youth Development approach.

Funding priorities for youth development programs should emphasize a more comprehensive and integrated approach across various contexts, aligning with the recommendation of Geldhof et al. (2015). Evaluating program effectiveness for funding consideration requires an intentional design to align with evaluation-based funding outcomes. To achieve outcomes suitable for evaluation-based funding, designers of Positive Youth Development programs must intentionally integrate a range of competencies, focusing on life skills and workforce development, as highlighted by Kumar et al. (2021). The limited digital literacy education and training studies highlight a research gap. Recognizing this, the proposed research introduces necessary skills- and competency-based outcomes to measure and evaluate youth development programs, with a specific focus on building competencies in digital literacy and social-emotional awareness in the workforce. This study addresses existing gaps, providing a foundation for more effective youth development programs. Moreover, the lack of studies and evaluations on the effectiveness of cross-sectoral PYD programs, as noted by USAID (2023) and Alvarado et al. (2017), accentuates the need for a more comprehensive understanding in this

realm. Additionally, the absence of an agreed-upon structured curriculum or instructional component for Youth Development Programs (YDP) hinders successful implementation and measurement of effectiveness, favorable outcomes, and successful implementation. Recognizing the challenge that youth need programs designed for digital literacy and social emotional awareness, educators may integrate relevant competencies to better prepare students entering the workforce. Emphasis on intentional program design is imperative, advocates for a more comprehensive approach, and proposes instructional competencies to bridge existing gaps in youth development programs, particularly in digital literacy and social-emotional awareness in the workforce.

Research Purpose and Questions

By 2030, ninety percent of jobs in the US will necessitate digital skills (Van Eerd & Guo, 2022). CASEL.org (2018) recognizes social-emotional skills as pivotal for enabling diverse social groups to contribute effectively to a complex global community. In the contemporary workforce, employers expect employees to excel in professional skills, embrace emerging technologies, and demonstrate self-awareness (Tushar & Sooraksa, 2023). This research attempts to elevate positive youth development programs by aligning their learning outcomes with the evolving demands of the modern workplace. Positive Youth Development, defined by Making Cents International, involves engaging youth, families, communities, and governments to empower young individuals to reach their full potential. Such approaches encompass building skills, assets, and competencies, fostering healthy relationships, strengthening the environment, and transforming systems. The study aims to identify conceptual areas within three key positive youth developmental frameworks—social-emotional learning, digital literacy, and employability skills—that contribute to positive outcomes in the context of youth development programs. This

research illuminates the projected importance of digital skills in future employment, reinforces the role of social-emotional skills, and introduces a research initiative aimed at enhancing the alignment of youth development programs with the evolving needs of the modern workforce.

The comprehensive development of young individuals relies on mastering social-emotional, digital, and employability skills, forming a well-rounded foundation for personal and professional challenges. Social- emotional skills, nurturing interpersonal relationships, and emotional intelligence are indispensable in personal and professional contexts. Digital skills are increasingly important in our technology-driven world, enabling effective communication and adaptability. Achieving a balance among these skills ensures a comprehensive foundation, equipping individuals to navigate diverse challenges in personal and professional spheres. Additionally, the paper aims to deepen understanding by exploring the benefits of Competency-Based Education (CBE) in preparing students for the workforce, particularly amid uncertain economic times and cultural shifts in competitive labor markets.

The study examines skills and competencies within socially relevant and technically rich fields and derives the skills and competencies by analyzing existing and appliable frameworks, covering social emotional learning, digital literacy, and employability. Competency-based education (CBE) plays a key role in fostering knowledge and awareness within both professional and personal environments, emphasizing the practical application of skills for the future.

Research Questions

Question 1: What are the overarching concepts of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), Digital Literacy (DL), and Employability Skills (ES) competency frameworks of CASEL, USAID Digital Literacy, and the Department of Education's Employability Skills and Competencies Framework?

Question 2: How do the overarching concepts align with youth development program design principles?

Question 3: How can these overarching concepts integrate into an intentionally designed youth development program?

The repercussions of COVID-19 on mental health, educational engagement, and workforce opportunities for young individuals underscore the necessity for increased investment in youth development programs. These programs should emphasize critical areas that can support and transform youths' journey to adulthood. Arnold (2020a) advocates for a boost in Positive Youth Development (PYD) funding to ensure equitable access to Youth Development Programs (YDP), address gaps in opportunities, establish a workforce pipeline, and encourage civic engagement. This study aims to examine the commonalities among the three frameworks and compare them to the positive youth development model to identify an evaluation concept for future program design.

Operational Definitions

Youth Development: Youth development is a process that prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood and achieve their full potential. It is promoted through activities and experiences that help youth develop social, ethical, emotional, physical, and cognitive competencies (NASETalliance.org, 2023).

Positive Youth Development Programs: Positive youth development programs strengthen young people’s sense of identity, belief in the future, self-regulation, and self-efficacy, as well as their social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral competence (cdc.gov, 2023)

Skills- and Competency-based Learning: Education that constructs its curriculum by analyzing a role within a group to validate students' advancement by assessing their demonstrated

performance in various aspects of that role. Displays of competence are considered regardless of the duration spent in formal educational environments (Riesman, 1979).

Community-Based Learning: Community-based learning creates both learners and citizens using strategies that engage students in learning through community-based problem-solving. These strategies include academically based community service, civic education, environmental education, place-based learning, service learning, and work-based learning. Community-based learning draws from research on peer-assisted, project-based, and experiential learning (Melaville et al., 2006).

Instructional Systems Design: Instructional systems design (ISD) combines education, psychology, and communications knowledge to systematically develop instructional plans tailored to specific groups of learners. (Purdue University, 2017, as read in Subramony, 2021)

Intentional Program Design: Intentional program design involves a purpose-driven and learner-centered approach, with a focus on achieving specific, meaningful outcomes aligned with broader educational objectives (Walker, 2006)

Social-Emotional Learning: SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions (CASEL.org)

Digital Literacy: “Digital literacy is the ability to access, manage, understand, integrate, communicate, evaluate and create information safely and appropriately through digital technologies for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship. It includes various competencies called computer, ICT, information, and media literacy” (UNESCO, 2018).

"USAID, building on UNESCO's definition of the term, defines digital literacy as "The ability to access, manage, understand, integrate, communicate, evaluate, and create information safely and appropriately through digital devices and networked technologies for participation in economic, social, and political life," (USAID, 2022)

Employability Skills: "Employability Skills are general skills necessary for success in the labor market at all employment levels and sectors" (OCTAE, 2023).

Significance of the Study

The current study explores the combination of three competency frameworks to reach a consensus on the overarching competencies and their relation to learning domains and alignment to a positive youth development program design. International educational organizations, with their global reach and social missions, focus on critical skills and competencies such as social-emotional learning, digital skills, and employability. These skills are selected for their overall positive impact on individuals and their communities.

Program designers who apply instructional systems design and implement flexible learning activities can achieve desired outcomes. Examining overarching learning competencies through the ecological systems view explores how community-based youth development can be effectively implemented, accurately measured, and properly evaluated. The competencies found in this research offer opportunities for efficient knowledge transfer through a specific set of skills necessary for success in all the areas of these frameworks. Within each competency framework, the learner continues to be the focus and engages the many factors in their ecosystems to scale their skills personally and professionally.

Limitations

One advantage of qualitative content analysis is the ability to schedule research time. No scheduling of interviews, requesting permission to distribute surveys, or other coordination of schedules were necessary. Cost is another advantage of framework content analysis. Each educational organization provides its frameworks to the public, available on the web and easily shared, printed, or downloaded to be saved on a computer or cloud-based repository. Money spent on travel, dialogue transcriptions, or mailings was zero.

Framework content analysis using three skills-based frameworks has several limitations. Content analysis is interpretive and, therefore, qualitative. Content analysis is time-consuming because the material must be reviewed throughout multiple phases. All the data and resources for this study are available on the web. Over time, the evolving nature of skills-based frameworks may also challenge the study's relevance. Further research re-examining updated competency frameworks, different competency frameworks, or the same frameworks but looking for other factors they contain other than competencies.

Another limitation to studying the frameworks is whether the elements of the listed competencies were determined to align with one youth development framework. Future research could address this issue as part of learning outcomes aligned with a different youth development framework. The findings may lack generalizability due to the study's focus on three specific competency frameworks, restricting the applicability of results to broader contexts.

Creswell (2003) points to the limitation of document content analysis as accessibility. Parsons (1995) agrees with the challenges of document analysis, as some documents may be incomplete or incorrect. This project used the most updated version of the framework. These frameworks may continue to develop as the needs of youth and the workforce evolve.

The desired result of this study is to furnish program designers seeking to incorporate the three critical frameworks of social-emotional learning, digital literacy, and employability skills into their programs with a comprehensive set of competencies from these frameworks. The aim is to present these competencies in a format applicable to creating measurable and evaluative learning outcomes tailored to their respective programs. The researcher recognizes and communicates these limitations to enable interpretation of the study outcomes.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this study are the three frameworks explicitly chosen for the intentional program design. The intentional program design focused on the benefits of SEL, DL, and ES competencies. The frameworks are aligned with positive youth development principles. Both governmental and nongovernmental educational organizations were looked at in this research project. I chose to include organizations with a broad reach to multiple social groups that are well respected in their fields. Although all the educational organizations are US-based, many have socially diverse, cross-sectoral, and international missions. These criteria limit the analysis of this research. The result of the framework content analysis can only be compared to the organizations with global impact and institutional goals.

A content analysis was conducted only on the three critical frameworks necessary to prepare youth for the workforce. No data on their implementation is gathered. Interviewing an informant, a knowledgeable insider, from either of these educational organizations could have provided additional information (Schwandt, 2001). Anyone who worked directly with constructing these competencies would know specific examples of behaviors, attitudes, and skills that may demonstrate mastery. However, these frameworks provide the liberty of learning activities to the program designers.

Researcher Perspective

In navigating this subject, I wear multiple hats: instructional designer, program coordinator, curriculum developer, teacher, and youth advocate. As an instructional designer, I take a systems-based approach, acknowledging the diverse environments shaping youth identities and demanding the application of skills in various settings. As a program coordinator, I aim to create a secure space for young people to engage in impactful learning activities alongside caring adults in their communities. As a curriculum developer, I integrate competencies from relevant frameworks, ensuring real-time and real-world learning for immediate application and feedback.

My commitment to teaching is driven by the transformative impact of supportive adult role models in my youth. As a youth advocate and public health proponent, I aim to offer transformative experiences to young individuals, enhancing their quality of life and inspiring them to pay it forward. My background, including experiences as a youth requiring intervention and serving as an interpreter for my deaf grandmother, informs my dedication to inclusive learning practices.

Having worked as a teacher in a rural school district, I recognize the importance of addressing diverse career paths for students, particularly those engaged in small businesses. My bias toward frameworks like Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), Employability Skills (ES), and Digital Literacy (DL) stems from workforce training experiences. These frameworks synergize to equip youth for the future workforce, emphasizing communication skills for both digital and physical interactions.

The significance of these research topics is further emphasized by experiences in a rural school district, where students pursuing vocational programs found success in their

entrepreneurial spirit. Integrating workforce training models into youth development programs, measured through competencies, enables standardized and replicable evaluative programming, extending the impact on youth development and contributing to a more autonomous society.

Organization of the Study

In this research study, I first summarize the current literature on positive youth development programs and their designs. Next, I give a brief history of competency-based approaches to learning and highlight the benefits of a competency-based approach to PYD program design. Then, I explore the frameworks of social-emotional learning, digital literacy, and employability skills to identify shared conceptual themes. Using the key concepts in these three frameworks, I describe their applicability to youth development programs. Subsequently, I use the analysis results to propose measurable learning objectives in positive youth development programs that integrate social-emotional, digital, and employability competencies.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

The literature review for this study begins by explaining a competence-based approach, the Instructional Systems Design (ISD) process, along with its key stages and applications. It also examines the role and significance of competency-based education within the ISD framework, explaining how this approach integrates into program design. The review provides background on the Positive Youth Development (PYD) movement and highlights the conceptual components that contribute to effective PYD program designs. Finally, the review presents evidence-based literature demonstrating the benefits of acquiring competencies and skills in the three key frameworks: social-emotional learning, digital literacy, and employability skills.

Instructional Systems Design

This section explores the application of the Instructional Systems Design (ISD) process in developing effective positive youth development programs. It examines how the ISD model serves as a conceptual framework for program design by integrating competency-based education into the program's structure. This integration ensures measurable outcomes that can be systematically evaluated. The ISD approach offers a streamlined, systematic process while maintaining flexibility, enabling intentional and responsive program design throughout all stages of development. The section describes how ISD principles contribute to creating streamlined youth programs that meet the needs of program directors, organizations, and diverse communities and equip young people with skills for personal growth and professional success.

The instructional systems design (ISD) model is a working approach to streamlining instructional activities and ensuring desired learning outcomes. The Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) defines ISD as a theory and practice encompassing the intricate processes of analyzing, developing, implementing, and evaluating learning

resources. Instructional systems design involves creating a curriculum to achieve specific competencies, skills, and learning outcomes.

The ISD model is a comprehensive framework that integrates organizational, communicative, educational, and psychological principles, guiding curricula development and learning activities for positive change. ISD employs an iterative process involving planning outcomes, strategies, and technologies for measuring and evaluating performance (Branch & Kopcha, 2014). Supported by Gagne, Briggs, and Wager (1992), the best way to design instruction is to work backward from its expected outcomes' (as read in Stroller, 2015). Branch and Merrill (2002) outline characteristics of ISD models, emphasizing learner-centered performance, goal orientation, relevance to real-world behaviors, reliable and valid measurable outcomes, data-driven processes, and collaboration. Instructional designers possess a spectrum of media skills and educational backgrounds. Through this strategic and impactful design approach, instructional designers who apply ISD principles can significantly enhance the effectiveness of positive youth development programs.

Critics of ISD raise several concerns, particularly regarding its ability to accommodate diverse learning styles and preferences, which may result in the exclusion of specific individuals. The World Economic Forum (2023), express concerns about ISD's potential rigidity in dynamic learning environments and questions its adaptability to evolving educational needs. Publications from organizations like the Search Institute (2024) stress the importance of relational, flexible programming in positive youth development (PYD). Critics argue that the heavy emphasis on measurable outcomes within ISD models may overlook the personal aspects of holistic education, such as critical thinking, creativity, and soft skills (Freire, 1970; Wenger, 2022).

These critiques highlight the need to reflect on ISD models' inclusivity, flexibility, and effectiveness in addressing a learner's diverse needs in an educational context.

Competency-based Education

The competency-based educational approach serves as a foundational workforce training model for assessing knowledge transfer. This evaluation is conducted through observable behaviors and measured using tools such as assessments, simulations, and on-the-job training (NCWWI, 2015). Youth development programs and competency-based education offer valuable frameworks for assessing and evaluating the effectiveness of program design. The argument that incorporating competency-based evaluation tools enhances the robustness of assessing the designs of youth development programs provides further support (HighScope Educational Research Foundation, 2019). Aligning youth development program designs with competency-based models enhances the skills and readiness young people need for the workforce.

Integrating competency-based models into youth development program designs enhances an individual's workforce preparedness. Competency-based education (CBE), as a proposed method for youth development of workforce skills, goes beyond knowledge acquisition, fostering increased social stability, future employability, understanding cultural and professional norms, and the awareness needed to navigate working environments effectively. Fede et al. (2017) highlight the potential for community partners, institutions, and organizations to adapt educational programs to meet the rigorous demands of workforce preparation. These programs emphasize developing transferable skills, such as communication and social skills, through experiential learning opportunities.

Competency-Based Education (CBE), likened to fine-tuning airplane parts by Pinar (1978), emphasizes technological rationality, design, and observable behavior change for greater

educational efficiency. However, using technology to measure human capabilities does not diminish the significance of individual needs and sensitivities. Assessing competencies in educational programs provides valuable insights into participants' capabilities, independent of their social standing, emotional state, or belief systems. This approach supplements discussions, behaviors, and attitudes, offering a more comprehensive understanding of individual strengths and potential. The use of CBE to measure learner competencies is progressive, providing a learner-centered equal opportunity evaluation option. The principles of CBE prove effective in workforce training and development programs.

Competency theory, grounded in the action of task performance, is measurable. Jacobs (1989) defines competency as "an observable skill or ability to complete a managerial task successfully." This approach grants learners the freedom to accomplish the task uniquely, aligning with personal expression, perspective, and experience. Analyzing learner outcomes through goals and tasks establishes a supportive curricular concept, allowing learners to achieve goals and tasks at their own pace and in their preferred space.

Stoller (2015) argues that traditional learning outcomes in schools are inadequate because they detach from the dynamic, emergent learning process, reducing them to mere actions to be performed. Stoller (2015) states that workforce management methods, which organize a system around constructing fixed organizational objects, are primarily employed in the workforce and closely align with youth development programs focusing on workforce training. While this approach might be deemed inappropriate for traditional educational settings, it holds prevalence in the current business environment. Considering this, designing youth development programs that incorporate a workforce model utilizing competency-based education creates an appropriate environment to provide youth with the out-of-classroom learning experiences necessary for the

future. Failing to adopt this approach could leave young people without a solid foundation for workforce learning.

Competency-based measures in youth development programs offer opportunities for minority and marginalized students to build practical, adaptable skills relevant to entering the workforce (Medina & Alderman, 2023). These competencies, characterized by their practicality, reliance on prior knowledge, and adaptability across diverse environmental contexts, are relevant for learners transitioning into the workforce. The competency-based educational approach in program design mitigates the ethnocentric nature of youth development programs that concentrate on activities less relatable to non-majority groups. Fallace (2015) criticizes the typical learner-centered approach for erroneously utilizing typical white child development stages as a universal measure for all groups. However, a competency-based program design, according to Fallace, can sidestep these pitfalls, allowing learners from all backgrounds to apply their unique skills in achieving goals and tasks.

Contrary to Stoller's (2015) argument that using learning outcomes dehumanizes program subjects, I assert that employing a competency-based educational approach in youth development programs empowers students with tangible control over their learning. This approach allows them to adopt various strategies for accomplishing tasks and achieving their learning goals. The teleological orientation of competency-based youth development programs readies young participants for their future in the workforce and facilitates straightforward evaluation of program effectiveness in achieving desired outcomes.

The rigid use of high stakes testing and standardized curricula in schools restricts the exploration of students' creative capacities and unique potential, as noted by Stoller (2015). Youth development programs (YDP), operating without the same constraints as schools, present

an environment conducive to employing a more effective competency-based approach for measuring learning outcomes and program efficacy. The flexibility inherent in YDP allows for greater adaptability to students' needs, aligning closely with the program's curriculum and offering more development opportunities than traditional schools. This flexibility in YDP comes with a responsibility to provide young individuals with opportunities beyond what conventional schools offer.

Youth development programs (YDP) align adolescents' psychological and sociological developmental stages with the requirements of the contemporary workforce. Dewey (1897), as interpreted by Fallace (2015), correlated the stages of human development with individual growth. During adolescence, a YDP curriculum integrates young individuals' social, academic, and professional needs through hands-on activities, learner-led projects, and creative endeavors. These activities progressively enhance youth competencies that apply to their future roles in the workforce.

Positive Youth Development

Over the past century, individuals have made a dedicated effort to create environments that facilitate positive development in young people (Borden et al., 2011). In alignment with existing literature, the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs defines positive youth development (PYD) as a purposeful, pro-social strategy involving young individuals in their communities, schools, organizations, peer circles, and families. This approach fosters productivity and constructiveness while acknowledging, leveraging, and amplifying young people's strengths. PYD advocates positive outcomes by providing opportunities, positive relationships, and the support necessary to nurture leadership capabilities among young individuals. Applying positive youth development principles empowers young people and steers

them toward a positive trajectory for future endeavors. By actively engaging in positive youth development, we contribute to young people's individual growth and promote a collective commitment to creating supportive environments that foster their well-being and development. Embracing positive youth development principles aligns with a commitment to empowering young individuals, nurturing their potential, and fostering a positive trajectory for their future endeavors.

The investigation into youth development and the subsequent emergence of positive youth development programs can be traced back to compulsory education laws and societal shifts (Halpern, 2002; National et al., 2002). Early organized programs, such as the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in the 1800s, the Boys Club in the 1860s, 4-H, and the Girls Scouts directly involved with engaging youth during their out-of-school time (OST). These initial models addressed youth deficits. While successful in deterring certain risky behaviors, these early programs lacked in providing youth with the skills necessary for a successful transition to adulthood (Borden et al., 2020). Exploring youth development and establishing positive youth development programs can be traced back to historical milestones. While early organized programs addressed youth deficits and deterred risky behaviors, they fell short of equipping young individuals with the skills required for a successful transition to adulthood.

Positive Youth Development (PYD) endures as a program model purposefully designed to engage young individuals in both productive and constructive ways to nurture positive outcomes, relationships, and support for developing their assets (youth.gov, 2023). According to Shek et al. (2019), the term "PYD" encompasses diverse meanings and contexts, consistently including overarching concepts such as the strengths of young people, developmental plasticity, and the cultivation of internal (psycho-social competence) and external assets (community

engagement). Furthermore, PYD integrates research-based practices, systematically incorporating proven successful practices into its programming, as highlighted by Romer & Hansen (2021). As indicated, a supportive environment and positive experience intricately connect to young people's positive development. Ensuring broad access to PYD programs within communities is necessary for implementing effective PYD programs, a sentiment by Hamilton, Hamilton, and Pittman (2004), ensuring young individuals have the necessary resources and opportunities for positive development.

An important factor in fostering positive youth development involves structured out-of-school time (OST) activities (Balsano A. et al., 2009). OST encompasses various settings, such as before and after school, during the summer, and other informal learning environments like libraries and museums (Newman, 2020). Youth programming expands from OST to dedicated youth development programs.

PYD programs ensure safety, structure, a sense of belonging, positive social norms, skills building, and integration of family, school, and community (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). By extending learning opportunities beyond the formal classroom, PYD programs contribute to the overall development of youth. Competency-based learning experiences in PYD prepare students to navigate social norms, engage in real-life interactions with diverse individuals, and acquire transferable communication and professionalism skills.

Competency-based PYD programs promote skill development while optimizing self and social awareness for positive social change. Intentionally designed competency-based PYD opportunities provide a sense of freedom in shaping program goals, curriculum, and instructional innovation. Positive youth development programs are vital in helping young individuals thrive and achieve key developmental outcomes (Arnold, 2020). The availability of youth programs in

communities is instrumental in promoting healthy youth development (Konopka Institute, 2000, pp. 3-4). Using structured OST through PYD programs is a significant element for fostering positive youth development and ensuring a balanced approach that extends beyond the formal classroom setting.

Youth development programs strive to incorporate diverse learning experiences to nurture young individuals' character development, skill acquisition, and social awareness. Positive Youth Development (PYD), guided by the science of learning and development, catalyzes advancing equity among learners. Partnerships with families, schools, and communities play a role in providing these educational opportunities to young people. The consequences of the recent global pandemic have significantly widened inequalities, exposing many young individuals to poverty, insecurity, violence, and a lack of access to services in health, education, and employment. To address these challenges, young people require opportunities to build competencies and forge connections within their communities, contributing to their agency and identity (Forum for Youth Investment, 2021). Fostering Positive Youth Development through collaborative efforts and accessible educational opportunities emerges as an impressive strategy ensuring a more equitable and empowered future for all young learners.

In the modern workforce, two elements of employability—proficiency in social and emotional skills and digital literacy—have become focal points. According to the American Institutes for Research (2015), positive youth development programs are vital in fostering and enhancing these skills for all young individuals. These programs prove instrumental in equipping the youth with the necessary competencies for success in the workplace.

Youth development encompasses many policies, processes, programs, practices, and principles. Researchers acknowledge the challenge of precise measurement within this expansive scope. In this study, youth development specifically pertains to programs designed for assessing and evaluating their effectiveness, focusing on the evidence of knowledge transfer. Identifying the key components, elements, or characteristics necessary for a program to qualify as a youth development program is important. Without this knowledge, researchers cannot address questions about the effectiveness of this approach to programming for youth (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). An intentionally designed youth development program contributes to the increased knowledge and skills of parents whose children participate (Horillo et al., 2021).

Youth development programs have become more important in response to the repercussions of COVID-19 on the mental health, academic engagement, and career opportunities of young individuals. As a result, program designers have developed comprehensive initiatives that integrate social-emotional learning, employability skills, and digital literacy across various sectors. These programs are designed to foster competency and assist young people in healthily navigating adolescence (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). The research aims to leverage the competencies within these frameworks to propose concepts for future programming. Youth development programs actively address the evolving needs of young people through intentional design and comprehensive frameworks, fostering competencies, promoting prosocial behavior, and empowering young participants and their communities.

Social Emotional Learning

The definition provided by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) establishes Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) as a process that facilitates the

acquisition and practical application of knowledge, attitude, and skills for understanding and managing emotions, setting, and achieving positive goals, demonstrating empathy, establishing positive relationships, and making responsible decisions. Youth and adults engage in SEL practices to develop personal and social success competencies. Berg (2017) identified the alignment between social and emotional competency frameworks. They found over 136 frameworks of SEL from different perspectives, further emphasizing the diverse perspectives encapsulated within social and emotional competencies. The comprehensive definition of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) highlights the intricate process through which individuals acquire competencies, fostering personal and social success.

Social and emotional skills require significant support from psychological research, education studies, and real-world applications to provide skills for the ever-changing social landscape. These competencies create a positive and inclusive learning environment and equip students with tools to navigate challenges, forge meaningful relationships, and excel academically and personally. The instrumental role of these skills is in fostering resilience and nurturing relationships that contribute to overall personal and academic success.

There is a strong case for the positive impact of social-emotional interventions on students, emphasizing their academic success and the broader benefits they bring to professional settings. Students who participated in social-emotional interventions experienced significantly improved skills. A recent meta-analysis (Cipriano et al., 2023) found that students with strong social-emotional skills tend to perform better academically. These skills, focus, motivation, and positive relationships with teachers and peers enhance student academic success. Young individuals with well-developed social-emotional skills are likelier to exhibit engagement,

motivation, and productivity in professional settings (Chernyshenko et al., 2018; Martin, 2005; Alarcon & Lyons, 2011). A professional environment that prioritizes social-emotional well-being fosters creativity, innovation, and collaboration among young people. Building young people's social-emotional skills in the professional sphere and workplace environments can benefit from a positive and inclusive workplace culture that contributes to the overall success and productivity of the organization and workforce.

Young people, especially those preparing for the workplace, must actively develop social-emotional attitudes. According to The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report in 2023, social-emotional attitudes such as self-awareness, motivation, flexibility, and resilience are skills for the evolving workforce. The report emphasizes the increasing significance of emotional intelligence in the workplace, with employers valuing individuals capable of navigating social dynamics ethically, communicating effectively, and collaborating. Social and emotional skills not only empower individuals to respond to change but also make them resistant to automation, aligning with the shifting demands of the workforce shaped by emerging technologies. The evolving workforce places a growing emphasis on social skills, making it imperative to prioritize the promotion of social-emotional skills for young people. Prioritizing the development of social-emotional skills not only contributes to the overall well-being of young people but also empowers them with invaluable tools, enabling them to excel academically and personally.

Well-Being

Refining social-emotional skills is foundational for individual well-being, influencing behavior, shaping interpersonal relationships, fostering personal growth, and positively impacting the individual and their social environment. The Collaborative for Academic, Social,

and Emotional Learning (CASEL) recognizes the association between social-emotional learning (SEL) programs in schools and positive outcomes, including decreased emotional distress among students and improved prosocial behaviors (Cipriano et al., 2023). Developing and utilizing social-emotional skills in young individuals significantly contributes to their overall well-being.

In a learning environment, educators prioritize the well-being of young people as it directly influences their overall development, performance, and self-awareness. According to CASEL (2023), a supportive learning environment significantly contributes to students' mental health, creating a foundation for effective learning. Actively engaged in educational pursuits, young individuals are more likely to display enthusiasm for learning, cultivate resilience, and form positive relationships with peers and educators. Research by Jones et al. (2015), Coleman and DeLeirre (2003), and Heckman et al. (2006) indicates that young people with strong social-emotional skills are more prone to graduate high school, enroll in college, graduate from college, and secure stable employment. Social-emotional skills in a learning environment enrich a young person's academic experience and establish the groundwork for building interpersonal relationships. This, in turn, fosters empathy, communication skills, and a sense of community that extends beyond the classroom.

Developing social-emotional skills in young people equips them with the tools to navigate social dynamics, communicate effectively, and cultivate meaningful connections with their peers and the broader community. Steinfield, C., Ellison, N. B., & Lampe, C. (2008) demonstrate that social-emotional skills foster positive relationships. Better communication, conflict resolution, and empathy actively contribute to success in both personal and professional settings (DeVoogd et al., P., & Kralowec, C. A. 2016; Riggio et al., D. 1989). The studies

showed that viewing empathy and problem-solving as basic social skills is a productive approach to interpersonal relationships.

Pro-Social Behavior

In both educational and professional environments, promoting social-emotional skills fosters prosocial behavior, enhancing resilience in the face of challenges, and serves as a deterrent against aggressive behavior. Participation in social-emotional skill building promotes safe and healthy responses. Research from Portnow, S., Downer, J. T., & Brown, J. (2018) asserts that students who participate in SEL programs experience lower levels of conduct problems and aggression. Social-emotional skills contribute to better self-regulation and impulse control (McClelland et al., 2007). The researchers report that students without adequate social and self-regulation skills are at greater risk for social difficulties, emphasizing the vital role of social-emotional skills in fostering positive behaviors and mitigating aggressive tendencies.

Social-emotional skills build resilience in the face of challenges experienced by young people. Chadwick, S., & Chadwick, S. (2014) suggest that social-emotional skills, particularly resilience, help young people cope with stress and adversity. Strengthening social-emotional skills builds the resilience needed to cope, adapt, and deal with daily challenges while living with purpose and fulfillment. This resilience is beneficial for navigating life's challenges and setbacks. Research has found that young people with built resiliency strengthen their ability to cope with negative experiences (Cahill H. et al., 2014). Social-emotional skills build resilience, bolstering young people's ability to cope with the challenges of daily life and contributing to a purposeful life by providing tools for handling negative experiences.

Social-emotional skills are a proactive and influential strategy in preventing bullying and aggressive behavior, offering individuals the tools to nurture empathy, resolve conflicts, and

build positive relationships that contribute to a safer, healthier environment. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) emphasizes the role of social-emotional learning in preventing bullying and aggressive behavior. Smith and Low (2013) discuss the role of social-emotional skills in improving young people's competencies in preventing bullying and strengthening gains at the peer level. Empathy and conflict resolution skills can create a more positive and inclusive learning environment. Incorporating these skills at an individual level, supported by research and endorsed by authoritative sources, provides an integrated approach to mitigating bullying and fostering a conducive atmosphere for healthy social interactions.

Evidence supports the idea that social-emotional skills are fundamental for various aspects of a young person's life, including academic success, well-being, positive relationships, and prosocial behaviors. Integrating social-emotional learning into education and youth development programs is a valuable investment in the overall success of young individuals.

Digital Literacy

Adolescents must acquire digital literacy skills in today's rapidly evolving digital landscape. Evaluating and utilizing information effectively in an increasingly complex world is vital for informed decision-making and professional success. Young people need digital literacy skills due to the pervasive influence of technology in various aspects of life. Being digitally literate means understanding how to access, navigate, read, and create digital media (Baron, 2019). Therefore, prioritizing the teaching of digital literacy in youth development programs is imperative for future success. By equipping young people with these skills, we empower them to access and assess information accurately, communicate effectively, think critically, solve problems creatively, and prepare for future career opportunities. This project explores the significance of digital literacy for adolescents, outlining why it should be taught and how

integrating workforce training models in youth development programs benefits youth and employers through skills-based learning.

Future of Work

Young people need digital literacy skills due to the pervasiveness of technology in various aspects of life, most importantly, the workforce. The Pew Research Center (2019) acknowledges that digital skills are increasingly becoming a requirement in the workplace. As technology is ubiquitous in the workplace, many jobs now involve digital tools and technologies. Young people need to develop their digital skills in preparation for future careers. The World Economic Forum's Future Jobs Report (2023) emphasizes the importance of digital literacy for future employability. The report identifies trends and disruptions, such as generative AI and climate considerations, which create a more complex workforce environment. However, it also identifies these factors as drivers of future job creation (p61). The report predicts a growing demand for digital skills across industries. Young people use technology in multiple areas of their lives, especially the workforce, and will need digital literacy skills to keep up with the ever-changing workforce environment.

Access to Information and Learning

In today's rapidly evolving educational landscape, young people must acquire digital literacy skills to navigate and excel in the learning environment, as technological advancements play a pivotal role in shaping the present and future of education. Digital literacy skills enhance productivity and efficiency, according to research from the International Journal of Information and Communication Technology Education (Marsh, 2019). Individuals with solid digital skills can navigate and utilize digital tools more effectively. Young people need access to information and lifelong learning. Digital literacy allows young people to access and critically

evaluate information. A study measuring digital literacy and learning components found a difference between digital and information literacy (Green et al., 2014). As education continues to be influenced by rapid technological advancements, fostering digital literacy skills among young learners is a must, ensuring their adept navigation of the learning environment and equipping them for success in a digitalized educational landscape.

Global Citizens

In an era of unprecedented global connectivity, digital literacy is not just a skill but a necessity. It empowers individuals to become adept digital citizens capable of communicating with, contributing to, and thriving in the interconnected landscapes of the modern world. Digital literacy facilitates the ability to communicate and collaborate globally. Digital communication skills bring new opportunities in global business relationships, as shown during the rapid acceleration of digitization during the pandemic (Amankwah-Amoah, J. et al., 2021). Moreover, The European Commission's DigComp 2.2 framework underscores the importance of digital competence for communication and problem-solving (Vuorikari, Kluzer, & Punie, 2022) . Digital literacy enables individuals to adapt to technological and social changes and contribute to critical thinking. Digital literacy actively promotes responsible digital citizenship with the prevalence of online platforms. The role of digital literacy in fostering safe and ethical online behavior in the interconnected personal and professional landscapes is necessary to understand how technology is driven and how the digital world works (Martin, 2019). In conclusion, the evidence suggests that digital literacy skills are needed for navigating the modern world, from education to employment and beyond. Digitally literate young people are better positioned to thrive in a technology-driven society.

Employability Skills

Skills and competencies are highly desired in the contemporary workplace, making adolescence an ideal time for developing life skills. Therefore, PYD programs designed to develop skills are a growing area of practice in youth development (Redmond & Dolan, 2016). They noted a lack of evidence-based program models for conceptualizing youth program components. The lack of clarity of these components reveals the need for continued investigation into developing competencies and skills for the future through the enormous flexibility inherent in youth development programs.

The Employability Skills Framework of the US Department of Education's Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) details general competencies for workforce success. These competencies are organized into three broad categories: Applied Knowledge, Effective Relationships, and Workplace Skills (lincs.ed.gov). According to the US Department of Education, Applied Knowledge refers to applied academic, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. Effective Relationships describes interpersonal skills such as communication, teamwork, and leadership. Workplace Skills include professionalism, adaptability, and technology use (cte.ed.gov). These competencies can effectively be taught through community-based youth development programs, career technical education within schools and districts, and larger workforce systems. The framework provides a comprehensive list of skills necessary for success in the workforce. Intended for use by educators, employers, and policymakers, The Employability Skills Framework is to develop programs that help individuals acquire these competencies and succeed in the workforce (lincs.ed.gov). The framework guides instruction and curriculum development through national policies and standards for a more prepared workforce (worlded.org). Additionally, community-based youth development initiatives support

local educational organizations by integrating career and technical learning into their program designs through workforce training models.

Basic Needs

Participation in programs that provide work experience offers potential benefits for youth, including gaining soft skills, increasing knowledge of workplace settings, and establishing a work history and network of potential employers. According to Youth Employment Solutions, YES, engaging in the workforce allows individuals to explore their interests, express their identities, and shape their values, all of which contribute to their personal and professional goals. Employment is pivotal in meeting an individual's basic needs and maintaining mental and physical health. In comparison, unemployment is associated with adverse outcomes such as depression, anxiety, and increased rates of illness, death, and suicide (YES, 2020). Young people require marketable, transferable, and realistic employability skills to remain competitive in the job market. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019), 1.8 million young people aged 16-24 are available and actively searching for work. Participation in PYD may be associated with reduced poverty, aided by higher educational attainment and increased income (Sheehan et al., 2022). Facilitating youth participation in programs that offer work experience prepares youth for employability skills that enhance their overall well-being, academic engagement, and economic prospects.

Career Exploration

Employers seek and increasingly prioritize candidates with technical and strong interpersonal skills. According to a study by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) (2021), communication, collaboration, and problem-solving skills are among the top qualities sought by employers. The changing work landscape requires adaptability to

automation and technology, emphasizing the importance of developing an agile mindset and a willingness to learn new skills. Reskilling and upskilling are instrumental in facilitating career advancement, as highlighted by The Center for Creative Leadership (2025), which assures that effective communication and leadership abilities are key factors in career progression.

The Future of Jobs Report from the World Economic Forum (2023) indicates a burgeoning demand for cognitive abilities and interpersonal skills in the future job market. Employees with strong interpersonal skills are more likely to earn promotions, this highlights the importance of collaboration, particularly in international work environments where cross-cultural communication and teamwork drive success (Yan, Zhu, & Hall, 2019; Wang, Fertel, Clark, & Kaplan, 2019). Furthermore, employability skills enhance one's ability to launch and sustain a business. The Global Entrepreneur Monitor highlights the importance of creativity and resilience for entrepreneurial success (gemconsortium.org, 2023). Employability skills are integral for navigating the complexities of the modern workforce, securing employment, and advancing one's career. Therefore, fostering the employability development of young people entering the workforce is valuable for communities and schools to support student self-sufficiency and success in their professional lives.

This study aims to provide a conceptual design model of learning outcomes using three salient frameworks: Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), Digital Literacy (DL), and Employability Skills (ES). The insights garnered from this study will assist PYD program designers in crafting instructional and learning activities that effectively target overarching concepts and build participants' competencies in these critical areas. By bridging schools and communities, this study intends to prepare students entering the workforce for the first time, ensuring they are equipped with the necessary skills to thrive in today's competitive job market.

Community Engagement

A PYD program designed to enhance participants' employability skills replicates real-world environments through instruction and practices. Community-based professional learning experiences enable student growth while building relationships with community stakeholders. Community stakeholders engaged with PYD programs focused on building young people's employability skills to gain a deeper understanding of workforce factors for entry-level workers. Additionally, they can support future employment opportunities for participating youth.

Workforce readiness refers to the skills, knowledge, and awareness necessary for students to succeed in their professional careers. Preparing students before they enter the workforce helps them develop the self-awareness of dispositions needed to succeed as employees. Research indicates that students exhibit positive academic outcomes after participating in experiential opportunities such as internships, community service, and service-learning (Kuh, 2008). These programs offer a variety of professional experiences in an informal, low-risk environment. Investing in workforce readiness programs as a partnership with and supporting school-based programs prepares students professionally.

Given the emphasis on academics in schools, the need for workforce readiness opportunities during Out-of-School Time (OST) holds valid. Tinto (1975) highlighted the importance of connecting students with the community, academically and socially, to increase student retention. Schools' focus on academic preparation requires developing non-technical soft skills. These skills, essential for the 21st Century, include innovation, collaboration, tech literacy, communication, and integrity (NAP Education for Life and Work, 2012). By acquiring employability skills through community-based youth development programs designed using a

workforce training model, students bridge the gap between the classroom, real-world educational experiences, and real-world transferable skills.

Summary

Youth development programs that adopt an instructional systems design approach to their curriculum demonstrate their dedication to valid measurement and reliable evaluation of their program's impact on participants' positive outcomes. ISD, a goal-focused design approach utilized in workforce training for decades, is an effective program design model that yields positive results. By utilizing competency frameworks such as Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), Digital Literacy (DL), and Employability Skills (ES), youth development programs can analyze goals and design effective training programs. This approach ensures that youth possess the necessary skills for success in social interaction, the digital environment, and the contemporary workforce, addressing their social, academic, and professional development needs.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

Chapter Overview

The qualitative conceptual content analysis method is selected for this study, with this section detailing its suitability, definition, data collection steps, and analysis process. This section identifies the appropriateness of this method for answering the study's research questions, provides a clear definition of conceptual content analysis, outlines the steps involved in data collection, and explains the process of analyzing the collected data. Using the qualitative methods described in this section, this study ensures a comprehensive examination of its research questions.

Research Design

Merriam (2009) describes qualitative research as an applied research technique used to improve the quality of practice in a particular discipline. Conceptual content analysis is an exploratory methodological approach used to analyze data by organizing key concepts or themes and examining textual content to uncover underlying meaning, patterns, and relationships (Elo & Kyngas, 2008).

Unlike quantitative research results, qualitative research is a different type of knowledge. Quantitative research maintains a positivist-objective orientation, assuming reality is observable, stable, and measurable (Merriam, 2009). However, when data are quantified, the opportunity to understand the perspectives of participants or social institutions is often lost (Kaplan & Maxwell, 1994). In contrast, qualitative research infers meaning from the data, embracing an interpretive-subjective approach that acknowledges reality as socially constructed with multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single event (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative researchers construct knowledge by developing the meaning of experiences with attributes of qualitative research as being

emergent rather than predetermined (Creswell, 2007) and furthering this research as constructivist, which examines objects from an individual perspective to construct a reality. The current study employs a constructivist approach to three competency frameworks. It identifies overarching concepts within the context of youth development principles, interpreting the data for common themes and the emergence of similarities and differences. Through interaction, meanings are socially constructed based on cultural and historical norms of people's daily lives. This study analyzes three competency frameworks to understand the overarching concepts in digital literacy, social-emotional learning, and employability skills as interpreted through instructional systems design and competency-based education.

Content Analysis

Conceptual content analysis is a qualitative research method used to identify, analyze, and interpret recurring themes or patterns within textual data by systematically coding and categorizing to uncover underlying concepts and relationships (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The research aims to address practical problems and promote social change, focusing on Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), Digital Literacy (DL), and Employability Skills (ES) by conducting conceptual content analysis on the competency frameworks of these three development areas. These areas become an ongoing need as digital devices are widely used, anxiety and stress affect many young people, and the need for economic independence grows as they transition into adulthood. However, the lack of youth development programs that build skills and resilience exacerbates these issues. To support adolescents effectively and prepare them for their future, it is important to understand the role of structured out-of-school-time (OST) and youth development programs (YDP) in communities. These programs, facilitated by government and non-government, not-for-profit, and local organizations, provide a platform for developing,

implementing, and evaluating positive youth development initiatives. They offer supportive environments and learning experiences where young people can enhance their skills and personal growth.

Content analysis is a research technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying unique characteristics of messages (Holsti, 1968). Lerner et al. (2006) state**,** "youth as resources to be developed" (p. 19), highlighting the shift in program design to actively nurture young people's potential through intentional community-based approaches. Though little is known about the learning objectives used to achieve positive program outcomes or the instructional elements that shape long-lasting social change in young people. Content analysis offers a systematic research method for identifying the actions and goals necessary in a Youth Development Program (YDP) designed to equip youth with the skills vital for overall well-being. Krippendorf (1980) authored a book detailing the content analysis method used for over 50 years. Its efforts are to improve political and social conditions using symbols, meaning, messages, and their functions and effects (Krippendorf, 1980, p. 9). Utilizing content analysis as a systematic research method holds promise for informing the design of Positive Youth Development (PYD) programs, facilitating the cultivation of skills, and promoting lasting social change in young people.

Qualitative content analysis serves as a valuable research method for examining phenomena within the context of youth development, offering insights into complex data through systematic analysis. Content analysis, a well-established approach in social sciences, has been utilized across various disciplines for analyzing diverse forms of communication, including verbal, written, and visual data. With its extensive history in social sciences, content analysis is a primary research method across various disciplines (Neuendorf, 2002). Used as a method to

analyze radio broadcasts during the war, content analysis has extended to public administration and policy change, media studies and websites, and sociology and mental health (Barcelona et al., 2011; Forrest-Bank et al., 2015; Gerodimos, 2008; Yeo & Chu, 2017). Content analysis analyzes the actual words with the frameworks (Parsons, 1995). Content analysis involves gathering communication data from a medium, identifying and extracting individual concepts, and determining their frequency of occurrence, with each word or phrase representing a distinct idea (Carley, 1993). Content analysis identifies the intentions and trends in communication. Qualitative content analysis is a versatile research method that provides valuable insights by analyzing diverse forms of communication across various disciplines.

Qualitative research includes many design approaches, including conceptual content analysis. A concept is examined, analyzed, and quantified in conceptual content analysis. The main goal is to examine the occurrence of selected terms, explicit or implicit. Explicit terms are identified, whereas implicit term coding involves contextual translation (Columbia Public Health, 2022). This study selected a conceptual content analysis research design as the appropriate methodology to address the research questions.

Content analysis has a well-established history in the context of youth development outcomes (Balsano, 2009; Evans, 1991; Henderson, 2005; Toomey et al., 2017). Content Analysis uses various data types to systematically infer and describe specific phenomena (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992). The data used includes verbal, written, and visual qualitative content analysis based on the understanding that knowledge is contained in the text (Gall et al., 1996). Content analysis provides knowledge and insights through specialized procedures for processing scientific data. Content analysis is a research technique for inferences from data to

their context (Krippendorff, 1980, p. 21). Specifically, content analysis will be conducted on three significant competency frameworks that identify skills necessary for proficiency.

Krippendorff (1980) asserts that the logic of content analysis is 'data making, data reduction, inference, and analysis'; these actions lead to the process of direct validation and testing of the hypothesis. Content analysis must be reliable and, therefore, replicable as an instrument of science. The steps for conducting a conceptual content analysis include deciding the unit of analysis, such as a word, phrase, sentence, or theme. From there, the researcher decides how many concepts to code for by developing a pre-defined category and adding flexibility or confining to the pre-defined categories. This study has two phases of content analysis encompassing pre-defined and emergent categories. The first phase is to code for the existence of predetermined concepts, and then emergent concepts will be coded for themes as they relate to a youth development framework and outcomes.

Data-making involves acquiring the frameworks of organizations associated with comprehensive youth development. Text is coded into manageable content categories in a process of selective reduction. This reduction focuses on specific words or patterns that inform the research question (Weber, 1990, p.41). The three organizations are selected based on the detail and quantity of competencies identified in their frameworks, aimed at refining skills through youth development programs. Each organization's framework contains overarching concepts with specific skills categorized below. Among the sampled frameworks, two key differences emerge. The social-emotional framework provides summarized concept topics, while the digital literacy and employability skills framework features concise headings. Secondly, variations exist in the number of skills listed under each concept topic, with the employability skills framework listing the fewest skills, particularly under the topic of

Technology Use. Similarly, the digital literacy framework lists the lowest number of skills under Information and Digital Literacy, while the social-emotional framework has the fewest skills listed under responsible decision-making.

Data reduction is omitting data that does not show relevance to the study. At the same time, the rubric was developed from Gagne's domains of learning and curriculum design approach. Conjunction words (and, in, or, and are) are omitted in a priori coding. Data is omitted because the action verb and the unit of measure are repeated for the same concept topic. For example, in the employability skills framework document, the word 'manage' is repeated four times under the concept topic of Resource Management. This action verb will be counted as one action verb with four object items: time, money, materials, and personnel. Data containing only an object item, not containing an action verb, will not be given an assumed action. For example, in the digital literacy framework document, under the concept topic of Communication and Collaboration is the skill "Netiquette." Netiquette refers to the ability to maintain cordial interactions while online. Netiquette contains no action verb in the document, and a hypothetical action verb will not be assigned.

Inference-making involves concluding reasoning with words, phrases, or textual units classified to represent their meaning (Weber, 1990). The text content is compared to the PYD framework, and the researcher determines which categories within youth development principles it belongs to. Weber (1990) discusses defining categories within the data, emphasizing the importance of carefully defining and coding categories. Some categories may be limited due to specific words, while others may be less limited due to vague language. Keywords are assigned to specific areas identified as aligning or not aligning with the PYD framework to facilitate their identification within each framework.

For this study, the Positive Youth Development program framework from the US Agency for International Development (USAID) was compared against the three salient frameworks of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), USAID's Digital Literacy, and the Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education (OCTAE) Employability Skills. These frameworks were selected for their overall positive benefits to people and communities when people possess these skills. The rubric created indicated the overarching competencies alignment to the content areas of USAID's Positive Youth Development Measurement Framework: Assets, Agency, Enabling Environment, and Contribution. The overarching competencies were analyzed and categorized into the USAID PYD framework to identify key concept communities.

The rubric comprised the specific topic areas described by the USAID program youth development framework. The topic areas included (1) Assets, (2) Agency, (3) Contribution, and (4) Enabling Environment (US Agency for International Development, 2016). According to USAID.gov, Positive Youth Development Measurement Toolkit, the definitions are as follows:

Assets: Youth have the necessary resources, skills, and competencies to achieve desired outcomes.

Agency: Youth perceive and can employ their assets and aspirations to make or influence their own decisions about their lives, set goals, and act upon those decisions to achieve desired outcomes.

Contribution: Youth are engaged as a source of change for their and their communities' positive development.

Enabling Environment: Youth are surrounded by an environment that develops and supports their assets, agency, access to services, and opportunities and strengthens

> their ability to avoid risks, be safe, secure, and protected, and live without the fear of violence or retribution. An enabling environment encourages and recognizes youth while promoting their social and emotional competence to thrive. The term "environment " should be interpreted broadly, including social, normative, structural, and physical.

The USAID (2022) youth development program measurement framework was chosen as a comprehensive and global approach to the activities involved in effective youth development program design. The topic Assets views young people as resources, not problems. Assets of healthy, productive, and engaged youth often incorporate training, formal education, interpersonal skills (social and communication), higher-order thinking skills, recognition of emotions, self-control, and academic achievement. Agency describes a sense of self-efficacy in the youth. The Agency category of healthy, productive, and engaged youth competencies framework encompasses positive identity, ability to plan (goal setting), perseverance (diligence), and positive beliefs about the future. The Contribution category states youth engagement. When youth are engaged in their community, they contribute. The Enabling Environment topic lists bonding, opportunities for pro-social involvement, support, pro-social norms, value and recognition, youth-responsive services, gender-responsive services, youth-friendly laws and policies, gender-responsive policies, physical safety, and psychological safety. Utilizing a rubric grounded in USAID's positive youth development measurements framework to assess the overarching competencies of the three salient frameworks will aid in evaluating their alignment with the youth development program principles.

Research Questions

Question 1: What are the overarching concepts of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), Digital Literacy (DL), and Employability Skills (ES) competency frameworks of CASEL, USAID Digital Literacy, and the Department of Education's Employability Skills and Competencies Framework?

Question 2: How do the overarching concepts align with youth development program design principles?

Question 3: How can these overarching concepts integrate into an intentionally designed youth development program?

Data Collection

This study utilizes a conceptual content analysis approach to investigate the overarching concepts of three competency frameworks and their alignment with the Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework. Conceptual content analysis is a research design method used to systematically analyze and interpret textual data by identifying and categorizing key concepts or themes. Braun and Clark (2006) state that conceptual content analysis focuses on understanding the underlying meaning and relationships within the text rather than simply counting occurrences of words or phrases. This technique allows the researcher to study data to obtain descriptive information, formulate themes, and infer meaning (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Krippendorf (1980) asks six questions about comprehensive content analysis.

1. What data are analyzed?
2. How is data defined?
3. What is the population from which data is drawn?
4. What is the content relative to which data is analyzed?

5. What are the boundaries of analysis?

6. What is the target of the inferences?

In this study, I examine three competency frameworks and their alignment with USAID's PYD framework and integrate the competencies into learning outcomes focusing on understanding underlying meanings and relationships within the text to formulate themes and infer meaning, as outlined by Braun & Clark (2006) and Krippendorf (1980). The examination occurs in two phases. The first analysis phase involves coding for pre-determined criteria in the three frameworks. The second phase of analysis utilizes a rubric to compare how each framework aligns with the principles of youth development.

Coding is grouping evidence and labeling ideas to reflect a broader perspective (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). The initial phase for data collection is in vivo coding. In vivo coding using the exact words of the frameworks. Then, the next coding cycle begins with a priori coding. A priori coding in qualitative research involves predefining categories or themes before analyzing the data (Creswell, 2018). This approach provides a structure for analyzing data and allows systematic categorization of information according to predetermined criteria. A priori coding ensures consistency and reliability in data analysis while allowing researchers to focus on specific aspects of the data that are relevant to the research issues.

According to Krippendorf, the data collection procedure uses pre-determined codes as the unit of analysis. The predetermined codes for this round are verbs, direct objects, or actions, and by Gagne's learning domains as described in Zemke (1999). The learning domains are motor skills, verbal information, intellectual skills, attitudes, and cognitive strategies. The following coding cycle compares the learning outcomes of the frameworks against the PYD framework mentioned above to identify overarching concepts and align them with the principles

of youth development. Conducting multiple coding cycles and the rubric groups learning outcomes into categories of competencies and skills intended for use by youth development program designers.

Sample Population

The internet is a rich data source with websites of renowned organizations offering a significant amount of information. This study employed a qualitative content analysis approach to examine three widely recognized competency frameworks: the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) Social Emotional Learning (SEL) framework, the U.S. Department of Education Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) Employability Skills framework, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Digital Literacy framework. The organizations in this study were selected for their social missions and global reach, as well as their alignment with foundational skills necessary for positive youth development and workforce readiness. As of 2025, the specific USAID Youth in Development program has been dismantled. This study references the last available version of the framework/toolkit used during the organization's active period.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is a leading organization that promotes integrating social and emotional learning (SEL) into education systems nationwide. According to CASEL's website (CASEL.org, 2023), their mission is to help make evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) a part of holistic development and create supportive learning environments. They envision people as self-aware, caring, responsible, engaged lifelong learners who work to achieve common goals and to create an inclusive, just, and equitable world. CASEL is grounded in the belief that social-emotional skills are essential for academic success, personal well-being, and positive social outcomes.

CASEL advocates for including SEL in school. CASEL's framework identifies five core competencies for social emotional learning: Self-awareness, Self-management, Social awareness, Relationship skills, and Responsible decision-making. Within these competencies, CASEL address interrelated areas of competencies that can be taught and applied at various developmental stages from childhood to adulthood and across diverse cultural to articulate what learners should know for academic success, school and civic engagement, health and wellness, and fulfilling careers. These competencies help learners develop essential intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. This framework served as the foundation for identifying emotional intelligence, empathy, goal-setting relationships, and decision-making competencies within the broader analysis. By promoting these competencies, CASEL aims to equip young people with the skills they need to thrive in school, work, and life (CASEL.org, 2023).

Table 3.1 CASEL Framework

CORE COMPENTENCY AREA	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE COMPETENCIES
Self-awareness	The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts. This includes capacities to recognize one's strengths and limitations with a well-grounded sense of confidence and purpose.	• Integrating personal and social identities • Identifying personal, cultural, and linguistic assets • Identifying one's emotions • Demonstrating honesty and integrity • Linking feelings, values, and thoughts • Examining prejudices and biases • Experiencing self-efficacy • Having a growth mindset • Developing interests and a sense of purpose
Self-managment	The abilities to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations. This includes the capacities to delay	• Managing one's emotions • Identifying and using stress-management strategies • Exhibiting self-discipline and self-motivation • Setting personal and collective goals • Using planning and organizational skills

CORE COMPENTENCY AREA	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE COMPETENCIES
	gratification, manage stress, and feel motivation & agency to accomplish personal/collective goals.	• Showing the courage to take initiative • Demonstrating personal and collective agency
Social awareness	The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, & contexts. This includes the capacities to feel compassion for others, understand broader historical and social norms for behavior in different settings, and recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.	• Taking others' perspectives • Recognizing strengths in others • Demonstrating empathy and compassion • Showing concern for the feelings of others • Understanding and expressing gratitude • Identifying diverse social norms, including unjust ones • Recognizing situational demands and opportunities • Understanding the influences of organizations/systems on behavior
Relationship skills	The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups. This includes the capacities to communicate clearly, listen actively, cooperate, work collaboratively to problem solve and negotiate conflict constructively, navigate settings with differing social and cultural demands and opportunities, provide leadership, and seek or offer help when needed.	• Communicating effectively • Developing positive relationships • Demonstrating cultural competency • Practicing teamwork and collaborative problem-solving • Resolving conflicts constructively • Resisting negative social pressure • Showing leadership in groups • Seeking or offering support and help when needed • Standing up for the rights of others
Responsible decision-making	The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social	• Demonstrating curiosity and open-mindedness • Identifying solutions for personal and social problems

CORE COMPENTENCY AREA	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE COMPETENCIES
	interactions across diverse situations. This includes the capacities to consider ethical standards and safety concerns, and to evaluate the benefits and consequences of various actions for personal, social, and collective well-being.	• Learning to make a reasoned judgment after analyzing information, data, facts • Anticipating and evaluating the consequences of one's actions • Recognizing how critical thinking skills are useful both inside & outside of school • Reflecting on one's role to promote personal, family, and community well-being • Evaluating personal, interpersonal, community, and institutional impacts

The Department of Education's Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) focuses on providing the resources necessary for individuals to succeed in their careers and adult lives. The OCTAE Employability Skills framework (U.S. Department of Education, 2015) categorizes essential workplace competencies into three overarching domains: applied knowledge, effective relationships, and workplace skills. Within these domains there are more specific competencies, including communication, problem-solving, teamwork, resource management, systems thinking, and adaptability—skills widely recognized as critical for entry-level and advanced professional success. OCTAE aims to promote lifelong learning and workforce development through educational programs and initiatives to equip learners with practical skills. OCTAE emphasizes the importance of hands-on learning experiences, industry-aligned curriculum, and community partnerships with employers to support students in the skills demanded by today's job market. OCTAE is critical in paving the way for young people to have meaningful careers and economic independence. OCTAE helps learners explore various career options contributing to community prosperity and social mobility (ed.gov, 2023).

Table 3.2 OCTAE Employability Skills Framework

CORE COMPENTENCY AREA	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE COMPETENCIES
Applied Knowledge	Applied Academic Skills	Uses reading skills Exercises leadership Uses writing skills Uses mathematical strategies and procedures Uses scientific principles and procedures
Applied Knowledge	Critical Thinking Skills	Thinks critically Thinks creatively Makes sound decisions Solves problems Reasons Plans and organizes
Effective Relationships	Interpersonal Skills	Understands teamwork and works with others Responds to customer needs Exercises leadership Negotiates to resolve conflicts Respects individual differences
Effective Relationships	Personal Qualities	Demonstrates responsibility and self-discipline Adapts and shows flexibility Works independently Demonstrates a willingness to learn Demonstrates integrity Demonstrates professionalism Takes initiative Displays positive attitude and sense of self-worth Takes responsibility for professional growth
Workplace Skills	Technology Use	Understands and uses technology
Workplace Skills	Systems Thinking	Understands and uses systems Monitors systems Improves systems
Workplace Skills	Communication Skills	Communicates verbally Listens actively

CORE COMPENTENCY AREA	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE COMPETENCIES
		Comprehends written material Conveys information in writing Observes carefully
Workplace Skills	Information Use	Locates information Organizes information Uses information Analyzes information Communicates Information
Workplace Skills	Resource Management	Manages time Manages money Manages materials Manages personnel

Digital literacy competencies help learners use technology safely and effectively. The USAID Digital Literacy Framework provides a structure and shared language for measuring impact and capacity building. The USAID Digital Literacy framework (USAID, 2017) presents a globally informed structure for digital skill acquisition using the European Digital Competence Framework for Citizens as a foundation for digital literacy and competencies. Organized into five key areas—information and data literacy, communication and collaboration, digital content creation, safety, and problem-solving—the framework addresses the need for inclusive and adaptable digital education in various cultural and economic contexts. This framework was particularly relevant in shaping this study's approach to equity, access, and the development of future-ready digital competencies. Digital Literacy framework promotes sustainable development and address global challenges through innovative solutions and partnerships while emphasizing the importance of education as a fundamental human right and a key driver of social and economic change. This study supports the notion that education empowers

individuals, builds resilient communities, and promotes economic growth by following the USAID mission to strengthen education systems, expand access to quality education, and improve learning outcomes for all and focusing on marginalized and vulnerable populations (usaid.gov, 2023). Note: As of 2025, the specific USAID program has been dismantled. This study references the last available version of the framework/toolkit used during the organization's active period.

Table 3.3 Digital Literacy Framework

CORE COMPENTENCY AREA	EXAMPLE COMPETENCIES
Information and Data Literacy	Browsing, searching and filtering data, information and digital content Evaluating data, information and digital content Managing data, information and digital content
Communication and Collaboration	Interacting through digital technologies Sharing through digital technologies Engaging in citizenship through digital technologies Collaborating through digital technologies Netiquette Managing digital identity
Digital Content Creation	Developing digital content Integrating and re-elaborating digital content Copyright and licenses Programming
Safety	Protecting devices Protecting personal data and privacy Protecting health and well-being Protecting the environment
Problem Solving Skills	Solving technical problems Identifying needs and technological responses Creatively using digital technologies Identifying digital competence gaps

This type of sampling is purposeful sampling. Creswell (2007) describes the ideas behind qualitative research to purposefully select participants, sites, documents, or visual material that will best help the researcher understand the problem and research questions (p 183). This research required purposeful sampling for sufficient analysis. Each framework was sourced from publicly available documents published by their respective organizations. The documents were downloaded and stored in their original form to ensure accurate analysis. These documents included detailed competency descriptions, organized by domain or topical heading, allowing for direct extraction and coding of the relevant content. To maintain methodological consistency, all three documents were reviewed using the same process of coding, followed by a thematic grouping of competencies based on shared attributes.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this content analysis was to identify and synthesize overarching competencies across three influential educational frameworks to inform the design of a competency-based, Positive Youth Development (PYD) program. The selected frameworks include Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Framework; U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) Employability Skills Framework; U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Digital Literacy Framework (archived). These frameworks were selected based on their credibility, practical applicability, and alignment with workforce readiness, social development, and digital literacy; competencies deemed essential for adolescent development. This study used a conceptual content analysis methodology incorporating both a priori and in vivo coding techniques. This dual approach ensured both theoretical structure and authenticity to the frameworks' original language.

In the first phase, top-level competency headings from each framework were reviewed and categorized into broad thematic topics. These topics emerged through an inductive reasoning drawn from framework language.

The content from each framework was analyzed using an in vivo approach, where headings terms and phrases used within the frameworks were retained to preserve the authenticity of the language. For example, heading terms such as "self-awareness" from CASEL, "resource management" from OCTAE, and "digital content creation" from USAID were coded using verbatim language present in the original framework documentation. The accompanying competencies under these topics were combined for further data reduction and to answer research question one. The first coding cycle is a process for the beginning stages of data analysis, where data is individually segmented (Saldana, 2013). The data is separated into discrete parts in this phase and compared for similarities and differences. This coding stage aims to remain open to all theoretical directions of the data. The first cycle is an open-ended approach intended as a starting point. The resulting codes offer analytical leads that may direct the researcher to the need for more data to support their hypothesis. In this study, line-by-line coding, as advised by Charmaz (2006), is conducted and may be used in phase two for interpreting and further analyzing the data. Next, these terms were grouped by overarching topical categories—Self, Society and Others; Information and Technology; Decision-Making; and Communication. For example, topics associated with 'Self (SEL)' and 'Personal Qualities (ES)' were grouped together as were the associated competencies, such as 'Integrating personal and social identities (SEL)' and 'Demonstrates responsibility and self-discipline (ES).' In vivo coding is called literal, verbatim, and inductive coding. The root meaning of in vivo is "in that which is alive," referring to a word or phrase found in the qualitative data (Strauss, 1987; as read

in Saldana, 2013). The heading topics of each the frameworks were grouped together based on their commonalities and their associated competencies analyzed.

Table 3.4 Identification of Competency

Framework Heading	Topic
Self-Awareness, Self-Management (CASEL)	Self
Social Awareness, Relationship Skills (CASEL)	Society & Others
Communication (OCTAE); Communication & Collaboration (DL)	Communication
Digital Safety, Information Use (USAID DL); Technology Use (OCTAE)	Information & Technology
Responsible Decision-Making (CASEL); Critical Thinking (OCTAE); Problem Solving (DL)	Decision-Making

Following initial coding, a second-cycle coding process grouped competencies into overarching concepts that span across all three frameworks. For instance, the competency of "conveys information in writing" listed under OCTAE's communication domain, was grouped with CASEL's "communicating effectively" and USAID's "interacting through digital technologies" under a shared umbrella of communication. Similarly, competencies related to goal setting, initiative, and time management were organized under self. A priori coding occurs using the resulting overarching concepts. A priori codes for predefined themes or codes the researcher determines before analyzing the data. Through this coding process, six overarching competency areas emerged: Self-Management and Adaptability, Communication and Collaboration, Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, Technical and Digital Literacy, Ethical and Cultural Awareness, and Lifelong Learning and Professional Development.

Table 3.5 Grouping Competencies by Topics

Topic	Competency	Source Framework
Communication	Communicates verbally, listens actively	OCTAE
Communication	Digital collaboration, netiquette	USAID DL
Communication	Communicate effectively, resolve conflicts	CASEL
Self	Managing emotions, growth mindset	CASEL
Self	Self-discipline, adapts and shows flexibility	OCTAE
Decision-Making	Reasoning, solving problems	CASEL, OCTAE, USAID DL
Information & Technology	Browsing, search, filter, evaluating data, protecting personal data	USAID DL
Information & Technology	Locates, organizes, uses, and analyzes information	OCTAE

This study aims to identify overarching competencies of social-emotional learning, digital literacy, and employability frameworks. The results are statements created for instructional activities that are shown to be successful by their resulting learning outcomes (Gagne, 1977). Using an instructional systems design approach, the learning outcomes that emerge from this research will lead to the decision-making of practical learning activities to measure and evaluate conceptual outcomes of the frameworks mentioned above as they are intentionally designed in youth development programs.

Additionally, domain and taxonomical coding was conducted (Saldana, 2013). Domains and taxonomic coding are methods for discovering knowledge to organize behavior and interpret experiences (Spradley, 1980, pp. 30-31). The domains used in Gagne's learning domain are motor skills, verbal information, intellectual skills, attitudes, and cognitive strategies (Gagne, 1977). Zemke (1999) defines each domain of learning as follows: motor skills involve the use of muscles to perform precise, smooth, and accurate actions; verbal information is declarative knowledge, stating facts, concepts, or principles through writing, telling, or drawing; intellectual

skills are discriminations and rules demonstrated by the ability to convert measurements or associate a name with a concept and to distinguish characteristics; attitudes are internal states that influence choice, this is determined to be the most challenging domain to train, and cognitive strategies are applied techniques for recalling information or capturing details.

Table 3.6 Gagne's Learning Domains

Learning Domain	Description
Intellectual	Understand and apply concepts, rules, and procedures to solve problems
Cognitive	Internal processes that guide learning, thinking, and problem-solving
Attitudes	Affective components that influence behavior, including feelings, values, and preferences
Verbal	Ability to recall and use knowledge that has been explicitly stated or described
Motor	Physical actions or movements that require precision and coordination, and repetition and practice are necessary for mastery

Taxonomic coding is analyzing verbatim data to extract terms generated for use by the researcher to develop relationships between extracted terms, and the researchers determined analytic terms (Saldana, 2013). Axial or analytical coding is grouping open codes (Merriam, 2009). Beyond descriptive coding, analytical terms come from interpretation and reflection on meaning. Constructing these categories or themes develops from patterns, regularities, and conceptual elements spanning previously identified units of analysis. This data reduction step will help narrow the three frameworks into overarching conceptual competencies.

In Phase Two, the individual competencies and the resulting themes from the previous coding cycles are examined for their alignment with the Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework to answer research question two. During this phase, the boundaries of analysis are established against a PYD framework. Weber (1990, p.9) defines content analysis as a method that employs a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text, and the meaning of words, phrases, or text is represented one-way through classification into categories. Krippendorff

(1980) describes inference as the logical mechanisms that connect data to the context under examination, considering systems, standards, communications, and processes. The rubric compares the three frameworks to the established measurable youth development competencies through youth development program design systems. Note: As of 2025, the specific USAID Youth in Development program has been dismantled. This study references the last available version of the framework/toolkit used during the organization's active period.

Table 3.7 Aligning competencies to PYD Framework

PYD Principle	Description
Assets	Youth have the necessary resources, skills and competencies to achieve desired outcomes.
Contributors	Youth are engaged as a source of change for their own and for their communities' positive development.
Agency	Youth perceive and have the ability to employ their assets and aspirations to make or influence their own decisions about their lives and set their own goals, as well as to act upon those decisions in order to achieve desired outcomes.
Enabling Environment	Youth are surrounded by an environment that develops and supports their assets, agency, access to services, and opportunities, and strengthens their ability to avoid risks and to stay safe, secure, and be protected and live without fear of violence or retribution. An enabling environment encourages and recognizes youth, while promoting their social and emotional competence to thrive.

As defined by Krippendorff (1980, p.35), a system is a conceptual tool to describe a portion of reality with variable components, relations across the components, and transformations implying other relations across time and space. This study sets the rubric within a youth development framework within the ecological system. Notions of system inferences depict trends, patterns, and differences within the system. Through content analysis of the skills and competencies, the study attempts to identify trends in each framework and their alignment with the youth development framework. Content analysis reveals communication patterns, perceptions, and expressions interdependent on the competencies and skills and their alignment to the youth development framework. Differences within the framework will be examined and

integrated with other systems inferences in this study to identify key symbols, traditions, and frequencies of overarching concepts in the frameworks. Krippendorff (1980) points out challenges in making systems inferences: many studies only analyze a single variable, such as frequency, definition, or value. Patterns are often conceptualized in binary terms, such as contrast, proximity, or cause. Additionally, differences regarding interactions that may diminish over time are seldom explained.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative design's inherent subjectivity introduces the potential for bias, as different analysts may interpret data differently. As qualitative research seeks to explore human experience, trustworthiness establishes the researcher's ability to collect and analyze enough data to warrant conclusions (Kleinheksel et al., 2020). Trustworthiness is achieved using a consistent process, openly available data sources, systematic collection methods, clear definitions of units of analysis, and predetermined categories. In qualitative research, trustworthiness involves the concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These terms, as compared to the quantitative research terms, are substituted for internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity (Merriam, 2009). An assumption underlying qualitative research is that reality is holistic and ever-changing, not a fixed objective phenomenon waiting to be observed and measured as in quantitative (Merriam, 2009). The researcher's data sources, biases, and perspectives are qualitative and subject to change if this research is to be conducted again.

Validity-Credibility

Validity refers to the extent to which the findings are congruent with reality and how adequately they reflect what is agreed as the meaning of a concept (Neuendorf, 2002; Merriam,

2009). Validity is improved when the researcher identifies precise units of analysis and how to measure them (Neuendorf, 2002). A small sample size and analyzing subject-specific competency frameworks could limit the study's external validity. This study strengthens validity by coding themes such as skills and competencies categorized by Gagne's learning domains.

Generalizability-Transferability

Research aims to transfer knowledge to others. The generalizability of findings refers to the extent to which they may be applied to several cases (Neuendorf, 2002). The generalizability limitation of this study reflects one perspective of the competency frameworks in learning domains. The application of these findings may transfer to similar educational settings but is limited in a broader context. This study aims to investigate skills and competencies relevant to young people. The goal is to provide program designers with actionable findings to inform their use of skills-based learning through backward design.

Reliability-Dependability

Reliability is the extent to which a measuring procedure yields the same results on repeated trials (Neuendorf, 2002). The researcher codes the data to intercoder reliability, the level of agreement among coders. Rigor was enhanced by pre-determined codes constructed from a standard framework of youth development competencies defined by motor skills, verbal information, intellectual skills, attitudes, and cognitive strategies. The rubric shows the content areas used from the global framework: Assets, Agency, Contribution, and Enabling Environment.

Objectivity-Confirmability

The researcher analyzed the data with an effort to be objective and rational. Confirmability in the study involved the researcher developing a rubric and pre-determined codes with clear definitions and steps taken to identify bias.

Summary

The conceptual content analysis seeks to understand the overarching skills and competencies of three salient frameworks: CASEL's social and emotional learning, USAID's digital literacy, and OCTAE's employability skills. Research studies challenge the concept of innovation in an ever-changing world. These skills may not make an entirely qualified young person or a comprehensive program designer; these skills will require more young people and program designers as modern technology and innovations occur daily. The findings will point toward a new approach to holistic and intentionally designed youth program learning outcomes. This study aims to narrow down the skills and competencies valuable for the next generation of youth and those who serve them.

Chapter 4 - Results

This chapter presents the findings from the qualitative content analysis and outlines the key competencies incorporated into a comprehensive and intentional youth development program design. The results inform the design of a conceptual youth development program that addresses three competencies: Social Emotional Learning (SEL), Digital Literacy (DL), and Employability Skills (ES). The program, designed to engage young people in a museum setting by applying Instructional Systems Design (ISD) principles, results in an interactive, educational, and culturally relevant experience that attracts and involves youth in the museum environment.

The Young Curators curriculum product utilizes an Instructional Systems Design (ISD) approach to address the needs of museums and youth audiences, ensuring that the learning experiences are meaningful, inclusive, and actionable. Grounded in a positive youth development framework, the curriculum integrates the overarching competencies: Self-management and Adaptability, Effective Communication and Collaboration, Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, Technical and Digital Literacy, Ethical and Cultural Awareness, and Lifelong Learning and Professional Development. By recognizing and building on the inherent strengths of young people, the curriculum seeks to transform small and rural museums into vibrant social learning hubs for young people.

Through inquiry-based activities, learner-centered practices, and real-world application, this conceptual program design aims to effectively design a museum science program for young people, integrating overarching competencies of the SEL, DL, and ES frameworks to complement classroom learning. This chapter is organized by each research question. First by providing the results for thematic analysis of each framework, next by demonstrating how these concepts align to the positive youth development framework, and finally, a demonstration of

how these concepts integrate into an intentionally designed learning solution for a small and rural museum looking to increase their rates of youth engagement. The final research question is organized using the foundational phases of the ISD process. Through collaboration between educators, museum staff, and community stakeholders, this initiative offers a replicable model for revitalizing small and rural museums and amplifying their role in youth development.

Research Question One Results

Question 1: What are the overarching concepts of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), Digital Literacy (DL), and Employability Skills (ES) competency frameworks of CASEL, USAID Digital Literacy, and the Department of Education's Employability Skills and Competencies Framework?

This section presents the qualitative findings from phase one of the thematic analysis of the three competency frameworks. The results are organized using in vivo and a priori analysis. Each analysis is detailed with representative framework text to illustrate key components. These findings provide insight into the integrated program design answered in Research Question Three.

Table 4.1 Reducing Data to Emergent Overarching Competencies

Original Competencies	Groups	Emergent Competency
Time management, resource management, task completion	Management	Self-Management and Adaptability
Written communication, oral presentations, digital collaboration	Communication across mediums	Effective Communication and Collaboration
Critical thinking, decision-making, analyzing information	Reasoning	Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving
Safe technology use, platform navigation, content creation	Digital Proficiency	Technical And Digital Literacy
Empathy, ethical behavior, cultural sensitivity	Global Citizenship Skills	Ethical And Cultural Awareness
Goal setting, initiative, professional learning	Growth-Oriented Mindset	Lifelong Learning and Professional Development
Emotional regulation, self-discipline, adaptability	Self-regulation	Self-Management and Adaptability

Original Competencies	Groups	Emergent Competency
Active listening, expressing ideas, teamwork	Interpersonal Communication	Effective Communication and Collaboration
Search evaluation, managing digital identity	Information Literacy	Technical and Digital Literacy
Conflict resolution, respect for diversity	Leadership, ethical practices	Ethical And Cultural Awareness
Managing money, managing personnel	Career planning and development	Lifelong Learning and Professional Development
Locate, organize, use, analyze, and communicate information	Information literacy	Technical and Digital Literacy

The first framework, Social Emotional Learning, focuses on the competencies of self-awareness, social awareness, and relationships. Competencies consistently highlighted individual, cultural, and social attitudes. The topics in this framework include Self and Social Awareness, Self-Management, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision Making. The language pattern in the Self-Awareness topics describes personal and social identities, emotions linking to feelings, values, thoughts, and developing interests and a sense of purpose. Self-management includes statements of self-discipline, motivation, and management of stress. This section includes setting goals, planning and organizational skills, and a sense of agency. The Social Awareness topic lists skills regarding others' perspectives, recognizing the strengths of others, empathy, compassion, and expressing gratitude. The Relationship Skills topic mentions teamwork and collaboration, leadership, and problem-solving. The decision-making topic includes skills for identifying social problems, analyzing facts, data, and information, evaluating the consequences of actions, and utilizing critical thinking.

In vivo analysis reveals emergent themes of Social Emotional Learning framework, such as the ability to identify one's emotions, use strategies to manage oneself, and consider the viewpoints of others. Other skills that emerge include the ability to evaluate and judge when to

apply these skills personally, culturally, and socially. These themes spotlight the significance of affective characteristics and their impact on one's competency in Social Emotional Learning.

The second framework, Digital Literacy, explores the skills necessary to navigate information on digital platforms, the internet, and other technologies. Key findings reveal that digital literacy includes intellectual skills. The topics of this framework include Information and Data Literacy, Communication and Collaboration, Digital Content Creation, Safety, and Problem Solving. The competencies in the Information and Data Literacy topic focus on using digital interfaces by browsing, searching, filtering, evaluating, and managing data. The Communication and Collaboration topic describes competencies for interacting and sharing through digital technologies, engaging in digital citizenship, and the use of 'netiquette' and managing one's digital identity. Digital Content Creation lists skills in content creation and knowledge of copyrights, licenses, and programming. Safety includes protecting devices, personal data, health, and the environment. Problem-solving skills needed for digital literacy are solving technical problems, identifying needs and gaps, and creating solutions using digital technology.

The emergent themes of the Digital Literacy framework during in vivo analysis present strategies for navigating information on digital platforms, interacting with a sense of citizenship in a digital space, creating digital technology, and making safe decisions. This analysis illustrates the importance of the intellectual characteristics necessary to develop digital literacy.

The third framework, Employability Skills, explores the competencies needed for success in a professional environment. The topics of this framework include Resources Management, Information Use, Communication skills, Systems Thinking, Technology Use, Personal Qualities, Interpersonal Skills, Applied Academic Skills, and Critical Thinking Skills. The topic of

Resource Management lists the competencies of managing time, money, materials, and personnel. Information Use describes skills to locate, organize, analyze, and communicate information. Communication skills include verbal communication, active listening, comprehension of written material, conveying information in writing, and careful observation. Systems Thinking lists competencies for understanding, monitoring, and improving systems. Technology Use includes using and understanding technology. Personal Quality competencies are responsibility and self-discipline, adaptation and flexibility, ability to work independently, willingness to learn, initiative, and demonstrating integrity and professionalism. Interpersonal Skill topics include teamwork, leadership, customer service, conflict resolution, and respect for individual differences. Applied Academic skills include reading, writing, computing math, and using scientific principles and procedures. Critical thinking skills include thinking critically and creatively, decision-making, problem-solving, reasoning, and planning and organizing.

The emergent themes of the in vivo analysis of the Employability Skills framework are management of resources and information, systems and how to interact with the components within the systems, and personal responsibility for initiative, leadership, academic ability, and professional strategy. The findings highlight the importance of cognition and the strategies available to apply knowledge to reach organizational objectives effectively.

After analyzing the three frameworks, the overarching concepts that intersect most include Self-Management and Adaptability, Effective Communication and Collaboration, Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving, Technical and Digital Literacy, Ethical and Cultural Awareness, and Lifelong Learning and Professional Growth. Self-management and Adaptability are listed in SEL as the awareness to focus on emotional regulation, goal setting, and resilience; DL lists the ability to adapt to emerging technology and the safety management

required; and the ES mentions responsibility, self-discipline, and initiative as competencies for potential employability. These overarching concepts emphasize the ability to manage oneself, adapt to new challenges, and sustain motivation in evolving environments. Effective Communication and Collaboration are prevalent throughout each framework. SEL describes competency in relationship skills that prioritize active listening, teamwork, and conflict resolution. The DL describes effective communication and collaboration through digital platforms and online spaces. The ES requires communication skills (oral, written, and digital) and interpersonal skills like teamwork and leadership. The ability to work well with others and communicate effectively across various mediums are necessary competencies for future success. Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving are overarching concepts in the three studied frameworks. SEL includes responsible decision-making, analyzing situations, solving problems, and considering ethical implications. DL contains critical evaluations of information and digital content. ES lists the need for competency in critical thinking skills to solve problems, innovate, and make informed decisions. These overarching competencies note the importance of reasoning, evaluation, and making sound decisions in various contexts. Another overarching competency within the three salient frameworks is Technical and Digital Literacy. SEL indirectly relates technical and digital literacy competency through understanding social norms in a tech-driven society. DL requires proficient access, use, and navigate digital tools safely and effectively. ES lists technology skills to complete tasks, process information, and adapt to technical innovations. Digital literacy is required for success in modern educational, social, and workplace settings. Ethical and Cultural Awareness is an overarching concept of the three frameworks. SEL emphasizes social awareness, empathy, and understanding of diverse perspectives. DL requires an awareness of ethical implications in technology use and cultural

expectations in online transactions. ES describes respect for individual differences and integrity in workplace decisions. Ethical behavior, cultural cognizance, and respect for diversity are vital for inclusive environments. Lifelong Learning and Professional Growth are concepts shared by these frameworks. SEL describes skills like goal setting and self-discipline as supporting continuous growth. DL encourages staying updated with digital advancements, and ES emphasizes professional growth, including financial literacy and system thinking. Continuous self-improvement and lifelong learning are key skills in a dynamic world. Integrating these overarching concepts into intentional youth development program design provides skills for a successful future.

Table 4.2. Overarching Concepts of the Three Frameworks

Overarching Concepts of the Social-Emotional Learning, Digital Literacy, and Employability Skills Frameworks
Self-Management and Adaptability
Effective Communication and Collaboration
Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
Technical and Digital Literacy
Ethical and Cultural Awareness
Lifelong Learning and Professional Development

In a priori analysis, the overarching concepts of the three frameworks are analyzed against Gagne's Domains of Learning (1985). Gagne's Domains of Learning provide a framework for classifying learning outcomes based on the type of knowledge or skill being developed. Gagne identified five domains of learning that address different areas of learner capability. The five domains are Intellectual Skills, Cognitive Strategies, Verbal Information, Motor Skills, and Attitudes. The SEL framework emphasizes Attitude skills the most, the DL framework prioritizes Intellectual skills, and the ES framework focuses primarily on Cognitive skills. Across all frameworks, Motor skills are the least represented. The most observed learning

domain across the frameworks was intellectual, followed by cognitive, the second most frequent, and attitude, the third.

Intellectual Skills are the ability to understand and apply concepts, rules, and procedures to solve problems. Hierarchical in nature, learners start at a simple, fundamental unit of discrimination by identifying differences to more complex rule applications and problem-solving. SEL's responsible decision-making aligns with intellectual skills by requiring learners to analyze situations, evaluate outcomes, and apply ethical rules. DL requires critical evaluation of digital information, and navigating online spaces requires applying these principles to safe digital behavior. ES requires critical thinking and problem-solving as they directly apply intellectual skills in the workplace and real-world tasks. The framework competencies incorporate intellectual skills through analytical reasoning, decision-making, and applying principles.

Cognitive Strategies are internal processes that guide learning, thinking, and problem-solving. These involve learners managing their own thinking and learning processes. The SEL requires cognitive strategies for self-management competencies such as goal setting, monitoring emotions, planning actions, and regulating behavior. DL employs cognitive strategies to develop digital navigation skills using search tools and filters. ES uses cognitive strategies when learners are asked to approach tasks systematically and creatively. These frameworks utilize cognitive strategies by encouraging self-regulation, strategic planning, and metacognitive skills.

Verbal Information is another domain of learning, which is the ability to recall and use knowledge that has been explicitly stated or described. This includes learning and storing information in memory for retrieval. The recalling and using factual knowledge is necessary to

be competent in SEL, DL, and ES. SEL requires social awareness, which includes recalling facts about diverse perspectives and cultural practices and remembering cultural practices. DL requires recalling and applying knowledge about tools, platforms, and safe online behaviors. ES depends on retrieving and articulating verbal information in the workplace, such as procedures or technical details. Competence in the three frameworks stresses the importance of storing and using knowledge effectively in communication and understanding systems.

Motor Skills are physical actions or movements that require precision and coordination, and repetition and practice are necessary for mastery. SEL indirectly aligns with motor skills. SEL activities such as team building or role-playing may require motor skills. DL involves motor skills for digital devices, and ES may require motor skills to perform technical tasks or operate machinery manually. Motor skills are less related to SEL, although aligned with incorporating motor skills for using technology and conducting technical tasks.

Attitudes are affective components that influence behavior, including feelings, values, and preferences. Learning attitudes often involve modeling, reinforcement, and direct experience. SEL competencies aligned to attitudes include building empathy, self-awareness, and positive perspectives towards oneself and others. DL aligns with attitudes by promoting safe and ethical behaviors toward technology use and digital responsibility. ES attitudes include professionalism, adaptability, and a positive view of lifelong learning and collaboration. Developing these affective components, like values, motivation, and preferences, is central to SEL and fostering ethical behavior in DL and ES.

The overarching competencies of the three frameworks align well with Gagne's Domains of Learning, demonstrating a comprehensive approach to learner development. Together, the

overarching competencies and the domains illustrate the importance of an integrated, comprehensive education approach to youth development program design.

Table 4.3 Gagne's Domains of Learning and Overarching Concepts

	Intellectual Skills	Cognitive Strategies	Verbal Information	Motor Skills	Attitudes
SEL CASEL	Decision making, problem-solving	Self-management, goal setting	(Indirectly) Social norms, empathy	(Indirectly) Role-Play for practice	Social Awareness, Ethical Behavior
DL USAID	Content creation, evaluating information	Manage data, engage in global citizenship	Interacting with technology	Device usage, technical operation	Ethical online behavior, collaboration
ES OCTAE	Reasons, plans organizes	Initiative, independence, flexibility	Communication, workplace systems	Customer needs	Professionalism, adaptability

Research Question Two Results

Question 2: How do the overarching concepts align with youth development program design principles?

This section presents the qualitative findings from phase two, domain and taxonomic, analysis of the overarching concepts, and a positive youth development framework. The results are organized by the topics of the positive youth development framework, assets, agency, contribution, and enabling environments, with descriptions of their alignment with the three frameworks. These findings provide insight into the integrated program design answered in Research Question Three.

USAID's Youth in Development Policy component is the Healthy, Productive, and Engaged Youth Development Framework. This framework focuses on youth development by empowering young people to reach their full potential from best practices in youth-specific programs. These practices are Assets, Agency, Contribution, and Enabling Environment. The

overarching competencies of the SEL, DL, and ES frameworks focus on empowering youth with skills, agency, and environments accessible for successful development. By supporting skills development programs, youth have the resources and skills necessary to achieve desired outcomes. An integrated and intentionally designed youth development program focusing on SEL, DL, and ES facilitates youth achieving positive outcomes for future success.

Designing youth programming to incorporate viewing young people as assets is a concept in positive youth development. Viewing young people not as problems to be solved but as resources to be cultivated and recognizing youth's inherent strengths, skills, and potential while building these assets helps them thrive and contribute positively to their communities. Young people have unique talents, abilities, and perspectives to be nurtured. Developing these competencies promotes self-confidence in the youth and supports positive growth. Recognizing youth as assets means addressing their development in multiple domains, such as physical, emotional, intellectual, asocial, and vocational, and giving youth opportunities to use their strengths and take ownership of their learning. In youth development program design, youth contribute to their communities, schools, families, and society. Their voices, participation, and leadership are valued when shaping solutions and driving change. Intentional program design incorporating SEL, DL, and ES competencies develops assets like emotional intelligence, information management, and workplace skills necessary for future success. The three frameworks build foundational skills that serve youth as assets to contribute in various settings.

The three frameworks' overarching concepts empower youth, enhance agency, and prepare them to take the initiative. Agency assumes youth can employ their skills and make decisions. These decisions are facilitated by family, community, and supportive policies. SEL empowers young people by developing self-management and awareness, enabling them to act on

their goals. DL enhances youth agency by equipping them with skills to navigate digital spaces and responsibility and advocate for themselves in online and offline environments. ES prepares youth to take initiative and lead in the workplace, promoting independence and adaptability. Intentional youth development program design reinforces agency through self-efficacy, autonomy, and the ability to take informed action in various contexts.

Youths are recognized as contributors to change and are involved in meaningful design and implementation supported by integrated program designs. Each framework promotes youth participation by empowering them to lead, collaborate, and drive change. SEL encourages contribution through relationship skills, collaboration, and community engagement. DL enables youth contribution by creating and sharing content in civic digital spaces and advocating for social change through technology. ES promotes professional communication, enabling youth to contribute to the context of the workplace and community. Youth perspectives are essential in intentional, integrated program design for youth development.

An enabling environment allows youth to thrive. Enabling environments promotes health, and providing access to safe, supportive spaces integrates effective services to young people. SEL competencies build personal and relational well-being. DL creates safe digital spaces and reduces risks associated with online activity. ES develops systems thinking and helps promote the development of policies and practices that create inclusive, equitable workplace environments. Programs that integrate these three frameworks align with enabling environments through emotional safety, inclusivity, and equity to support youth development.

The overarching competencies of the SEL, DL, and ES frameworks align seamlessly with the positive youth development approach by focusing on youth as assets, agency, meaningful youth contributions, and creating enabling environments. Together with intentional integrated

program design, competencies in these three frameworks share the goal of empowering youth to thrive personally and professionally.

Table 4.4 Positive Youth Development Framework and Overarching Concepts

Framework	Assets	Agency	Contribution	Enabling Environment
SEL CASEL	Emotional Intelligence	Self-awareness, self-management	Collaboration, relationship skills	Supportive relationships, social-emotional safety
DL USAID	Digital skills, safe technology use	Digital navigation, advocacy	Civic engagement, content creation	Safe digital environments
ES OCTAE	Critical thinking, technical, and workplace skills	Initiative, adaptability, leadership	Teamwork, leadership, professional communication	Equitable systems, inclusive policies

Research Question Three Results

Question 3: How can these overarching concepts integrate into an intentionally designed youth development program?

Organization of the Conceptual Program Design

The organization of this chapter follows the Instructional Systems Design (ISD) process of analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation. The analysis includes the results of overarching competencies of the three frameworks, audience and learner characteristics, and goal and task analysis. The design incorporates lesson objectives, developmental learning activities, and instructional strategies. Development includes creating and building physical and digital course materials, media elements, and interactive learning activities. The implementation section describes the delivery of a conceptual youth program in a

small and rural museum with staff and student participants. Evaluation incorporates formative lesson and course and summative program evaluation for measuring effectiveness.

The conceptual program is titled Young Curators. The program curriculum consists of thematic modules emphasizing museum operations, professional communication, and design principles. It starts with introductory lessons on these topics, including the purpose of museums, Docentship, and social media marketing. Participants then progress to more advanced projects where they curate their exhibits. Each module includes lesson plans, activity guides, and assessment tools to help museums monitor participant progress. Future versions of the curriculum will incorporate updates based on evaluative research on the implementation and impact of the Young Curators program in museums.

Analysis

This section focuses on the Analysis phase of the instructional systems design process, including the program's goal analysis, the learners' audience analysis, the context analysis utilizing the emergent overarching concepts from the content analysis of the learning environment, and the task analysis utilizing the three frameworks SEL, DL, and ES.

An Instructional Systems Design analysis involves gathering and examining data to ensure the instructional solutions are effective, efficient, and aligned with learners' needs, organizational goals, and contextual factors. Through this analysis, the Young Curators program's foundational needs and strategic design intend to serve as an innovative solution to attract and engage young audiences, addressing the museum visitation challenges and fostering positive youth development.

Goal Analysis

The Young Curators program is structured to achieve these primary goals.

1. Increase Youth Attendance in a Small and Rural Museum: The curriculum seeks to attract more visitors to museums by offering an engaging, interactive program addressing the ongoing challenge of low attendance.

2. Foster Digital Literacy: The curriculum integrates training in digital tools, online research, and exhibit design, helping youth develop transferable skills in today's workforce.

The goal of enhancing student digital literacy skills aligns with the intellectual, verbal, and motor domains, emphasizing the development of practical, hands-on abilities in professional applications. This goal focuses on building various digital communication competencies utilized for workplace readiness. Students will exercise their written and digital communication skills by creating professional emails, designing social marketing flyers, and demonstrating the ability to craft messages tailored to professional settings.

3. Support Social and Emotional Skill Building: The program encourages teamwork, communication, and community building through collaborative curation projects, helping youth develop strong social-emotional skills.

The goal of supporting social and emotional skill building within a diverse community is grounded in the attitude domain, focusing on knowledge, understanding, and critical thinking. Students begin by describing the diversity within their community, gaining awareness of its unique cultural, social, and historical attributes. Building on these skills, they will apply critical thinking to predict the cultural characteristics of sample artifacts, allowing them to explore and appreciate the rich narratives and traditions represented within their community. Students interpret interpersonal experiences as opportunities to form and collaborate with diverse teams, enhancing their ability to navigate and value different perspectives. Social and emotional

engagement deepens their understanding of diversity and equips them with skills to contribute to inclusive environments actively.

4. Professional Socialization: Youth participants engage in professional tasks such as public presentations and interacting with museum visitors and staff, helping them gain valuable professional experience.

The goal of professional socialization positively impacts students' self-perception, personal growth, and self-awareness. Students develop oral communication skills through delivering presentations and participating in interviews. These experiences enable them to articulate ideas clearly and confidently in formal settings. Student design and construct a museum exhibit, showcasing their proficiency in visual communication by creating a polished and engaging display. These activities prepare students for success by practically applying their skills in a formal yet supportive environment.

Learner Analysis

Learner Analysis considers a variety of factors about the learners. Demographics, Prior Knowledge and skills, learning preferences, and incentives are all analyzed when analyzing the audiences of a learning product. The participants of the Young Curators program are ages 12-16, from a rural town in southwestern US. These students engage in a low-risk professional setting, are assumed to have minimal professional experience, and may not have visited the museum before. They have limited exposure to cultures outside their own but bring diverse experiences from other local community engagement programs. Participants must meet specific prerequisites to join the program, including language proficiency and consumer-level technology skills such as logging into an online account. Technology competencies required for the program include using tools such as phones, downloading and engaging with digital platforms,

graphic design tools, and cameras. YC participants possess creativity, industriousness, and an entrepreneurial spirit characterized by self-starting behavior and openness to new ideas. The program offers a safe environment for students to practice professional communication skills helpful for self-promotion and an opportunity to reflect on their role as valued community members. Cultural considerations for the program include providing instructions in easy-to-read formats, ensuring access to the Internet and laptops, and offering parental communication in dual languages.

Context Analysis

Context Analysis considers the learning and performing environment, technology, internet access availability, organization norms, and any resource constraints impacting design. The Young Curators program takes place in a unique learning environment, a small and rural museum in the southwestern community. Grounded in competency-based learning, the program incorporates local themes, content, and systems into its instructional design. The museum features authentic working collections, knowledgeable docents, and artifact curation of genuine local history, creating an experiential learning setting that cannot be replicated in a formal classroom, private business, or other community organization. Students in the program interact directly with the museum environment by serving as student docents, cataloging actual collection items, and curating their exhibits for public display.

The Young Curators instructional environment combines computer-based training (CBT) and instructor-based training (IBT) to prepare students for professional interactions. CBT utilizes Google Classroom as a learning management system and Google Slides for interactive learning activities, offering flexibility for students to complete training modules at home, on their phones, or using museum-based laptops. IBT takes place in the museum's working

departments, where students participate in discussions and seminars in the conference room, practice as docents on the museum floor, and curate artifacts in the collections. This integration of CBT and IBT prepares students for the program's performance environment, where they apply their skills in a real-world setting.

The performance environment on the museum floor serves as the platform for students to practice professional communication skills through activities based on SEL, DL, and ES frameworks. Interacting with the public, museum stakeholders, volunteers, and the museum director, as well as engaging with future employers during events like the opening night of their exhibit, students perform oral, visual, and digital communication. Using a flipped classroom model, students complete foundational CBT modules during the week, equipping them with the knowledge to practice and apply professional skills in the IBT and performance environment.

The ultimate goal of the YC program is to enable students to transfer the skills they acquire, which are taught in the CBT, practiced in the IBT, and applied in the museum environment, into more formal professional settings. These skills are intended to support future success in paid employment, small business ownership, or entrepreneurial endeavors, helping students build confidence and practical expertise in their chosen career paths.

Content Analysis

The content analysis determines the scope of content and depth of coverage. Sequencing the topics in a logical order, aligning the content to relevant applications for the learners. Using the overarching concepts of the three salient frameworks, content analysis provides the topics and depth of the material covered in YC. Despite differing domains, these frameworks focus on adaptability, collaboration, communication, ethical behavior, and critical thinking. For Self-Management and Adaptability, the emphasis spans emotional regulation, resilience,

responsibility, digital safety, adaptability to emerging technologies, and personal qualities like flexibility and initiative. Effective communication and collaboration are shared priorities through active listening and teamwork, digital communication and online collaboration, and interpersonal skills such as leadership and teamwork. Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving integrate analyzing and making responsible decisions, evaluating digital information critically, and solving problems innovatively. The importance of Technical and Digital Literacy is highlighted through navigating social norms in a tech-driven world, using digital tools safely and effectively, and leveraging technology for workplace tasks. Ethical and Cultural Awareness underscores empathy, understanding diversity, ethical technology use, and respecting workplace differences. Lifelong Learning and Professional Growth promote goal setting and self-discipline, staying current with digital advancements, and professional development. These thematic concepts underscore the need for a well-rounded program to equip participants with skills and preparation for evolving societal, technological, and workplace demands.

Table 4.5 Sample Learning Objectives

OVERARCHING COMPETENCIES	SAMPLE LEARNING OBJECTIVES		
Self-Management, Adaptability	Develop personal strategies for achieving short-term goals while managing setbacks.	Demonstrate adaptability by learning and using emerging digital tools to complete assignments.	Exhibit initiative and self-discipline in completing independent tasks and responsibilities.
Effective Communication, Collaboration	Practice active listening and articulate responses in diverse interpersonal and group settings.	Use digital platforms to communicate and collaborate with peers on shared tasks effectively.	Resolve conflicts through effective negotiation and collaborative problem-solving strategies.
Critical Thinking, Problem Solving	Analyze situations to identify potential solutions and evaluate outcomes based on ethical considerations.	Critically assess the credibility and reliability of digital information sources.	Apply creative problem-solving techniques to address real-world challenges in academic or professional contexts.

OVERARCHING COMPETENCIES	SAMPLE LEARNING OBJECTIVES		
Technical, Digital Literacy	Safely navigate and manage online platforms for academic, personal, or professional use.	Demonstrate proficiency in using digital tools to organize, process, and present information.	Adapt to new technological systems by applying foundational digital literacy skills.
Ethical and Cultural Awareness	Recognize and respect cultural differences in interpersonal and digital communication.	Identify and avoid unethical behaviors in technology use, including plagiarism and cyberbullying.	Demonstrate empathy and inclusivity in group dynamics and workplace interactions.
Lifelong learning, Professional Growth	Set and pursue personal and professional development goals through reflective practices.	Stay informed about emerging trends and advancements in technology and their applications.	Build and apply financial literacy skills to manage resources and plan for future growth.

The Task Analysis breaks down task learners' performance into components with the identified tools and materials to perform the tasks. The YC students experience various professionally applied skills through topics, tasks, and procedural processes. Topics are based on the relevant interests of the students in the local community. They engage in local culture and heritage topics, themes, and content. Tasks performed are general tasks that can be transferred into the professional workforce. Tasks include greeting tour groups to the public, archiving artifact-planning and organizational skills, and building exhibit-critical thinking and decision-making.

Stakeholder analysis identifies everyone involved by their contributions and expectations; it is a critical component of the instructional systems design process. Stakeholder analysis identifies and evaluates the individuals and groups with a vested interest in the program's success. Stakeholders have influence or are impacted by the program design, implementation, and outcomes. The Young Curators program's stakeholders include museum leadership, staff, volunteers, students, and their families, local educators and schools, community organizations,

and potential future employers or business partners. Each group plays a role in shaping the program and its success.

The input of stakeholders is invaluable as it provides diverse perspectives that help tailor the program to meet the needs of all participants. Museum stakeholders, such as directors, docents, and curators, bring expertise in museum operations, artifact curation, and community engagement, directly informing the curriculum and training modules. Students and their families offer insight into the learning preferences, schedules, and accessibility needs of the target audience, ensuring that the program is inclusive and practical. Local educators and schools can identify opportunities to align the YC program with broader educational goals, such as social studies and graphic design state standards and an opportunity for character development and service-learning programs. On the other hand, community organizations and businesses can help identify workforce gaps and provide resources or partnerships to enhance the program's effectiveness.

By conducting a thorough stakeholder analysis, the YC program can address each group's specific goals and expectations while fostering collaboration and buy-in from the broader community. Engaging stakeholders early in the design process ensures the program is relevant, accessible, and sustainable. It also helps build a network of advocates invested in the program's

success, supporting its mission to prepare students for professional opportunities and enrich the local community.

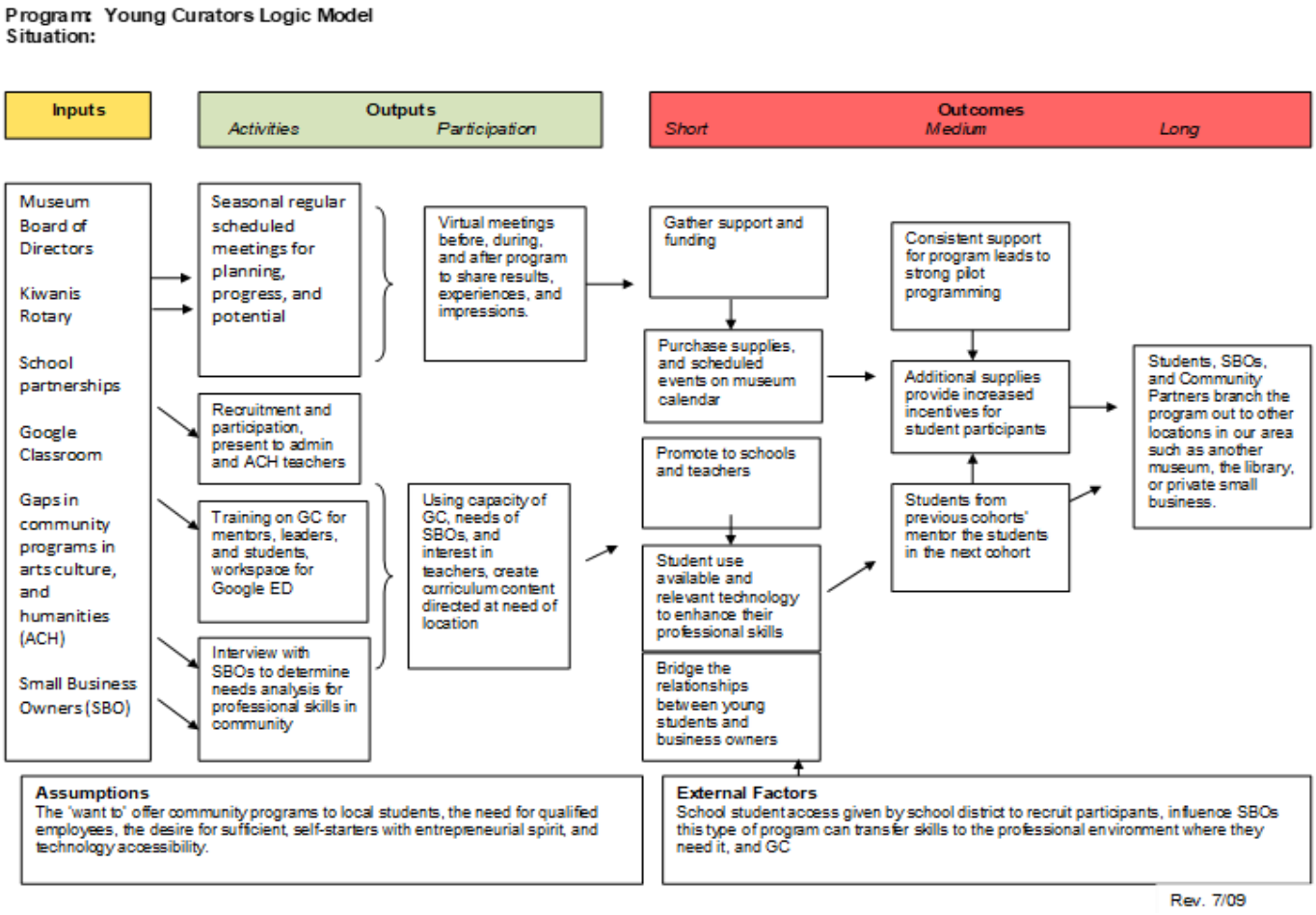

Figure 1. Young Curators Conceptual Logic Model

Design

In this section, a brief description of the design process is explained. Then, I describe the conceptual design of the learning objective of each lesson of the Young Curators program and provide samples of computer-based and instructor-based lesson plans and exit tickets. The learning design provides opportunities for students to practice overarching competencies while engaging in digital and in-person learning activities.

Learning objectives are clearly defined and aligned with organizational goals in the design phase. A taxonomy framework using levels of complexity from remembering to evaluating helps distinguish cognitive, affective, and psychomotor goals developed during the learning process. The content design organizes the material in a logical sequence that divides content into manageable units to expedite learning. Instructional strategies to best achieve learning objectives are chosen, and activities to actively engage the learners are scaffolded to support structures that guide learners, which are gradually reduced as mastery is developed.

The sequencing for the Young Curators program begins with foundational learning material provided by the museum, which serves as the basis for student engagement. Students start by summarizing key points from the museum's content and developing written and verbal renditions of these points to share with diverse community members. As students grow more comfortable speaking in the museum environment, they expand their skills to the digital domain by creating and designing an image-rich marketing flyer to promote their exhibit. The program culminates in the ultimate step of the students' development, where they utilize their speech, language, audio, and visual communication skills to present their curated exhibit to the public, displaying their growth and accomplishments.

The YC program is a six-week program where students meet once weekly to spend two hours at the museum experiencing topic-specific learning activities. The sequence topics include a prework week on professionalism, where students will implement professional norms in digital communication and behavior by following models of text and behavior. During week one, the topic of museums is introduced, and students can identify the history of museums, explain why they are important, and determine what purposes they serve for people of diverse cultures. Week two introduces artifacts and how to organize them into a collection. Students must attribute characteristics and cultural value of artifacts by analyzing, cataloging, and summarizing sample artifacts. Week three brings students to the museum floor as student docents. Students analyze a sample exhibit, summarize key points, and present to diverse groups of community members. Week four students begin to work in collections and curate different types of objects. They examine and analyze sample artifacts for attributes to compile a label copy and written description of several artifacts such as manuscripts, documents, and textiles. Week five is marketing using graphic design platforms and social media. Students use design principles, digital techniques, and software to create a promotional flyer for opening night exhibits. Week six is the installation and opening night. Students construct their exhibits using materials and tools to professionally design and visually engage their audiences.

Table 4.6 Sample Computer Based Lesson Plan

LESSON STEP	CBT ACTION	STUDENT ACTION	TIME
Introduction	Identify the history, purpose, and components of museums.		1 minute
Interactive Video	View the video, History of Museums, from Ted-Ed.	Answer interactive questions during the video using the Edpuzzle software platform	5 minutes
Read experts from the International Council on Museums.	Provide a prepared excerpt from ICOM of the purpose of museums	Answer the text entry question in their own words: What is the purpose of museums?	5 minutes
Take a Virtual Tour of a Museum	Visit the museum website with an available virtual tour to identify the components	Identify the components available from the hosting museum, Ex: Education Programs, Collections, Exhibits, Offices, Museums Store, Partnerships	5 minutes

Table 4.7 Sample Instructor Based Lesson Plan

LESSON STEP	TEACHER ACTION	STUDENT ACTION	TIME
Introduction	Review key points of the featured exhibit.	Walking on tour, active listening, tactile engagement with appropriate.	20 minutes
Direction Instruction	Lead a guided tour of the museum floor, show each exhibit, and explain key points of interest in each.	Walking on tour, active listening, tactile engagement with appropriate.	20 minutes
Guided Practice	Pair with students with exhibits and explain the narration style of exhibits. Be available for questions	Stand in front of the exhibit, showing the key features and how they relate to the facts and key points of the exhibit.	25 minutes
Break	Break	Break	10 minutes
Independent Practice	Repeat the process with specific artifacts in exhibits.	Bring artifacts from home. With *the My Artifact worksheet, gloves, and tools are used* to examine the artifact. Take 5 minutes each at the end to explain your artifact.	25 minutes

LESSON STEP	TEACHER ACTION	STUDENT ACTION	TIME
Closure	Using key points of interest, play a quiz game. Create questions about the exhibits with answers aligned to the facts.	Play along to win by answering questions about exhibits.	10 minutes

Table 4.8 Sample Exit Ticket

QUESTIONS	OUTPUT
List one of the many facts about the history of museums from the Ted-Ed video.	Input answers in Google Forms for automated collection and spreadsheet generation.
List one component a museum offers to visitors.	Input answers in Google Forms for automated collection and spreadsheet generation.
What activity did you enjoy most this week?	Input answers in Google Forms for automated collection and spreadsheet generation.
What activity did you enjoy least this week?	Input answers in Google Forms for automated collection and spreadsheet generation.

Development

To describe the development phase of the ISD process for the Young Curators program, I summarize what occurs during the phase, then detail the development specific to the digital learning development of Young Curators computer-based training. Development for the Young Curators program includes interactive slide presentations and videos, graphic design, and communication pathways.

The development phase of instructional design is where the content transitions from concept to reality. This step focuses on creating and refining instructional materials, multimedia assets, and interactive elements that align with the design blueprint. During this phase, instructional content is crafted and integrated into delivery platforms, such as a learning management system, such as the Young Curators' Google Classroom. The development phase ensures accessibility and usability for the target audience. Quality assurance and user testing are key in verifying that the course content functions as intended and meets established learning objectives. By bringing the design plan to life, the development phase serves as the foundation for successful implementation, connecting user experience and instructional strategies to meet the needs of the learners and stakeholders.

Young Curators is a hybrid learning experience. A hybrid learning experience incorporates instructor and computer-based exchanges. In the flipped classroom model of YC, the student participants begin their program with a self-guided, interactive lesson about professionalism and expected behavior when in the museum and as a student worker. The students access the weekly lessons through a free Google email account and sign into an established Google Classroom using a predetermined code. The benefit of the Google Platform is the no-cost use of various digital tools available to educators.

Contact information is collected during the online application process using the free Google platform application Forms. Students input their application information into the form, and once they select Submit, their responses are collected in an autogenerated spreadsheet and the Google Suite titled Google Sheets. Google Voice allows museum personnel to communicate with families and students with a generic phone number that relays voice and text messages via email or forwarded phone calls to a personal phone number. This communication tool keeps a professional boundary between the program personnel and provides a phone number dedicated to the program. Another tool used to send text messages and reminders is the Remind App or Cloud HQ. These free services provide text notifications to be scheduled and sent on a regular cadence to help students accomplish their computer-based learning before arrival in the museum so they can be fully prepared for the activities of weekly topics.

Google Slides is a development tool for computer-based content. The creation of the interactive slides incorporates tables and text boxes for students to use to answer assessment questions or practice a skill. These elements offer fill-in-the-blank style questions, text entry options, and drag-and-drop activities to engage the learner and provide interactivity with the content. Canva, a free online graphic design platform, offers templates and an easy-to-use interface for students and marketing material. The Google Docs application provides a word processing program with many features necessary to develop the facilitator guide, lesson plans, and student handouts. Videos used in Young Curators were streamlined through an embedded link from YouTube, another application in the Google suite. These development tools enhanced the learning and alignment to the program's learning objective and the overall goal of building students' SEL, DL, and ES competencies.

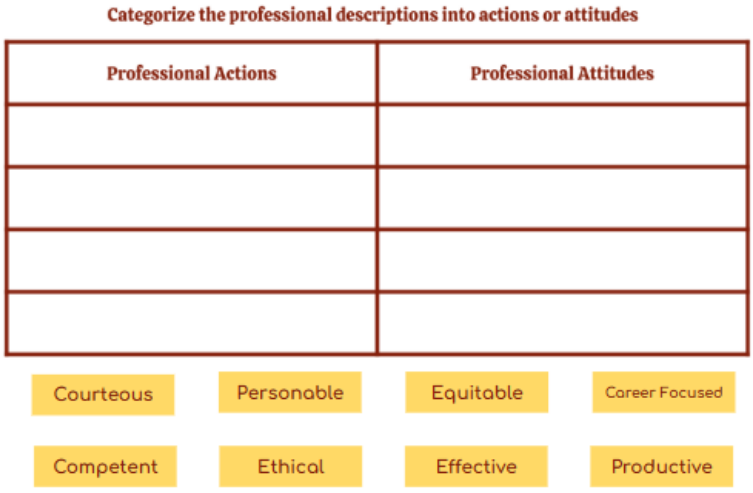

Figure 2 Sample of Drag and Drop Interactive Slide

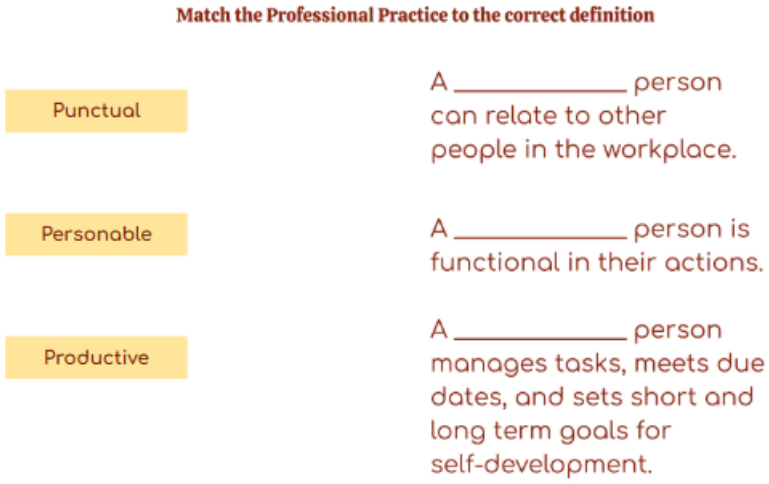

Figure 3 Sample of Fill in the Blank Interactive Slide

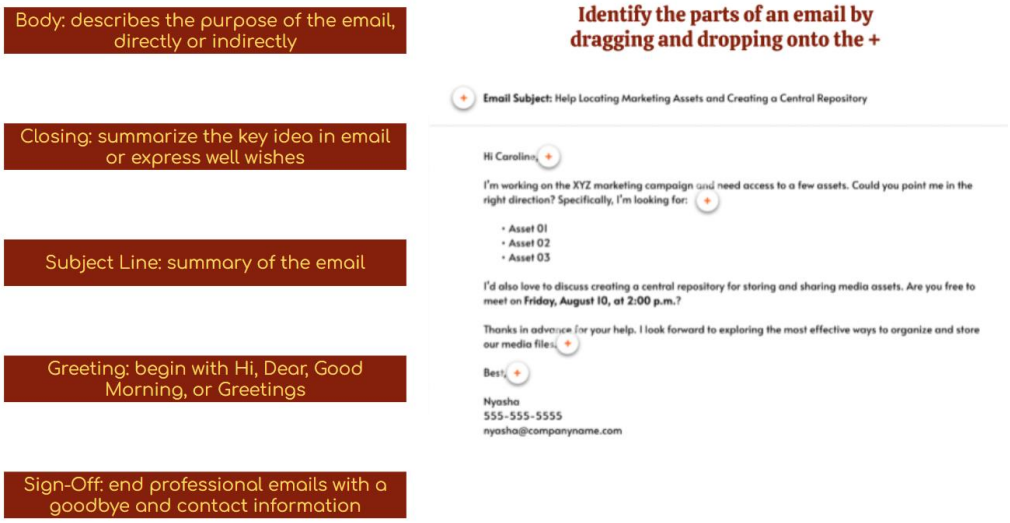

Figure 4 Sample of Labeled Graphic Interactive Slide

Implementation

In this section, I review the events during the implementation phase and describe the possibilities of implementing the Young Curators program in a small and rural museum.

The implementation phase of Instructional Systems Design marks the transition from preparation to action, as the instructional solution is delivered to learners. This phase focuses on ensuring seamless deployment by training instructors or facilitators, setting up delivery platforms, and providing the necessary technical and instructional support. The materials and strategies developed in the previous phases are implemented, emphasizing learners' engagement and confirming their access to the content. Monitoring learner participation and addressing challenges in real-time is necessary for the success of this phase. Implementation generates valuable data for the evaluation phase, enabling a continuous improvement loop. By executing

the design plan, the implementation phase bridges development and evaluation, effectively achieving the learning objectives.

Various coordinating efforts must occur during the implementation of a conceptual program, such as the Young Curators. First, an optimal schedule for delivering the program must be established. Taking into consideration other museum events, special occasions, and school schedules. Young Curators compete with students regarding school obligations, club membership, and sports commitments. Opening the digital assignment one week before the in-person is suggested so the students have ample time to complete the lesson. Keeping the computer-based lesson to fewer than fifteen minutes is highly recommended; for the students to experience the museum in real-time, a weekend day is suggested, such as Saturdays from 10 am to noon. This allows students to arrive after breakfast, and if the program offers a nominal lunch, an incentive to stay the entire time.

The staff and volunteers need to be trained to begin a youth development program at a museum. Program facilitators will need a strong understanding of the weekly lesson objectives, how to access the materials, and techniques for strategic delivery methods. Program directors provide guidance on the required technology and tools, such as Google Classroom and Canva. Purchasing technology, such as a basic laptop, may be necessary to configure and test the delivery platforms and functionality. Facilitators connect with participants via the Google Forms application process, then grant them login credentials to Google Classroom and grant learners access. This process occurs once for each subsequent delivery cycle.

When rolling out the learning solution, facilitators present the instructional material and follow instructional strategies to orient learners to the lesson objectives and expectations. To engage the participants, the facilitator promotes interaction through open-ended questions and

collaborative activities. Monitoring learners' completion of computer-based learning before the in-person emphasizes the need for clear communication. Students who have not completed the lessons may have a few minutes before the in-person experience to complete the short digital interactions. Facilitators are available to address technical issues, provide clarification, and modify delivery methods to accommodate learner's needs.

After delivery, learners are provided with a certificate of completion and a letter of recommendation to show their achievement in participating in the program. During the implementation phase or delivery, stakeholders can debrief to discuss the program's successes, challenges, and adaptations at that moment or by the next delivery cycle.

The purpose of the implementation phase is to connect the development phase with the evaluation phase by delivering the learning solution and generating data to measure effectiveness, satisfaction, and success. Implementation gives learners the intended knowledge and skills, the design and development efforts are executed, and feedback is collected to inform evaluation and measurement.

Evaluation

In this section, I will briefly describe the purpose of the evaluation phase of a learning solution during the instructional design process. Then, I will describe how evaluation occurs for the participants of the Young Curators program to confirm that the transfer of learning has occurred. Lastly, I describe an evaluation of the program to measure its overall success and impact on students' SEL, DL, and ES levels. Evaluating a curriculum or educational program is an iterative process and may not always happen linearly.

The evaluation phase of the ISD process is the step where the effectiveness and impact of the instructional solution are measured. The evaluation focuses on collecting feedback and

performance data from learners and stakeholders to determine whether the objectives have been met and if the intervention achieved the intended outcomes. Key activities include analyzing data to measure success and identifying areas of improvement. Insights gained during this phase validate the solutions' impact and inform revisions and other refinements to iterate into the design for effectiveness and relevance. The evaluation phase is an interactive step promoting a cycle for continuous improvement and continued effort to evolve the solution to meet the changing needs of the learners and organization.

The YC program intends to provide students with hands-on experiences in a museum that develops their professional communication skills. Throughout six weeks, students engage with the museum director, other museum stakeholders, diverse community members, and the general public, including local families, small business owners, and city officials. Self-reflection is integrated into the program through exit tickets, discussions, and collaborative activities, enabling students to evaluate their progress each week. As they become more comfortable as student docents, museum volunteers, and exhibit experts, students gain confidence and insight into their professional development.

The learning activities aim to help students develop greater awareness of themselves, others, and their environment. Through communication, collaboration, and coordinated digital interfaces, learners will enhance their understanding of professionalism. After completing each module, students participate in a reflective process grounded in experiential learning. This reflection fosters a renewed self-awareness, systems thinking, and skill building.

The broad approach to museum tasks is designed to help students recognize how the skills they develop are transferable to other professional environments. Through this approach, Young Curators students are encouraged to observe their peers' work and exchange ideas based

on their experiences. Students reflect on digital and in-person activities, identifying their favorite tasks each week. This self-reflection, prompted by simple like-or-dislike questions, fosters self-awareness by highlighting personal strengths and opportunities for adaptability in diverse professional settings.

Students practice professional communication skills in an informal, low-risk learning environment, building confidence as they refine their abilities. Interactions take place in person and through digital interfaces, offering diverse opportunities for communication practice. Students also engage in reflective discussions, analyzing their communication efforts with peers and museum stakeholders. Through these open discussions, they identify strengths, address challenges, and explore strategies for improvement.

Computer-based training (CBT) aims to provide students with real-world workforce training experience. As industry standards increasingly shift toward online training for convenience, standardization, and record-keeping, students will use digital platforms designed for workforce training. During Instructor-led training (ILT), students interact with diverse groups, enriching their understanding of professional dynamics and workforce systems. Students complete exit tickets after each CBT and instructor-based training session as part of their reflective practice. These exit tickets review the content covered and offer a dedicated space for reflection on all activities completed throughout the week.

Program evaluation is a great way to promote a learning program at a museum. If a program is considered adequate, it opens the opportunity to grant funding and sponsorship and increases participant interest. Program evaluation is conducted to measure specific outcomes. Beyond assessing the transfer of learning in students after participating in one lesson, Program evaluation happens after a pilot intervention to seek opportunities for improvement or to measure

a specific health or risk assessment. Program evaluation occurs during the implementation phase as the experience of the facilitators and participants helps modify the delivery to better serve the learner's needs. Evaluation of a program that occurs often and regularly will provide the valuable data necessary to make important decisions about how the program is received and how it can be improved for future sustainability.

Summary

I organized the findings in this Results section according to the research questions. The first research question is addressed through the qualitative content analysis of three competency frameworks: Social Emotional Learning, Digital Literacy, and Employability Skills. The analysis identified overarching concepts common across these frameworks, including self-management and adaptability, effective communication and collaboration, critical thinking and problem-solving, technical and digital literacy, ethical and cultural awareness, and lifelong learning and professional growth. These concepts inform the second research question, which examines how these competencies align with positive youth development. Finally, the results answer the third research question, exploring how these overarching competencies can be integrated into a conceptual youth development program design. In the following section, I discuss these findings, provide interpretations, and emphasize their relevance in addressing a gap in program design.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

This chapter revisits the findings of the content analysis and program design through the lens of the literature reviewed and theoretical frameworks presented in earlier chapters. The discussion interprets how the identified overarching competencies align with existing theories of your development and learning including Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Relationship Development Systems Theory (RDST), and Instructional Systems Design and how the frameworks of CASEL Social Emotional Learning, US Agency of International Development Digital Literacy, and the Office of Career Technical and Adult Educations Employability Skills align with the USAID's Health, Productive, and Engaged Youth Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework. This includes a review of and explanation of the findings and their implications. Lastly, suggestions for refinement and future research are addressed.

Connecting the Findings to Theoretical Frameworks

This study identifies six overarching concepts: self-management and adaptability, effective communication and collaboration, critical thinking and problem-solving, technical and digital literacy, ethical and cultural awareness, and lifelong learning and professional development. These concepts aligned with the USAID PYD framework and informed the design of a conceptual youth program to integrate activities to build these skills. Utilizing the Instructional Systems Design (ISD) process, the program development involved detailed phases, including goal and task analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation. The structured approach of ISD provides a streamlined, comprehensive, and adaptable process for youth needs.

Alignment with Positive Youth Development: The findings reinforce the importance of a strength-based, youth-centered approach as advocated by a Positive Youth Development (PYD)

model. Each of the six overarching competencies align with the four practices of Assets, Agency, Contribution, and Enabling Environments. For example, seeing young people as assets are reflected in their technical and digital literacy skills, their applied academic knowledge, and their leadership capabilities. Youths' opportunity to exercise their agency emerges through self-management and adaptability, as well as critical thinking and problem-solving, both emphasized in SEL and employability frameworks. Youths as valued contributors is facilitated through communication and collaboration skills, digital participation and professional development. An enabling environment is advanced by cultural awareness, ethical digital behavior, and inclusive systems.

Alignment to Self-Determination Theory: The finding highlight the relevance of Self-Determination, which emphasizes autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Competencies such as self-management, adaptability, and goal setting encourage young people to be active in the learning process, while lifelong learning and problem-solving support skill building and knowledge base. Relatedness is visible in the relationship built during an intentionally design youth development program, through communication and collaboration with support adults and communities. These competencies position youth as active agents of their learning, capable of reaching goals, managing task, and navigating their educational and professional journeys.

Alignment to Relationship Development Systems Theory: The finding highlight the connection and role of context and relationships in youth development that highlight communication, empathy, digital citizenship, and ethical awareness affirming the importance of supportive relationships and responsive environments. Youth development occurs through dynamic interactions with family, peers, mentors, and digital communities, all of which are incorporated in the Young Curators program's conceptual design.

Alignment to Instructional Systems Design and Structured Larning Pathways: The ISD model's goal driven, systematic approach to instructional design complements the competency-based structure of SLE, DL, and ES frameworks. By applying the ISD phase-analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation, the conceptual Young Curators program creates a learning pathway where skill acquisition is scaffolded and aligned with clearly defined objectives. The application of ISD ensures that competencies are not only taught but practiced and assessed through performance-based task. Actions and behaviors aligned with youth ability and development.

Connecting the Findings to Applied Practice

The results of this study broadly apply to skills necessary in personal and professional contexts. Self-management and adaptability emphasize students' ability to exercise agency and practice strategic decision-making. These attributes align with the broader goals of social-emotional learning and demonstrate how programs can prepare young people to manage their time and tasks, embrace change, and remain productive in ever-changing situations.

Effective communication and collaboration reflect the role of interpersonal skills in both personal and professional environments. This study reveals the benefits of integrating activities to enhance communication through multiple mediums and teamwork. Youth development programs intentionally designed to promote cultural and contextual sensitivity ensure the relevance and applicability of these skills across diverse environments. Preparing youth for real-world scenarios that require collaborative efforts strengthens their ability to thrive in diverse settings.

Critical thinking and problem-solving are not only academic skills but also essential life skills. Programs designed to build these skills help youth approach challenges with creativity

and innovation. Supporting critical thinking and problem-solving prepares youth to address complex problems with a forward-looking tool for their future.

Digital and technical skills answer the need for ever-growing digital competency in a tech-centric world. Each framework features a skillset that reflects the need for young people to acquire skills to navigate digital tools, understand online environments, and apply technical knowledge. These findings suggest that addressing gaps in access to technology is necessary to create equitable opportunities for diverse groups of young people.

Ethical and cultural awareness incorporates teaching youth to understand and respect diverse perspectives and see themselves as global citizens. The larger societal need for empathy, inclusivity, and accessibility strengthens the importance of these skills.

Lifelong learning and professional development incorporate a growth mindset young people need when committing to continuous learning. Ongoing skill acquisition and upskilling are needed in the competitive workforce, and programs designed to grow these skills prepare youth for immediate success and sustain personal and professional growth.

Integrating PYD and ISD

The findings indicate the universality and applicability of the emergent overarching concepts of the three frameworks for positive youth development program design. Designing youth programs that focus on these skills is appropriate for preparing young people to thrive in diverse, personal, and professional contexts. The alignment of the overarching concepts among the three frameworks demonstrates how foundational skills directly support young people's holistic growth and empowerment.

The alignment of competencies with Positive Youth Development (PYD) frameworks demonstrates how integrating skills into program design fosters holistic growth, builds strengths,

promotes active engagement, supports agency development, and facilitates positive relationships. These aligned competencies directly contribute to PYD's goal of helping youth thrive. They prepare young people for academic and career success and nurture emotional, social, and ethical characteristics, fostering a well-rounded developmental approach.

PYD's strengths-based approach views youth as valuable assets. Aligning these competencies reinforces this perspective by equipping youth to navigate challenges confidently. Furthermore, aligning competencies to PYD frameworks encourages active engagement by involving youth in meaningful activities. This participation empowers young people to interact with their communities and contribute positively to society.

Incorporating these competencies into PYD programs also supports agency development by enabling youth to take control of their learning and growth. PYD helps young people set goals and pursue their aspirations, facilitating independence and self-directed development. Additionally, alignment fosters positive relationships by encouraging connections with peers, mentors, and community members. These relationships build trust and teamwork and are vital for social and emotional well-being and career readiness.

Finally, this alignment prepares youth for the demands of an evolving world. Whether in education, the workforce, or civic engagement, the competencies equip young people with transferable skills that apply across diverse contexts, ensuring they are ready to meet future challenges with confidence and adaptability.

The alignment of competencies with PYD principles and ISD methodology shows how theoretical frameworks can be operationalized, actionable, and adaptable to ensure systematic program design by defining clear objectives, designing relevant activities, and implementing evidence-based strategies for effective program outcomes. The lack of cohesive frameworks in

youth development demonstrates the need for integrative approaches that combine multiple contexts like employability and emotional and digital skills (Lerner et al., 2005). Bringing PYD and ISD together solves organizational and learner needs through a structured process that is manageable by the organization and provides a clear map for achieving objectives for the learner.

The goal-oriented nature of ISD reflects intentionality in program design. Hamilton et al. (2004) outline the need for structured and evidence-based youth development programs. ISD serves this need by integrating specific strategies into the design to satisfy the learner's needs. The alignment of PYD and ISD creates equitable development opportunities by integrating overarching competencies. PYD principles help these competencies promote equitable growth, and ISD articulates aspects of the program, from goals to assessment, delivered to show measurable outcomes. ISD focuses on measurable outcomes by incorporating formative and summative assessments. Using data-driven evaluations, program design tracks youth progress and overall effectiveness. Aligning PYD with workforce and life readiness empowers youth to lead meaningful lives and achieve through actionable learning activities. ISD in PYD encourages ongoing growth, a mindset of continuous improvement, and adaptability.

While aligning these overarching concepts provides a foundation for youth development program design, some aspects warrant more critical evaluation. Though critical thinking and problem-solving are universally recognized, applying these skills varies in interpretation across cultural and socioeconomic contexts. Technical and digital literacy is important, but it assumes access to resources and infrastructure that may not be available to some audiences (Wei et al., 2011; van Dijk, 2020). Digital inequities in access to technology resources emphasize the need for integrated PYD programming with these skills. Barriers that prevent equitable access are

removed when PYD programs adapt to these gaps. Although lifelong learning and professional development are forward-thinking, they require sustained support systems beyond a program's immediate scope. These factors indicate the importance of tailoring program design to address social disparities.

Limitations

This study's limitations include using secondary data for framework analysis and alignment. The conceptual program has not been evaluated for effectiveness, making the findings theoretical rather than empirical. Eccles and Gootman (2002) call for more empirical testing to evaluate program effectiveness. Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2016) identify gaps in youth initiatives' testing and implementation stages. This study is a starting point to help youth program designers and organizations prepare a program with assessments and evaluations baked into the design through the ISD process. Future iterations of this study could include empirical validation to gather real-world data.

The cultural and contextual nuances also are not fully captured as these frameworks and program design reflect a primarily Western perspective. Arnett (2008) explores the biases in educational and psychological frameworks, stressing the need for culturally diverse programs. UNESCO (2023) outlines the importance of incorporating ethical and cultural awareness into education, noting how these frameworks lack a global representation. Overgeneralizing development frameworks can lead to ineffective outcomes, as they often fail to adapt to local contexts and inequities (Sen, 2009). Similarly, Nussbaum (2011) argues that assuming universal applicability of skills neglects the importance of addressing specific contextual needs. Future studies may incorporate a variety of more representative cultural and social perspectives while considering and addressing infrastructural constraints in program design.

Refining and improving this research involves enhancing its methodology and expanding its scope to achieve more robust and applicable results. Improvements include conducting pilot testing and implementing the Young Curators program, strengthening qualitative and quantitative data collection, integrating diverse frameworks and cultural perspectives, addressing digital and resource disparities, and incorporating longitudinal studies. These enhancements would make the program's design more inclusive and effective while enabling iterative monitoring and continuous refinement.

The current study is conceptual and lacks empirical validation. Implementing the designed program in a real-world setting can provide practical insights into learner outcomes and program effectiveness. A pilot program with diverse youth groups to test the alignment of competencies with positive outcomes collects pre- and post-intervention data on participants' skill development and feedback from facilitators and stakeholders. The conceptual nature of this study's findings is theoretical and lacks primary data to support a conclusion. Using a different methodological approach will provide a deeper understanding of the program's impacts and areas for improvement. A valuable next step would be implementing a mixed-methods research design, combining qualitative data from interviews with participants or focus groups with stakeholders and quantitative data from pre- and post-assessments. These improvements help identify practical challenges to refine delivery and assess its scalability.

This research is rooted in a Western-centric cultural context, limiting its applicability to more culturally diverse settings. Integrating frameworks with a global perspective would expand the cultural scope, making the intentional design of a youth development program more inclusive. To further enhance inclusiveness, the study could broaden stakeholder involvement by incorporating perspectives from educators, community leaders, and policymakers regarding

competency frameworks they would like to see developed in their young people. Expanding the cultural scope would enhance a more global framework study's inclusivity, relevance, and success.

In this study, the emphasis on digital literacy assumes access to technology, which may not be available in all areas. Developing study adaptations for a program design for a low-resource setting, low-tech or offline, creates a program design that is more equitable and accessible to youth regardless of resource availability. Other contextual barriers not explicitly addressed in this study are economic or systematic challenges to implementation. Mitigating barriers to implementation makes the program design more adaptable and capable of meeting the needs of diverse youth populations.

The study's long-term impact on program design and skills development is not explored. Future research possibilities include conducting longitudinal studies to track participants over time and examine how the program influences their personal, academic, and professional growth. Long-term data would demonstrate the program's design effects on participants' lifelong skills.

Implications

The finding of this research have several important implications for youth program design, educational and workforce readiness, equity and inclusion and policy development, and future research. The identification of overarching competencies provides a clear foundation for designing intentional youth programs. These competencies algin with positive youth development principles which support youth by emphasizing not only academic growth but also emotional, social, ethical, and civic engagement. By integrating these competencies into a program design using Instructional Systems Designs methods, program developers can create structured, scalable, and goal-oriented pathways that are both measurable and adaptable.

This study reinforces the relevance of transferable skills for educational and workforce readiness. In today's fast moving global landscape young people must be equipped with skills like critical thinking, collaboration, and digital competence to succeed. The research highlights the importance of digital and technical literacy as essentials tools for youth participation in modern economies, while drawing attention to the persistent digital divide. Addressing gaps in access to technology and digital training is critical for ensuring equitable opportunities for all youth, especially those from under-resourced communities.

Equity and inclusion emerge as central themes in this study. The findings accentuate the need to design programs that respond to systemic disparities, such as limited access to digital infrastructure, economic barriers, and culturally narrow education framework. The research calls for more inclusive, content sensitive approaches that reflect the lived experiences, values and voices of diverse youth populations. By promoting agency, this study affirms the importance of youth-led learning and decision-making, empowering youth people to take charge for their own development.

In addition, the study offers valuable insight for policy makers, funders, and other stakeholders. The competency-based framework can serve as a guide for funding strategies, policy alignment, and program evaluation. Stakeholder-centered design is encouraged, where the voices of educators, community leaders, and families inform the development of localized, culturally grounded youth initiatives. The study also emphasizes the importance of data-informed decision making, recommending the integration of formative and summative assessment to evaluate program impact and ensure accountability.

Ultimately, this research lays a strong foundation for future studies, while conceptual in nature it provide a model for empirical validation through pilot program, mixed methods

evaluations, and longitudinal research to assess long term impacts. It also advocates for the inclusion of global cross-cultural perspectives in youth development research to enhance the relevance and inclusivity of competency frameworks. By merging insights from education, psychology, digital literacy, and workforce development, this interdisciplinary approach opens the door for broader, more impactful studies in the future.

Summary

Key learning points of this study include interdisciplinary relevance, competency framework integration, scalability, and assessment. The interconnectedness must not be ignored as this study presents skills across these competencies and domains. The overarching concepts from these frameworks offer valuable insights for program design, maximizing the effectiveness of the time invested and the development of students' transferable skills. Aligning the concepts to a positive youth development framework informs a program's holistic and youth-centered design. Utilizing the ISD process supports the creation of programs that are scalable and adaptable to different youth populations. The emphasis on formative and summative assessments built into the conceptual youth program design of Young Curators allows for continuous improvement and accountability. This study signifies a step forward in creating intentional, data-driven programs that deliver practical, sustainable outcomes by combining strategic frameworks in an impactful way.

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