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# Effects of Musical Theater Education on the Self-Esteem of Middle School Students

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Concordia University (Portland)

College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

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Effects of Musical Theater Education on the Self-Esteem of Middle School Students

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College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in

Transformational Leadership

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## **Abstract**

Musical theater combines two educational components; music and theater. These arts classes have demonstrated positive influences on student academic achievement and student self-esteem. Musical theater, however, has not been fully examined as a pathway to enhance student self-esteem. The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of musical theater education on middle school student self-esteem. Using a qualitative case study, 11 students from a private Christian school in suburban Minnesota participated in a musical theater production to measure the effects of musical theater education on their self-esteem. Likert surveys, interviews, observations, records, and artifacts were collected to determine positive or negative interactions with the production. Data revealed self-esteem did not increase in those students who previously reported high levels of self-esteem. However, those students who reported lower levels of self-esteem demonstrated increased willingness to attempt new tasks, increased flexibility, and openness to change.

*Keywords:* music, theater, musical theater, self-esteem.

## **Dedication**

I have so many wonderful people to count in my life. Those who listened, guided, encouraged, and cheered me on. Thank you for your contribution to my life. You are so appreciated.

To Garden Café, Chef John's, and Highland Grill: Your endless glasses of ice tea and friendly smiles kept me typing every morning! You guys are the best and YOU share in this life goal!

To my sweet puppies, Sadie and Macie, who did NOT contribute to any of my writing because they would rather bark, take walks, or stand on my computer keyboard. I love you anyway and you are my baby girls. Mr. Fish, I thank you for being low maintenance. Love you, you sweet little 17 year-old goldfish!

To my extended family that have helped me get to this wonderful place. Thank you for your love and encouragement! Thank you, Valerie, for continuing to check on me!

A special thank you to my high school music teacher who changed the course of my life. Dr. Sidener, may you look down from heaven and know you created a love of music that gives me a passion for life. Thank you for taking time to guide my young steps.

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And to my husband, Gordy. You inspired me to try this crazy path and I love you for it! Thank you for being my partner every single day. We have made a beautiful life together and have so much to be thankful for. God is good, all the time.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Introduction to the Problem**

Self-esteem affects how students perform academically, emotionally, and socially (Chubb, Fertman, & Ross, 1997; Ferkany, 2008; Kuperminc, Leadbeater, & Sidney 2001; Lunenberg, 2011; Scott, 2011). Students struggle with having confidence in their identity, social roles, and academic achievement. “Representing the capacity to feel worthy of happiness and be able to successfully address life challenges, self-esteem is an important determinant of adolescent mental health and development” (McClure, Tanski, Gerrand, & Sargent, 2010, p. 238). Without healthy self-esteem development, student issues can broaden into their adult life, affecting relationships, financial decisions, career opportunities, and mental health issues (Rowe & Hall, 1991; Sang, 2015).

Middle school is a time of rapid change and uncertainty in a student’s life (Chubb, Fetman, & Ross, 1997; Kuperminc et al., 2001; Scott, 2011; Simmons, 1977). Research demonstrates a decline in student self-esteem from elementary to middle school (Seidman, Allen, Aber, Mitchell, & Feinmann, 1994; Simmons, 1977; Wigfield, Eccles, MacIver, Rueman, & Midgley, 1991). These declines may be attributed to a variety of changes in middle school structure including the shift from small group to large group instruction, academic performance goals, fewer relationship opportunities between student and teacher, and increasing social pressures (Alspaugh, 1988; Britner & Pajares, 2006; Kuperminc, Leadbeater, & Sidney, 2001). Musical theater, which has often been included as a middle school curriculum extracurricular activity, has been used to encourage students to be more expressive, creative, and self-aware. However, studies have suggested musical theater education can also enhance student self-esteem (Lee, 1983; McCammon, Saldana, Hines, & Omasta, 2012; Perrine, 1989; Scott, 2011).

## **Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem**

Student self-esteem is an important contributing factor in education (Chubb, et al., 1997; Donnellan, Trzesniewski, Robins, Moffit, & Caspi, 2005; Ferkany, 2008; Kuperminc, et al., 2001). Self-esteem, or the value an individual places on himself or herself, is an intricate part of healthy psychological development (Bandura, 1997). Positive self-esteem affords students the motivation to take charge of their lives and allow for mistakes without the fear of rejection. However, lower self-esteem may cause students to make poor choices that affect them academically, emotionally, and socially.

Under the umbrella of self-esteem, self-efficacy is also a component in student self-esteem. Bandura (1977, 1997) defined self-efficacy as “the belief in one’s ability to manage and carry out actions that will produce positive outcomes (Stuart, 2013). Rates of self-efficacy affect middle school students in a variety of ways. Students with high self-efficacy tend to set higher goals for themselves, imagine accomplishing tasks, and demonstrate more perseverance when facing adversity (Bandura, 1977; Schunk, 1989). However, research has demonstrated students with lower self-esteem, with often matching levels of lower self-efficacy, can lack school engagement, leading to poor decisions such as school dropout, substance abuse, and teenage pregnancy (Caraway, Reinke, & Hall, 2003). Students with lower self-esteem tend to set lower, more attainable goals for themselves, whereas students with higher self-esteem are willing to work harder to achieve a larger goal.

Over the course of this study, three theories will be presented that serve as a framework for studying the effects of musical theater on middle school student self-esteem. Using Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory (1986), Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1993), and Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984), the researcher will examine the effects of three

possible influential components of musical theater: increased self-esteem due positive social and learning environments (SCT), increased self-esteem due to an increased willingness to attempt new tasks (SET), and increased self-esteem due to personal and transformational student experiences (ELT).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Middle school can be a challenging time in an adolescent's life (Simmons, 1977; Chubb, Fetman, & Ross, 1997; Kuperminc et al., 2001; Scott, 2011). Educators can help ease this period by helping students enhance their personal self-esteem. Research has examined the link between academic achievement and positive student self-esteem. However, based on current literature, performing arts education, specifically musical theater education, has not been thoroughly researched as to how it may influence student self-esteem.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of musical theater education on middle school student self-esteem. Musical theater, although often encouraged as an extracurricular activity, may also be useful in core curriculum as a tool for enhancing struggling self-esteem of middle school students (Brennen, 1972; Deasy, 2002; Dietry, 2012; Huntsman, 1982; Lee, 1983; Perrine, 1989; Pitts, 2007; Ward, 1994). Musical theater combines two educational components; music and theater. These arts classes have demonstrated academic and self-esteem support (Brandt, 1980; Deasy, 2002; Dietry, 2012; Martin, 1983; McLendon, 1982; Sarokon, 1986; Sunyak & Kaufman, 1983; Zuffiano, Alessandri, Gerbino, Kanacri, Di Giunta, Milioni, & Caprara, 2013). Musical theater, however, has not been fully examined as a

pathway to enhance student self-esteem and self-efficacy (Brennen, 1972; Lee, 1983; Perrine, 1989).

### **Research Questions**

1. Does musical theater education influence middle school student self-esteem?
2. If musical theater education can effectively enhance student self-esteem, how can teachers integrate this method of teaching into an already crowded standard driven curriculum?
3. If student self-esteem is enhanced in the musical theater classroom, can higher self-esteem be transferred into the academic classroom?

### **Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of Study**

In the wake of the 2002 legislation *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), performing arts classes were often sidelined, forcing educational curriculum to focus on academic subjects such as mathematics and reading. Although these subjects are imperative to student academic achievement, critics of NCLB (2002) stated the new curriculum placed too much emphasis on core academics, cutting back on arts electives financially and allotting less classroom time to study arts based classes (Amobi, 2006; Irons & Harris, 2007; Price & Peterson, 2009). Under this legislation, arts electives were often the first to be cut from a school's budget, leaving the families of students to pay for performing arts education themselves (Diamantes, Young, & McBee, 2002). However, with growing evidence that the arts can benefit students academically as well as enhance their self-esteem, performing arts curriculum has been reintroduced into students' core classes. In the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), signed into law by the Obama administration in 2015, policy language has shifted from "core curriculum" to a "more well

rounded education,” making arts education a key aspect of every child’s education (NAFME, 2016).

Through the recent addition of the *ESSA* curriculum, students are encouraged, and often required, to participate in some type of arts classes such as music and theater. Both of these genres have demonstrated academic and self-esteem benefits (Brandt, 1980; Deasy, 2002; Dietry, 2012; Martin, 1983; McLendon, 1982; Sarokon, 1986; Sunyak & Kaufman, 1983; Zuffiano, et al., 2013). Therefore, musical theater education, which incorporates both genres of learning, could be beneficial if included in school core curriculum.

### **Definition of Terms**

In studying the effects of musical theater education on the self-esteem of middle school students, key words will be defined so the study can be comprehended clearly. The terms to be discussed are self-esteem, self-efficacy, participant, researcher, principal investigator and participant observer.

**Self-esteem.** Self-esteem can be defined as the extent to which one values themselves (Blaskovich & Tomaka, 1991).

**Self-efficacy.** A person’s belief in their ability to accomplish a skill or task (Bandura, 2003).

**Participants.** In this study, participants as those who are allowing themselves to be interviewed, observed, and studied over the three-month research period.

**Researcher.** The researcher is the principal investigator and clinical research coordinator involved with study (University of Virginia, 2010).

**Participant observer.** A participant researcher engages in the study activities and records observations (Spradley, 1980). Participant observation extends beyond naturalistic observation because the observer is a "player" in the action (Spradley, 1980).

### **Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations**

This research study is challenged by a few assumptions, delimitations, and limitations. First, there is an assumption that interviewed students may answer in a manner that is perceived as positive to the researcher. Secondly, the study has a delimitation of length of the data collection. Because students are only enrolled in the class for a semester, the study only spans three months. Lastly, there are a set of limitations that may affect the overall generalizability of the results to the study. There are limitations in the usage of methodologies in the research discussed due to the limited number of minority students in specific demographic regions of the United States. Due to the low number of minority students in the specific area, this study is limited largely to Caucasian children and therefore is not able to be generalized to other populations. Also, most children are from a similar socioeconomic background, so the study only reflects the outcomes of upper middle class community students. Additionally, the teacher-student ratio at sample school is thirteen to one, much smaller than the rest of the nation's classrooms. Hence, the study may not be applicable to the outcomes of larger cities' students. Finally, the school only educates 100–300 students, so the evidence found in this study may not be generalized to larger school districts. Slavin (2007) warned that research that is not easily generalized may need to use other methods to ensure the validity of the research.

### **Summary**

This research study examined the possible connection between middle school student self-esteem and musical theater education. The following chapters will discuss the existing literature examining the link between music education and student self-esteem, theater education

and student self-esteem, and musical theater education and student self-esteem. Subsequent chapters will discuss the framework for the study, the data collection methods utilized, ethical considerations taken during data collection, and the results of the study. The final chapter will discuss suggestions for further research.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

Self-esteem affects how students perform academically, emotionally, and socially (Chubb, Fertman, & Ross, 1997; Ferkany, 2008; Kuperminc, Leadbeater, & Sidney 2001; Lunenberg, 2011; Scott, 2011). Middle school students can struggle with having confidence in a variety of ways, including developing their identity, social structures, and academic achievement. Musical theater may be useful as a tool to encourage middle school students who struggle with self-esteem (Brennen, 1972; Deasy, 2002; Dietry, 2012; Huntsman, 1982; Lee, 1983; Perrine, 1989; Pitts, 2007; Ward, 1994). Musical theater combines two educational components, music and theater. Those arts classes have demonstrated academic and self-esteem support (Brandt, 1980; Deasy, 2002; Dietry, 2012; Martin, 1983; McLendon, 1982; Sarokon, 1986; Sunyak & Kaufman, 1983; Zuffiano, et al., 2013). Musical theater, however, has not been fully examined as a pathway to enhance student self-esteem (Brennen, 1972; Lee, 1983; Perrine, 1989).

**Student self-esteem.** Student self-esteem is an important contributing factor in education (Chubb, et al., 1997; Donnellan, et al., 2005; Ferkany, 2008; Kuperminc, et al., 2001). Self-esteem, or the value we place on ourselves, is an intricate part of healthy psychological development. Positive self-esteem affords us motivation to take charge of our lives and allow mistakes without the fear of rejection.

Middle school is a time of rapid change and uncertainty in a student's life (Chubb, Fertman, & Ross, 1997; Kuperminc et al., 2001; Scott, 2011; Simmons, 1977). Studies have shown a decline in student self-esteem from elementary to middle school (Seidman, et al., 1994; Simmons, 1977; Wigfield, et al., 1991). These middle school declines can be attributed to change

in student-teacher structure, small group to large group instruction, academic performance goals, fewer relationship opportunities between student and teacher, and social pressures (Alspaugh, 1988; Britner & Pajares, 2006; Kuperminc, Leadbeater, & Sidney, 2001). Musical theater may be helpful in aiding this awkward time in an individual's development. Musical theater has often been included as a middle school extracurricular activity to encourage students to be more expressive, creative, and self-aware. Studies have suggested that musical theater education can also enhance student self-esteem (Lee, 1983; McCammon, Saldana, Hines, & Omasta, 2012; Perrine, 1989; Scott, 2011). However, based on current literature, musical theater education has not been determined to be influential in enhancing student self-esteem.

**Conceptual framework.** The performing arts have most often been studied for their ability to provoke emotion, shifts in self-awareness, and deepen understanding of human communication and interaction (Brennen, 1972; Deasy, 2002; Dietry, 2012; Huntsman, 1982; Lee, 1983; Perrine, 1989; Pitts, 2007; Ward, 1994). However, in creating a conceptual framework for an educational study, the researcher must first understand the role of the chosen framework. Self-esteem, however, is sometimes difficult to measure. While participating in performing arts classes, there are three theories that may shape students' educational experience. Using Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1993), and Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984), the researcher examined the effects of the possible influence of musical theater education on the self-esteem of middle school students.

**Social cognitive theory.** Social Cognitive Theory is the first theory that creates a framework to study how musical theater may enhance student self-esteem. In his Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), Bandura (1984) stated students' behaviors are shaped by their environment, their social interactions, and their ability to emotionally respond to these stimuli.

Glanz, Rimer, and Lewis (2002) summarized Social Cognitive Theory as it pertains to behavioral patterns. Glanz et al., (2002) stated Social Cognitive Theory addresses a variety of concepts that intertwine to affect a person's overall self-perception. First, a student's surrounding external environment provides opportunities for interaction and social support. In a musical theater classroom, this can be demonstrated while students rehearse vocal or choreography aspects of the production. While in this environment, the student perceives the situation to be positive or negative. Using behavioral capability, he or she gains the knowledge to perform a behavior and work towards mastery of that skill. The student then develops expectations of the outcome of that behavior, sensing incentives or observing positive outcomes of a healthy behavior. Through these expectancies, the student places value on the results and the outcome gains validity. Utilizing self-control, the student can gauge how to react to future situations. This leads to self-monitoring, goal setting, problem solving, and self-reward. By observational learning, the student can observe and learn from healthy models of behavior. Through the next step, reinforcement, the student shapes their behavior by the positive and negative experiences they have experienced. As he or she finds success in making good choices, self-esteem is increased. The increased esteem builds emotional coping responses, allowing students to handle emotional stimuli such as stress or time management. The final concept, reciprocal determinism, occurs when the student's behavior and the environment in which the behavior is performed allows for personal growth and change (Glanz et. al., 2002).

**Self-efficacy theory.** Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1999), stemming from Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, is an additional piece of the framework connecting musical theater to enhanced student self-esteem. Self-efficacy is the perception of a person's ability to reach a goal. Self-efficacy beliefs help determine the choices students make, the effort they put

forth into completing the task, the persistence and perseverance they display in the face of setbacks, and the degree of anxiety or confidence they experience as they engage the varied tasks in which they engage (Pajares, 2002).

According to Bandura (1986), self-efficacy impacts learning in a variety of ways. Self-efficacy impacts the objectives students choose to challenge themselves with. Pajares (2005) concurred and stated students must believe their efforts can produce the effect they desire, or they will have little incentive to work through the difficulties that they will encounter. Students with a lower sense of self-efficacy are more inclined to choose easier tasks, while those with higher levels of self-efficacy may choose more difficult challenges. In theater classes, students with lower self-efficacy may not audition for roles simply because they do not believe they could perform well enough to even attempt the audition, even though the audition process itself could prove to be an educational and positive experience for them. Students with higher self-efficacy, however, may view the audition process as a good learning experience, a chance to hone their skills, and an opportunity to gain feedback on their performance. Individuals tend to learn and perform at rates similar to their level of self-efficacy (Britner & Pajares, 2006; Lent, Brown, & Gore, 2007; Lunenberg, 2011). Next, self-efficacy impacts learning and the level of effort exerted in the classroom. Students with higher levels of self-efficacy tend to work harder to learn new skills due to a higher level of confidence. To the contrary, students with lower levels of self-efficacy tend to not put forth as much effort when attempting to learn and conduct new tasks due to a lack of confidence that they will succeed, similar to Learned Helplessness Theory (Seligman, 1995). Lastly, self-efficacy impacts the diligence of a student attempting a new skill. Students with high self-efficacy feel empowered and confident that they will be successful in learning and conducting new tasks. Students with higher self-efficacy are more likely to push

through difficulty even if they are faced with challenges. Low self-efficacy students are more likely to believe that they are not capable of learning and completing a challenging task, so they are more likely to give up when challenges arise (Britner & Pajares, 2006; Lent, et al., 2007; Lunenberg, 2011).

Bandura (1997) stated there are four actions that influence self-esteem: mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal/social persuasion, and physiological and affective states. Mastery experiences allow a student to accomplish a goal to the fullest extent. Music education courses may be uniquely effective in helping students achieve mastery skills. Orchestra students who practice melodic passages repetitively find mastery through motor skills. In a study examining student self-esteem in science courses, Britner and Pajares (2006) found only mastery experiences were clear indicators of increased self-esteem. Likewise, Usher and Pajares (2006) stated mastery experience was the strongest predictor of self-efficacy.

Vicarious experiences allow students to observe and model positive behavior. Students can observe completion of a skill they have not attempted before or have had little previous success. Modeling creates the process of attention, retention, motor reproduction and motivation brings students to the point of a willingness to try a new task (Bandura, 1986). In musical theater, students can observe other students creating characters and fully developing their performance without fear of rejection. Newer students may feel insecure acting a character out on stage in front of an audience. However, by using vicarious experiences through observing more experienced actors around them, students can feel stronger about creating physical and

emotional connections themselves. These connections lead to more successful performances, leading to increased self-efficacy.

Bandura (1997) theorized students measure some of their self-efficacy on the verbal encouragement they receive from others such as peers, teachers, and parents. This is especially true of feedback from teachers (Bandura, 1993; Scott, 2011). The learning atmosphere engaging the students and the teacher encouragement or discouragement they receive make a significant difference in student self-efficacy (Fencl & Scheel, 2005). How easily a person is influenced by positive and negative cues in their environment controls their affective state. Students with higher self-efficacy are not as influenced by negative facial expressions, comments, and emotional states of others. Negative cues affect self-efficacy poorly, while positive cues encourage social behavior and connectedness (Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Gerbino, & Pastorelli, 2003).

**Experiential learning theory.** In addition to Social Cognitive Theory and Self-Efficacy Theory, Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) can also shape musical theater students' behaviors and self-esteem. Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) is built upon the previous theories of notable researchers, including William James, John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Carl Jung, Paulo Freire, and Carl Rogers (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). All of these theorists placed experience at the center of the learning process, envisioning an educational system centered around the learner. According to Kolb (1984), ELT differs from other educational theories because it includes actual personal experience and personal transformation. Kolb (1984) defined Experiential Learning Theory as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience” (p. 41). Musical theater, the art of musical and theatrical expression, is

best learned through personal experience. Students are able to portray the life of anyone they chose, develop the character, and make creative choices for their specific role. Students who have a higher sense of internal control achieve a higher level of self-esteem (Scott, 2011; Zuelke, 1986). Educationally, students who are given choices, freedom, and opportunities for creativity ultimately have a higher sense of locus control. Siddall (1999) stated students can drive their own learning if given the opportunity to have some control over what they are learning. Student self-efficacy can be enhanced if they believe they can exercise some level of control over their choices, behaviors, and outcomes (Hen & Goroshit, 2013; Pajares, 2005).

ELT is a particularly effective theory to utilize in the theater and musical theater classrooms because it bases learning on experiences, reflection, and further actions. It is a holistic theory that defines learning as a process of personal transformation involving the entire person (Kolb & Kolb, 2011). Because of its' nontraditional methods, experiential learning can be an effective teaching tool in an arts classroom (Millenbah, Campa, & Winterstein, 2004). Because classroom lectures primarily address the cognitive domain, experiential learning challenges the student differently because it involves the whole student: their cognitive, affective and physical domains (Kolb & Kolb, 2011; Oxendine, Robinson & Willson, 2004). However, in the musical theater classroom, student experience is the focus of the curriculum. The educational process in the musical theater classroom is not to read about a character, but for a student to become that character. Utilizing ELT allows students to relate to the subject matter in a way that is meaningful to their own lives.

ELT is composed of four stages: concrete experiences, reflective observations, abstract conceptualizations, and active experimentations. Based on rehearsal structure in the theater classroom, the ELT style of teaching and learning can be particularly effective. Students study

and perform a scene (their concrete experience) and are given feedback from peers and teacher. Students can then reflect on the comments (reflective observations) and consider different options for their interpretation of the character and their performance (abstract conceptualizations), arriving at an active experimentation on how to perform better. The primary focus of ELT is allowing students to use the most effective educational process for their learning style (Kolb & Kolb, 2011). “A goal of arts integration is to use the arts so that students can have direct experience, be involved in making decisions about their learning, and be engaged in lessons that are motivating” (Mason, Steedly, & Thormann, 2004, p. 3).

Kolb and Kolb (2005) stated that all learning is re-learning. “Learning is best facilitated by a process that draws out the students’ beliefs and ideas about a topic so that they can be examined, tested and integrated with new, more refined ideas” (Kolb & Kolb, 2005, p. 209). Kolb and Kolb (2005) stated that conflict, differences, and disagreement are what drive the learning process. This is especially true in the theatrical process. In some cases, students wrestle with characters different from themselves physically, racially, ethically, or religiously. This process forces students to consider other peoples’ experiences and perspectives. As the theater student utilizes ELT, they learn from their environment and adapt to it. ELT allows learning to be a process of creating knowledge (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). “This process is portrayed as an idealized learning cycle or spiral where the learner ‘touches all the bases’—experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting – in a recursive process that is responsive to the learning situation and what is being learned” (Kolb & Kolb, 2005, p. 195). In a qualitative study investigating the influence of creative dramatics on inner city youth, Sanders (2004) found that student participation is the most influential tool in helping them explore difficult aspects of their lives: racism, classism, and sexism. Through grant funding, Sanders (2004) offered a free summer

school workshop entitled Urban Odyssey. The funding allowed for visiting artists from the community to work with minority students for a three-week period five hours a day. Students used creative writing, drama, and music to examine the “isms” in their life, which included racism, sexism, and other social challenges. Sanders (2004) stated that through their writing and subsequent performances, students were able to more fully understand people in their community with issues different than their own.

Andersen, Boud, and Choen (2000) summarized the goals for experience-based learning. First, Andersen, et al, (2000) stated experience-based learning involves something personally significant or meaningful to the students, which leads them to be personally engaged. “Arts integration enable(s) students to be active, to experience things directly, and to express themselves in ways best suited to the students” (Corbett, Wilson, & Morse, 2003, p. 17). Throughout the learning process, there should be opportunities for reflective thought either verbally or through journaling. The experience should involve the whole person, their intellect, their feelings, and their personalities. To build trust between students and teachers, students should be recognized for abilities they bring to the creative process. Through these experiences, teachers and students build a sense of trust, honesty, and openness (Anderson, et al., 2000).

Experience-based projects allows students a variety of learning styles to step outside the box of traditional classroom assignments (Millenbah, et al., 2004). Students who may normally struggle with academic subjects may be excited to work on a project that allows them to draw from their own life experiences. Allowing a student to have control over the creative process gives the experience a lasting impact (Kirk and Thomas, 2003). Students are not using rote

memorization for a test and then forgetting everything they learned. ELT allows students to be a part of the learning process.

**Study topic.** The researcher examined the possible link between musical theater education and positive middle school student self-esteem. Research has already demonstrated a connection between music education and positive self-esteem (Brandt, 1980; McLendon, 1982; Martin, 1983; Sunyak & Kaufman, 1983; Zuffiano, et al., 2013). In addition, theater education has also shown evidence of supporting positive student self-esteem (Huntsman, 1982; Deasy, 2002; Dietry, 2012; Pitts, 2007). “The real driving force behind dramatic arts is what it does for the emotional, physical, and cognitive abilities of the student” (Jensen, 2001, p. 76). Since existing research has also demonstrated a decline in positive self-esteem during the middle school years, educators must look for new, innovative techniques to enhance student self-esteem (Huntsman, 1982; Hoge, 1990; Moorefield & Lang, 2010; Scott, 2011; Ward, 1994). The researcher hopes to discover alternative pathways to positive self-esteem by introducing students to musical theater education.

**Context.** This study was conducted at a private K–12 Christian school in Minnesota. The school educates a total population of 100–300 students. Although students were immersed in a classical education atmosphere, they had very little experienced musical theater in their arts curriculum. The researcher examined the effects of musical theater on the school’s middle school students, ranging from fifth to seventh grades.

**Significance.** Young children must gain self-knowledge of their capabilities in broadening areas of function. They have to develop, appraise, and test their physical capabilities,

their social competencies, their linguistic skills, and their cognitive skills for comprehending and managing the many situations they encounter daily (Epstein, 2007, p.73)

In 2002, the legislation *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) went into effect, stressing the importance of academic subjects such as mathematics and reading. Although these subjects are imperative to student academic achievement, critics of NCLB stated the new curriculum placed too much emphasis on core academics, cutting back on arts electives financially and allotting less classroom time to study arts based classes (Amobi, 2006; Irons & Harris, 2007; Price & Peterson, 2009). Under this legislation, arts electives were often the first to be cut from a school's budget, leaving the families of students to pay for performing arts education themselves (Diamantes, et al., 2002). However, with growing evidence that the arts can benefit students academically as well as enhance their self-esteem, performing arts curriculum has been reintroduced into students' core classes. Through the recent addition of Common Core curriculum, students are encouraged and sometimes required to participate in some type of arts classes such as music and drama. Both of these genres have demonstrated academic and self-esteem benefits (Brandt, 1980; Deasy, 2002; Dietry, 2012; Martin, 1983; McLendon, 1982; Sarokon, 1986; Sunyak & Kaufman, 1983; Zuffiano, et al., 2013). Therefore, musical theater education, which incorporates both genres of learning, could be beneficial if included in school core curriculum.

**Problem Statement.** Middle school students often struggle with low self-esteem due to puberty, body appearance, family factors, and school experiences. (Hoge, Hanson, & Smit, 1990; Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1997). Additionally, this low self-esteem affects motivation and success (Lunenberg, 2011; Wigfield & Eccles, 1999). Performing arts curriculum, however, has demonstrated success in enhancing student self-esteem (Brandt, 1980; Choi, 2010, Pelayo &

Galang, 2013; Martin, 1983; McLendon, 1982; Sarokon, 1986; Sunyak & Kaufman, 1983). Music education and theater education has been richly studied (Brandt, 1980; McLendon, 1982; Martin, 1983; Sunyak & Kaufman, 1983; Sarokon, 1986; Zuffiano, et al., 2013). Studies have also revealed that peers, families, and teachers have a tremendous effect on student self-esteem (Canfield, 1990; Scott, 2011). Musical theater, however, has not been fully examined as an additional avenue to help teachers influence student self-esteem. Therefore, more research should be conducted on how to utilize musical theater education to raise student self-efficacy and self-esteem.

**Organization.** The organization of a study impacts how it is observed.

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world.

Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (Creswell, 2013, pp. 2-3).

Stake (2010) concurred with Creswell (2013 and referred to qualitative research as interpretive, experiential, and situational. McMillan (2012) added another aspect to the definition and stated that qualitative researchers believe there is more than one reality represented in the participants. Qualitative research is interpretive and looks at meanings of human experience from different views. The researcher is comfortable with multiple meanings and relies on intuition when conducting the research. Qualitative research is experiential, field oriented, and learning comes

through observation is in its natural iteration, without interference or preconceived end point. Qualitative research is also situational; “it makes the point that each place and time has uniqueness that works against generalization” (Stake, 2010, p. 15). Because of the nature of qualitative research, those examining the situation are entering the study in the original environment. Quantitative researchers believe that there is only one outcome in a study while researchers committed to the qualitative method see many possibilities (McMillan, 2012, p. 273). Qualitative researchers need to be willing to examine multiple perspectives to reveal a layered, inclusive, detailed account of the population. It is important to appreciate qualitative research because it only allows for the perspective of the participant to shine through, not the paradigms of the researcher.

### **Review of Research Literature**

**Student self-esteem.** Self-esteem can be defined simply as “a person’s appraisal of his or her value” (Leary & Baumeister, 2000, p. 2). Studies demonstrated the development of positive student self-esteem may have significant consequences for successful growth into adulthood (Britner & Pajares, 2006; Chubb, et al., 1997; Kuperminc, et. al., 2001; Scott, 2011). Conversely, Trzesniewski, Donnellan, Moffit, Robins, Poulton, and Caspi (2006) reported low adolescent self-esteem can lead to poorer mental and physical health and limited economic success. In an additional study, Donnellan, et al., (2005) indicated lower adolescent self-esteem led to antisocial behavior and increased isolation. Widmer, Duerden, and Taniguchi (2014) stated struggling youth can benefit from activities designed to enhance self-esteem. In a research study examining the emotional vulnerability of middle school students, Kuperminc, Leadbeater, and Sidney (2001) reported results that were “consistent with the idea that careful attention needs to be given to the social-emotional environment of middle schools. Particularly for adolescents

preoccupied with issues of self-definition” (p, 141). The cycle of low self-esteem, leading to antisocial behavior, ending in isolation and even greater lower self-esteem must be broken in student experiences.

Britner and Pajares (2006) stated self-esteem has been a strong indicator of academic achievement, course selections, and career decisions, regardless of age levels. In addition, research studies found students who suffer from low self-esteem may struggle with adult experiences (Chubb, et al., 1997; Lent & Brown, 2006; Trzesniewski, et al., 2006). Therefore, it is beneficial for students to understand and practice healthy self-esteem patterns throughout their educational career. Establishing these patterns, however, proves to be difficult. Middle school is a time of tremendous change educationally, socially, physically, and emotionally, while also being a critical time of student development (Simmons, 1977; Widmer, et al., 2014). Kuperminc, et al. (2001) found the middle school years to be a socially and emotionally difficult transition period, especially for those students who are searching for self-definition.

Society often equates accomplishment with human value, leaving students to often struggle to understand their value as a person versus their achievement in school (Scott, 2011). Students can suffer confusion between their ability and their worth. The school environment is a key factor to shaping to overall self-esteem (Chubb, et al., 1997; Hoge, 1990; Scott, 2011). Additionally, as students mature through their school years, their understanding of what makes them “good” or “bad” is challenged and their self-esteem progressively drops as students begin to compare their skills to other students (Scott, 2011). Studies examining age as a predictor of self-esteem have been inconsistent (Connor, Poyrazli, Ferrer-Wreder, & Grahame, 2004).

Therefore, it is not evident it is the age of a student in middle school that hinders their self-esteem, rather the ever-present change around them (Simmons, 1977).

Many factors combine to shape and influence self-esteem development in adolescence. Previous literature has focused on academic achievement, social acceptance amongst peers, body image, gender roles, school environment, media influences, socioeconomic status, relationships with family, age, and ethnicity (Hoge, Hanson, & Smit, 1990; Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1997). In addition, teachers have a measurable effect on student self-esteem (Hoge, et al., 1990; Scott, 2011). In classrooms utilizing the custodial model, teachers maintain tight control of the classroom atmosphere, leaving students little to no autonomy. In a humanistic climate, one that encourages democracy and student participation, students demonstrate higher levels of self-esteem. Instead of teachers who control the classroom with procedures and student stereotyping, humanistic teachers allow for creativity, maturation, and growth. Students who are trusted with choices feel empowered, enhancing their self-esteem. Educators must find a way to teach students how not to avoid failure, but learn to succeed (Scott, 2011).

The arts classrooms often represent individuality, personality, and autonomy. Sawyer (2006) stated the arts allow for improvisation, collaboration, and the emergence of interconnectedness. In a study conducted by Morefield and Lang (2010), researchers investigated the relationship between arts education and personal motivation and self-efficacy in rural middle school students. Their findings concluded students showed signs of stronger confidence as a result of arts education. This increase lead to a departure from parent or teacher approval by building inward self-efficacy (Morefield & Lang, 2010).

**Music education.** Music education courses can impact student academic achievement, which may then positively influence their self-esteem (Shin, 2011; Zuffiano, et al., 2013).

Academic achievement has demonstrated to be influential in enhancing student self-esteem (El-Anzi, 2005; Lane, Lane, & Kyprianou, 2004; Ross & Bruh, 2000). Music education courses seek to teach students how to read, comprehend and synthesize academic musical notation, while exposing them to the art of singing and playing an instrument. When a student can successfully integrate these musical abilities, other areas of their education may be affected, especially the areas of mathematics and reading (Hansen & Berstorf, 2002). More importantly, with improved academic performance often follows improved self-esteem (Zuffiano, et al., 2013). Conversely, improved self-esteem can enhance overall academic and social interaction. Researchers have explored the recent issues of low self-worth, self-esteem, and self-knowledge and have determined that students can benefit from creative outlets that build confidence and self-assuredness (Costa-Giomi, 2004; President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, 1999). A significant amount of research demonstrates that music education can positively affect student self-esteem (Fleming, Merrell, & Tymms, 2004; Hughes & Wilson, 2004; Wright, 2006).

The evidence of higher math scores (Rausher, 2002), more fluent reading ability (Bolduc, 2008), literacy improvements (Schellenberg, 2005) and increased self-esteem in students (Shields, 2001) who have studied music have led researchers (Cox, 2006; Garland & Kahn, 1995; Vitale, 2011) to examine the correlation between early music education and higher academic achievement. Music can enhance academic instruction on key levels. Mathematically, students can improve their understanding of fractions through the reading of rhythms (Courey, Balough, Siker, & Paik, 2012). In reading curriculum, students who participate in music classes often synthesize the ideas of reading intonation and pitch more readily than those who are not exposed to music (Bolduc, 2008). Additionally, those students who are asked to listen to music and explain its' meaning have a stronger overall understanding of literature and culture (Telesco,

2010). Finally, Shields (2001) shows evidence that music can increase self-esteem and confidence in public school students. These positive attributes of music education can shape students' beliefs towards academic subjects (Vitale, 2011). With increasing budget cuts, it is imperative that the importance of early music education be brought to the attention of all school administrators.

According to Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, using integrated forms of education can pave an alternate route to understanding (Brualdi, 1996). Students who struggle with understanding mathematics computation can benefit from learning to read music because it incorporates counting a steady beat while breaking the measure into fractions (Rogers, 2004). Students can also benefit from early music education as they are developing a phonic language (Hallam, 2010). In addition, many musicians share characteristics with high academic performers, such characteristics as higher aptitude, goal structure, and self-concept (MacIntyre, Potter, & Burns, 2012). Finally, music education can improve self-esteem by allowing students to express themselves (Diamantes et al., 2002) and feel connected to a peer group (Shields, 2001).

***Mathematics.*** Mathematics is an academic area that can be enhanced by music instruction. For example, by interpreting rhythmic patterns, students may be able to link the division of beats to the division of fractions (Courey et al., 2012). When the time continuum is split into pieces by sound, rhythm is created (Garland & Kahn, 1995). Rhythm begins in larger sections called measures, representing sections of sound. From the larger measure, the whole notes can then be subdivided into smaller beats, similar to the idea of fractions. Students who participate in music education classes learn how to break beats into smaller sections by dividing

by a common denominator. This skill can then be directly related to the mathematical concept of fractions (Garland & Kahn, 1995).

Mitchell (1994) concurred with these results when her study found children who performed well rhythmically also performed well mathematically (Mitchell, 1994). In a study conducted by Courey, Balough, Sakir, and Paik (2012), students who received musical training scored higher in the computation section of their research post-test. Music can enhance a student's understanding of mathematics in a variety of ways. It is theorized that math scores are higher in those students who have studied music in elementary school (Rauscher, 2002). However, in 2008, a controversial discussion was held by the Louisiana Board of Education, allowing administrations to remove academically challenged students from taking the elective classes of music and art. Baker (2011) conducted a study to examine the potential effects of removing students who were performing poorly in math and reading from art or music classes. The students enrolled in music scored higher on the standardized Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) test than those who were not exposed to music education. Because enrollment in music classes was a positive predictor of academic achievement, Baker (2011) supported the theory that music education should remain a core subject in elementary schools.

Rhythmic notation, the skill of writing distinct musical symbols representing lengths of divisions of sound, is a key link between music and mathematics (Rogers, 2004). If a student is able to count beats in a measure, they are able to simultaneously count a steady pattern while subdividing the measure into smaller beats. Rhythmic patterns also teach the concept of least common multiple, by training the brain to see smaller patterns inside larger ones (Rogers, 2004).

**Reading.** Many studies have demonstrated a link between a children's early exposure to music and their advanced phonological capacities (Bolduc, 2008; Hansen & Bernsdorf, 2002;

Lamb & Gregory, 1993). These studies revealed evidence that musical activities help the components of linguistic development, such as auditory perception and phonological memory. In a correlational study using eighteen preschoolers and thirteen kindergarteners, researchers observed that students exposed to rhythmic and melodic patterns obtained stronger results in melodic perception than those who were not (Bolduc, 2008). The exposure to the melodic patterns created a bridge to the concept of reading (Bolduc, 2008). Butzlaff (2000) stated early music exposure requires students to be aware of high and low pitches, or tonal distinctions, which leads to phonological sound patterns, the pitch inflections that create language. Because of its small size, it is difficult to prove if the results from this study could be generalized to a larger body of students. It does, however, support that music and language seem to have a correlation in early childhood development, as Butzlaff (2000) also proposed.

Studies have demonstrated music can have a positive effect on a variety of cognitive abilities (Bolduc, 2008; Mitchell, 1994; Vitale, 2011). During a three-year study, Telesco (2010) examined the effects of including live music rehearsals and performances in the basic curriculum of a group of third grade students who had a reading score of 37% in comparison to the national average of third grade students. This study allowed students to watch musicians resolve conflict with cooperation and teamwork. After learning to read music, the students used the Soundscapes to learn how to find the key elements of a score, such as the main theme of the music, the complementing harmonic sections, and the final resolution of the symphonic music. A Soundscape is a musical arrangement that allows the listener to experience the environment

around them (Schafer, 1986). In a literature story, a Soundscape can be musical representations of the scenery and characters in the storyline, for example Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*. The students then transferred that knowledge into finding the theme of a reading assignment (Telesco, 2010). These exercises taught students to isolate the main theme of the story, recognize how some characters simply play a supportive role, and how all of the elements work together to create the whole story (Telesco, 2010).

After three years of only adding a wind ensemble's live musical performance into the students' education, the results were significant. Taking into account that ethnicity and socioeconomic factors were controlled, the improvement was consistent. The third graders who participated in the pilot program had a reading score of 87%, as compared to their previous pretest score of 37%. A neighboring district noticed the results and employed a similar program, yielding a gain from 57% percent proficient in reading to 79% only two years later (Telesco, 2010). Researchers (Bolduc, 2008; Telesco, 2010) argue that these results show music playing a significant part in literacy improvement. Telesco (2010) summarizes it best, "the jury is in...we cannot delay any longer. We must recognize the cognitive, educational and social benefits accruing from a totally music-infused curriculum and demand that such a curriculum be put into place now" (p.17).

***Additional academic benefits.*** There are several attributes that can combine to create a strong academic student, including aptitude, self-concept, goal structures, attributions, and performance expectancies (MacIntyre, et al., 2012). MacIntyre et al. (2012) implemented a study to correlate the same attributes that created a strong academic student to those that create a strong musician. They surveyed 107 students, ranging in age from 14-17, on the attributes the students felt were important to musical achievement. Researchers settled on seven basic

characteristics to musical success. These were student beliefs, aptitude, self-concept, goal structures, attributions, performance expectancies, and parental involvement (MacIntyre, et al., 2012).

However, a study comparing four elementary classrooms may demonstrate evidence that the Intelligence Quotient (IQ) can actually be enhanced by music education. Schellenberg (2005) conducted a study in which four classrooms of six year olds were given piano or voice lessons for a year. Their IQ increased by 7.5 points, where the control groups had no increase in IQ. In a more recent study, Schellenberg (2005) followed a group of musicians from six years old to college ages. For those students who took lessons for six years or more, the increase in IQ was “small but significant” (Schellenberg, 2005). Distinctions could also be made in the students’ spatial reasoning, working memory and perceptual organization (Schellenberg, 2005).

***Improvements in self-esteem.*** A variety of research studies throughout the educational community have demonstrated that music can influence the overall self-concept (Brandt, 1980; McLendon, 1982; Martin, 1983; Parker, 2011; Sarokon, 1986; Sunyak & Kaufman, 1983). Lecky (1945) stated students that are academically successful have a higher self-esteem than those who perform poorly. Although his research was conducted over sixty years ago, his findings are consistent with current researchers (Darrow, Novak, Swedberg, Horton, & Rice, 2009; Putnam, 2009). In a study examining music education used as a mentoring program with at risk teens, music was shown to raise self-esteem and self-concept (Darrow et al., 2009). In a similar study, Choi (2010) shows evidence that music education can be used to lower aggression and raise self-esteem in elementary students. Although Hylton’s (1981) study did not directly address self-esteem, it did show a correlation between music and better self-awareness and knowledge. “The following statements regarding the choral music experience were rated highly

by participants: (1) to help me get to know myself better, (2) to feel more at ease, and (3) to help me be at peace with myself” (Hylton, 1981, p.289).

At the Music Educators’ National Conference, D’Amboise (1991) discussed how music allows students to learn and connect with who they are. In a study examining the relationship between music and self-confidence, researchers speculated that the more public performances these individuals experience, the higher the confidence level and comfortable they become as their confidence grows (Pelayo & Galang, 2013). It is also inferred that simply learning the art of singing raises self-confidence because the voice is a uniquely personal attribute. It can be demonstrated that positive response to public performance enhances self-concept (Pelayo & Galang, 2013). However, this being stated, the same argument could be used for the negative if public performances were not well supported.

In a compelling Scottish qualitative longitudinal study allowing young prisoners to use music as a part of their rehabilitation, one participant claimed the musical study "inspired us to see that maybe we have hidden talents we don't know about" (Anderson & Overy, 2010, p. 178). The students accomplished this goal by splitting up into groups to write new, original music forged by the struggles of their teen years. As teammates encouraged each other to press on during writing blocks, feelings of inadequacy, and embarrassment from singing in front of each other, a bond was created, helping them trust each other as well as themselves. In a study by Heyning (2010), researchers found similar hidden positive effects to group musical interaction. By singing together, members were given the opportunity to communicate better, listen and tune

to each other, and value teamwork. The students who felt accepted into the team had increased self-esteem and confidence.

In a related study of how music affects student self-esteem, Shields (2001) used structured interviews with students and teachers to link coded themes. “Teachers cited social interaction and camaraderie from being a part of an arts group as key in these students' lives (Shields, 2001, p. 278). In addition to self-esteem benefits, Diamantes, et al. (2002) stated that music allows young people to feel emotion, while also giving them the tools to control it (Diamantes et al., 2002). Music allows students to be a part of something larger than themselves, allowing them to find a social bond with fellow musicians as well as a musical one (Diamantes et al., 2002). In a qualitative study utilizing structured interviews of 60 music students, student ensemble participation demonstrated musical, academic, psychological, and social benefits (Adderly, Kennedy, & Berz, 2003). Additionally, the students commented on music as being important to their well-being and overall growth. (Adderly, et al., 2003). Adderly and Berz (2003) found students identified the music classroom as their “home away from home” (p. 190). Students who participated in the ensemble showed growth in academic, psychological, and musical, and social areas (Adderly & Berz, 2003). Students noted the social atmosphere of the music classroom encouraged relationships and personal growth. Telesco (2010) argued that because music education can affect so many aspects of a student’s growth and development, it should remain in public school curriculum and funding. Reynolds (1992) agrees. “Furthermore, when music programs become threatened in times of financial hardship, research investigating

the relationship between music education and self-concept may influence decisions regarding the continuation or termination of music programs” (p. 5).

In a mixed methods study exploring the development of self-efficacy amongst middle school students, Hirschorn (2011) used vocal improvisation to encourage students to find their own voice through working with others who were doing the same. The study demonstrated significant increases in Bandura’s (1984) theories of mastery and vicarious experience. Students participated in 16 weeks of daily vocal improvisational training. Because vocal improvisation was a genre of singing that was new to the students, self-esteem grew and fell as students navigated the musical and social pressures of individual vocal improvisation and working as a team. Although there were challenges throughout the study, when the students had successfully completed the task, the overall findings demonstrated collective enhanced student self-esteem (Hirschorn, 2011).

Bredenkamp and Copple (1997) stated a quality music program can enhance the self-esteem of elementary children through teaching problem-solving skills, self-management skills, and encouraging children to discover their own self-interests. When a child’s needs are met, they can find satisfaction in who they are (Bredenkamp & Copple, 1997). Since self-esteem is connected with a child’s ability to think of themselves as competent individuals, the study revealed music education to be a tool that may enhance student self-esteem (Hendrick, 1998).

**Theater education.** Theater arts have an impact on students academically and socially (Deasy, 2002; Pitts, 2007; Dietry, 2012). Students that participate in theater are likely to be more self-aware and expressive. By teaching a student to be reflective, they increase their awareness of their strengths and aptitude. In a qualitative study examining the residual effects of theater education in a rural, Midwestern public elementary school, Dietry (2012) interviewed 22

students, ranging in age of 11-16 years old, about their personal experience with theater. Results demonstrated development of academic and personal life skills that were transferred to other areas of life. Increased personal development was demonstrated in the areas of self-confidence, development of positive social networks, and stimulated desire for continued involvement with performing arts. However, research limitations effected this study. Since student interviews were conducted by their teacher, bias may be a factor in student responses. Also, the sample population consisted of mostly White students, so the study may not be generalized to the entire national public school population.

In his 2-year study researching the effect of dramatization on literary experiences on fifth grade students, Siddall (1999) found a distinct connection between students who used drama to perform literature and more fully understand the meaningful content it held. Students demonstrated an ability to comprehend more than just the simple meaning of the story. They understood the many different perspectives of the characters, their struggles, and their successes and were able to connect them to their own lives. Because Siddall (1999) played the role of both teacher and researcher, possible study bias may exist. However, the students did demonstrate they had personally connected to the literature in a more meaningful way. Likewise, in a qualitative study examining the effects of dramatic arts and critical thinking, Ferguson and Montgomerie (1999) found children ages four to eight years old were more likely to engage in understanding a character if they were given an opportunity to choose how they would act them out. The students became more empathetic towards the characters when they were given the freedom to explain for themselves how the story develops.

Drama can be a form of self-expression that can be used to connect with at-risk youth (Guetkow, 2002; Schiller, 2008). In some cases, drama is a more exciting avenue to challenge

students because they see it as more relevant to real life. Additionally, arts curriculum can be especially effective at increasing tolerance for others (Guetzkow, 2002, Matarasso, 1997; Williams, 1995). Hollander (2008) stated understanding student experience in drama class is an unexplored pathway to educating students more effectively. In a study discussing the classroom experiences of seventh grade theater students, interviews showed a pattern of students enjoying and benefiting from group work. They admired each other's strengths and built on their weaknesses. Many students commented on need for teacher encouragement. Thirdly, students enjoyed the independence in the classroom.

In a mixed methods survey examining the lifelong impact of theater on students, findings demonstrated not only an acceleration of adolescent learning in the areas of social development, but also “residual, positive lifelong impacts throughout adulthood” (McCammon, et al., 2012, p. 2). Instead of conducting a purely quantitative study measuring teacher and administrative responses, the “Lifelong Study” researchers felt it was important to interview who they believed were the most important recipients of the instruction, the students themselves. Interviews conducted with over 200 participants ranging in age from the twenties to seventies were asked to share their theater experiences. Findings showed quality theater programs enhance student “artistry, oral communication, personal motivation, initiative, commitment, self-confidence, self-esteem and identity” (McCammon, et al., p. 2).

In a study to determine if dramatics can increase student self-esteem, Huntsman (1982) found students who learned improvisational techniques showed an increase in self-confidence and self-esteem. Although the experimental group only consisted of 30 volunteers, the treatment group demonstrated a significant response to participating in theater education. Huntsman (1982) believed this result indicated theater can be helpful in improving student self-esteem. In a

longitudinal study, Catterall, Chapleau, and Iwanaga (1999) found students who participated in theater had a slightly more enhanced self-esteem than those of the control group. Even if the students' experience only yielded a slight increase in self-esteem, more research is needed to determine if prolonged musical theater study could enhance self-esteem more effectively.

Self-esteem plays a large role in identity development (Bandura, et al., 2003; Ward, 1994). In a qualitative study to examine the effect of theater education on the self-esteem of first grade students, Ward (1994) implemented a classroom production allowing every student to have a speaking role. The sample group consisted of seven African American students and fourteen Caucasian students, ranging in age from five to seven years. Their reading abilities, an important aspect of participating in a play, ranged from grade fluency to illiterate. Self-esteem was assessed by pre and post interviews and a self-assessment instrument. Ward (1994) found that all but three of her 21 students reported an increase in self-esteem. Although the sample size was small, Ward (1994) stated the increased in self-esteem was evident.

For many students, social acceptance is key to their personal self-esteem. In a study to examine the effect of creative dramatics in relation to male self-identity (Alloway, Gilbert, Gilbert, & Henderson, 2003), researchers found the boys who were already socially popular performed theatrical scenework better than boys who felt they were not as accepted. Therefore, they performed better than those boys who struggled with social acceptance.

The theater classroom can be a unique forum for discovering and discussing cultural similarities and differences, beginning with the teacher. Blazar (2011) stated cultural tensions, alive in many classrooms, can be exposed and explored through theater rehearsal and performance. The dialogue of the script allows students to hold true conversations amongst each other, facing racial and cultural differences. "Engaging students in conversations around cultural

identity through theater-thereby building relationships necessary for academic growth in my students and professional growth for me as a teacher- is something that happened coincidentally” (Blazar, 2011, p. 295). Cultural differences between teachers and students must also be addressed. Rich (1984) argued, “When someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of physic disequilibrium, as if you looked in the mirror and saw nothing” (p. 199). Rich (1984) goes on to stress how incredibly important it is to allow a student to see themselves and to be seen by those around them. “Invisibility is a dangerous condition” (p. 199). In a theater classroom, students can create characters that represent themselves, who they are, and how they want to interpret their environment. This “mirroring” allows students to see themselves reflected in the world around them.

**Musical theater.** Musical theater education combines two genres of artistic expression, music and theater. As previously discussed, music education may be academically and socially beneficial, subsequently raising student self-esteem (Zuffiano, et al., 2013). Theater education also demonstrates enhanced student self-esteem (Pitts, 2007; Scott, 2011; McCammon, et al., 2012). Because musical theater addresses multiple intelligences, students can be educated on a variety of levels (Lewicki, 2002). Creative dramatics have been used successfully to promote learning across the curriculum (Fleming, 2007). Gardner (1983) supported teaching students in a variety of methods to reach every learning style. These styles include; visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, linguistic, and logical-mathematical (Gardner, 1983). Through music, dance, and dialogue, three major components of musical theater, these various learning styles are met.

In an extracurricular activity examining the effects of musical theater on high school students, Pitts (2007) produced the show *Anything Goes* to discover possible links between

musical theater education and self-esteem. The study was prompted by the absence in the research literature investigating extra-curricular activities that form a vital part of many young people's arts development. The project focused on individual motivation and experience, exploring the effects of the school show not just on its participants, but also on the broader school community. The study showed slight increase in student self-awareness and self-esteem as well as an overall feeling of having fun. Theater education allows students to become someone else through role play and method acting. Even students who shied away from the stage initially reported they enjoyed theater more than they expected. Pitts (2007) reported that after interviewing cast members, transcripts demonstrated increased self-esteem.

Lee (1983) found musical theater to be a successful genre for not only enhancing musical and dramatic growth but also allowed for personal discipline and achievement. In 1972, Brennen discussed the lack of experimental research in the musical theater realm. To help address this gap in literature, Perrine (1989) conducted a qualitative study to; (a) determine the changes in levels of middle school students' estimation of self-worth after participation in a musical production; (b) to determine changes in the students' attitudes toward music classes after participation in a musical production; and (c) to determine gains in scores on the Torrence Test of Creative Thinking after participation in a musical production. After a 6-week rehearsal schedule and performances, findings showed an increased in creativity and elaboration. Since there is a lack of literature available exploring the benefits of musical theater, researchers

stressed the importance of continued research examining the possible link between musical theater and possible increased student self-esteem (Brennen, 1972; Lee, 1983; Perrine, 1989).

### **Review of Methodological Issues**

The literature review examined a wide variety of school environments and student experiences. This speaks to the validity of the research studies. However, there may be some weaknesses in the findings due to the sample populations used to support the research. In metropolitan cities, areas consisting of 50,000 people or more (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), arts education can be more prevalent in public schools (Khattri, Riley & Kane, 1997). In rural settings, however, arts education is often not as readily available to public school students (Palavin & Kane, 1990). The U.S. Census Bureau (2012) defines a rural community as consisting of 2,500 people or less, leaving their school districts to face more budget constraints than larger cities (Khattri et al., 1997). Studies have been conducted showing evidence arts education can have a positive impact on academic achievement and self-esteem in metropolitan cities such as Toronto (Vitale, 2011), Chicago (Hansen & Bernstorf, 2002), and Winston-Salem (Telesco, 2010), but these studies may not be generalized to school districts in agrarian communities. This research study will examine how musical theater education affects self-esteem in a suburban area in Minnesota. The study may reveal a gap in arts education between metropolitan, suburban, and rural communities.

A second weakness in the literature review is how factors that influence self-esteem are determined. Although school environment and social pressures may greatly effect student self-esteem, there may be outside qualifying aspects of self-esteem such as include parental

involvement, socio-economic status, and physical development and appearance (Lavoie, 2002). The literature review may need to include studies that recognize this reality.

### **Synthesis of Research Findings**

A majority of researchers reported a positive correlation between music, theater, and musical theater education and increased student self-esteem (Brandt, 1980; Deasy, 2002; Dietry, 2012; Martin, 1983; McLendon, 1982; Sarokon, 1986; Sunyak & Kaufman, 1983; Zuffiano, et al., 2013). In addition, theater education has also shown evidence of supporting positive student self-esteem (McCammon, et al., 2012; Perrine, 1989; Pitts, 2007; Scott, 2011). Researchers demonstrated evidence of positive influences on student self-esteem in most studies conducted.

### **Critique of Previous Research**

**Lack of scholarly research.** Understanding the potential variables and constraints of scholarly research, this researcher does not find fault with the results of previous research data. Studies examining student self-esteem are faced with a variety of issues including differing personalities, family backgrounds, and socio-economic class, so determining what actually affects self-esteem can be challenging. Although there is a vast amount of data examining student self-esteem, it is sometimes inconclusive. In an impressive 14 yearlong longitudinal study of adolescent self-esteem, Erol and Orth (2011) disagreed with previous research that the adolescent years show a drop in student self-esteem. Along with other studies, the authors claimed that self-esteem actually rises during these years (Huang, 2010; Pullmann, Allik, & Realo, 2009). Erol and Orth examined (2011) over 7,000 individuals ranging from age 14-30 through eight data collection assessments. Although Erol and Orth (2011) argued that self-esteem does not decrease during adolescence, the authors did observe results that if self-esteem was going to fall, the middle school years were a particularly vulnerable time for this regression.

Although Erol and Orth (2011) did not agree with previous studies that self-esteem falls each year a student is enrolled in school, the authors did agree with previous studies that mastery skill is the main contributing factor to increased self-esteem. However, for those researchers who question the importance of student self-esteem, Bandura (1993) offered this: “Effective intellectual functioning requires much more than simply understanding the factual knowledge and reasoning operations given activities” (p. 117).

**Longevity.** One consistent criticism of performing arts research is that they are not conducted for a long enough period of time. Workshops that only last two weeks or even a month may not have lasting self-esteem effects (Guetzkow, 2002). Those studies sometimes made inferences that cannot be fully supported. Guetzkow (2002) also warned against surveying people that may already be involved in the arts, producing results that are “anecdote-rich and evidence poor” (p. 20). He suggested a more random choosing of an arts treatment group. Additionally, thorough funding for these studies may be lacking for long term studies.

**Need for more research in diverse academic environments.** A final gap in the available literature is how musical theater affects the self-esteem of nontraditional students, including those in charter schools. This researcher would suggest more studies be conducted in non-traditional schools such as private, charter, and magnet schools, in addition to the public school environment.

Though some research contradicts itself, there does seem to be enough evidence to demonstrate strong self-esteem as a worthy educational goal. However, concerning musical theater, there is a significant lack of research. Therefore, more research should be conducted to

add to existing research on how the performing arts may positively affect student self-esteem. This study hopes to contribute to this literature gap.

## **Chapter 2 Summary**

In conclusion, early evidence reveals a possible connection between musical theater education and increased student self-esteem. Evidence has demonstrated that music education benefited students in the areas of mathematics, reading, literacy, and self-esteem (Brandt, 1980; Darrow, Novak, Swedberg, Horton, & Rice, 2009; Martin, 1983; McLendon, 1982; Parker, 2011; Putnam, 2009; Sarokon, 1986; Sunyak & Kaufman, 1983; Zuffiano, et al., 2013). Likewise, theater education was demonstrated to be beneficial to student self-esteem (Deasy, 2002; Dietry, 2012; Scott, 2011). Although there were questions of validity concerning generalization, most of the evidence supported the arts influencing positive self-esteem. Therefore, because musical theater is a combination of these two genres, musical theater education may also benefit students. Because the field of musical theater education has not been completely researched, more studies are warranted to examine the links between this field and student self-esteem.

## Chapter 3: Research Methodology

### Introduction

Research has demonstrated middle school to be a particularly challenging time in an adolescent's life (Seidman, et al., 1994; Simmons, 1977; Wigfield, et al., 1991). Self-esteem may decrease due to differences in school structure from elementary to middle school, lack of parental involvement, and difficult peer relationships (Hoge, Hanson, & Smit, 1990; Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1997). Although healthy self-esteem is not necessarily an educational goal, self-esteem affects students' academic achievement, social interactions, and overall self-efficacy beliefs (Britner & Pajares, 2006; Chubb, et al., 1997; Kuperminc, et. al., 2001; Scott, 2011). Students who have low self-esteem struggle to find success academically, socially, and emotionally (Britner & Pajares, 2006). Students with lower self-esteem carry unhealthy habits into adulthood and are more likely to suffer from stressful relationships, poor financial decisions, lost career opportunities, and mental health issues (Rowe & Hall, 1991; Trzesniewski, et al., 2006; Sang, 2015).

Music and theater have been shown to be instrumental in helping students achieve a higher sense of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and sense of accomplishment (Brandt, 1980; Deasy, 2002; Dietry, 2012; Martin, 1983; McLendon, 1982; Sarokon, 1986; Sunyak & Kaufman, 1983; Zuffiano, et al., 2013). However, musical theater, the combination of these two artistic genres, has not been widely researched for its influence on student self-esteem. Through a qualitative case study research design, the researcher examined the possible effects of musical theater education on middle school student self-esteem. Through a literature review and research

process, the researcher also addressed the gap in research literature concerning possible links between musical theater and positive student self-esteem.

### **Research Questions**

Through this research study, I asked the following questions:

1. Does musical theater education influence middle school student self-esteem?
2. If musical theater education can effectively enhance student self-esteem, how can teachers integrate this method of teaching into an already crowded standards driven curriculum?
3. If student self-esteem is enhanced in the musical theater classroom, can higher self-esteem be transferred into the academic classroom?

### **Purpose and Design of Research Study**

Middle school students often struggle with low self-esteem due to puberty, body appearance, family factors, and school experiences. (Hoge, Hanson, & Smit, 1990; Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1997). This low self-esteem can affect motivation and success (Lunenber, 2011; Wigfield & Eccles, 1999). Some performing arts curriculum, however, has demonstrated success in enhancing student self-esteem (Brandt, 1980; Choi, 2010, Pelayo & Galang, 2013; Martin, 1983; McLendon, 1982; Sarokon, 1986; Sunyak & Kaufman, 1983). Music education and theater education has been richly studied (Brandt, 1980; Martin, 1983; McLendon, 1982; Sarokon, 1986; Sunyak & Kaufman, 1983; Zuffiano, et al., 2013). Researchers have also discovered that peers, families, and teachers have a tremendous effect on student self-esteem (Canfield, 1990; Scott, 2011). Musical theater, however, has not been fully examined as an avenue to helping teachers influence student self-esteem. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine how musical theater effects middle school student student-self-esteem. This

study is important because in addition to addressing the problem of a gap in current literature, this study may contribute to the current knowledge base of how the performing arts may enhance student learning. By discovering new techniques to reach a diversity of learners, such as using cross-curricular collaboration that allows for intentional alignment of coursework, teachers may discover new meaningful practices to help students comprehend and retain academic curriculum. Continuing to integrate the arts into national educational standards may improve student self-esteem and academic performance by enhancing student creativity and problem-solving skills, equipping them with multiple pathways to solve difficult challenges.

The arts have been previously included in educational curriculum guidelines. However, past indications revealed “extreme inequities in students’ access to arts education, indicating that arts education is not universally available, is too often limited to music and art, and is inconsistent across grade levels” (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). The current national standards, falling under legislation entitled Every Student Success Act (ESSA), provide guidelines to educators on teaching students how to understand and appreciate the arts by exposing student to the arts’ positive life attributes. Artistic literacy is a combination of philosophical foundation and lifelong goals (National Standards, 2014). The National Standards list the positive life influences the arts can play over a lifetime. First, the arts serve as a form of communication. The arts teach students how to express themselves, have increased empathy for others, and allow them to think outside themselves (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Palmer (2004) stated that when a student feels safe in an environment, they can speak and hear truth. This phenomenon allows the student to look at the world around them outside of their opinions and beliefs. The arts also allow for personal

realization. The arts allow students a space to support and encourage growth, resulting in self-actualization. Bennis (2015) encouraged students to develop themselves so they can grow into who they want to be. A fully developed student is one who is an original, not a copy (Bennis, 2015).

Next, the arts are a bridge to culture and history. The National Arts Standards (2014) place an emphasis on culture understanding. Communication and mutual trust are key to creating and maintaining cultural relationships (Hu-Chan & Underhill, 2003). Understanding artwork outside of a student's own heritage provides insights into cultures and societies, while also providing opportunities to make connections to their own background (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

Artistically literate people recognize and appreciate artwork from a variety of historical periods and cultures.

Finally, the arts serve as means to overall wellbeing and community engagement. Markie (1994) encouraged educators to involve their students in their surrounding communities. Teaching is not just about informing a student about a subject (Markie, 1994). Teaching includes opening a student's mind to how they can incorporate themselves into a working society. Exposing students to a strong community enhances students' social, emotional, physical, and academic development (Epstein, 2011). Connecting students to their community equips students with cultural capital and community relationships (Epstein, 2011; Sanders, 2006). Community partnerships strengthen student learning while allowing the community to be

part of the process (Epstein, 2011; Palmer, 2004). Palmer (2004) called learning a paradox. The student needs solitude to find themselves, but also needs the community to challenge them.

## **Research Design**

It is imperative to use the correct research design to ensure proper research goals, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, and conclusions. Without clear methodology practices, results are skewed, rendering findings invalid. Under the umbrella of research designs, there are a variety of research theories. By understanding the characteristics of research study design and the theories within it, researchers can make an informed decision on whether that design model can effectively address the essential questions to their research study.

This study used qualitative design as the overall research approach, utilizing case study research as the main methodology to determine the effects of the musical theater program's process on student self-esteem. In this study, the qualitative aspects of the research design allowed the student's experience to shape the findings. Instead of the researcher bringing a preconceived notion of the results, the participant shared multiple perspectives of their experience (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative researchers do not rely on one single data source (Creswell, 2013; McMillan, 2012; Stake, 2010; Yin, 2012). In qualitative design, data may be collected from documents, artifacts, interviews, observations, or journals. After collecting data from a variety of sources, researchers then synthesize the information to paint a clear picture of the population. Qualitative researchers allow their themes to grow as they discover them. They do not come into the study only searching for one answer, but allow the data to guide their next steps. The interview process allows for the main themes of the findings to emerge. This inductive/deductive process allows the data to shape the study by the themes that develop. "The flexible format permits open-ended interviews, if properly done, to reveal how (participants)

construct reality and think about situations, not just to provide the answers to a researcher's specific questions and own implicit construction of reality" (Yin, 2012, p. 10).

Qualitative researchers are willing to examine multiple perspectives to reveal a layered, inclusive, detailed account of the population.

There are distinct characteristics that frame qualitative research design (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 2010; McMillan, 2012). Qualitative researchers are more apt to be in the population's natural setting, collecting data as they interact with the participants (Creswell, 2013).

Participants are rarely brought into a research environment for study. Conducting the study and collecting evidence in the natural group setting is a key aspect to qualitative design. Qualitative design can be complex, asking the researcher to examine many different aspects of a group.

McMillan (2012) shared this point of view. Researchers using a qualitative design understand that there are many aspects to a participant's perspective, and relating those differing aspects to the context of the phenomena is paramount (McMillan, 2012). Crouch and McKenzie (2006) proposed that including less than 20 participants in a qualitative study helps a researcher build and maintain a close relationship, encouraging honest communication. In selecting study participants, Mason (2010) reminded researchers the guiding principle should be the concept of saturation. In a homogenous group, saturation achieved more easily. McMillan (2012) also admitted qualitative design may seem disjunctive in the beginning since many points of view are being expressed. At the outset of the study, the data may seem too unconnected to make support a theory, but as the data evolves, more specific findings are generated (McMillan, 2012).

Case study is a qualitative research design model that explores the experiences of a participant or group (McMillan, 2012). The goal of the case study researcher is to observe an in-depth understanding of a single or small number of cases studied in their real-world contexts

(Yin, 2012). A case study is limited in scope to one specific experience or entity (McMillan, 2012). According to Yin (2003), a case study design should be considered when:

(a) the focus of the study is to answer “how” and “why” questions; (b) you cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved in the study; (c) you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study; or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context (Baxter & Jack, 2009, p. 545)

The characteristics of case study research may be beneficial to this research study in a variety of ways. Because it is a qualitative design, the study included rich narratives from the participants and detailed observations of their experiences and behaviors. According to Creswell (2013), a case study explores an issue or phenomena that occurs within a “bounded system” (p. 73). A bounded system refers to the study examining a specific experience (Creswell, 2013). In this specific study, the data was bounded within a class of middle school students who were participating in a musical theater production over a span of three months.

Following the qualitative design model, the target population in this study was comprised of 31 middle school students who were observed in their regular music classroom where they have participated in music education for most of their earlier elementary years. It is a familiar and safe environment for students to learn. Students in grades five through seven participated in a semester-long musical theater class. The class met two times a week for 40 minutes a class period and was comprised of students who have had very little past musical theater experience. This class was required of students in grades five through seven, so the sample was populated with students who chose to be in the class along with students who were simply fulfilling their class requirements. The musical production, *The Music Man Jr.*, was chosen as the performance

piece for a variety of reasons. First, the gender breakdown of the cast was conducive to the gender distribution of the class. *The Music Man Jr.* requires 10 leading male roles and 17 leading female roles. The remainder of the roles are chorus members who participate in the large group song and dance scenes. Secondly, the musical is set in River City, Iowa, which is culturally very similar to Minnesota. Students studied and created characters that reflected the societal norms of Iowa citizens in 1912, which reminded them closely of their older relatives. Thirdly, the production has been adapted from the original full length production to be appropriate for middle school abilities and singing voices. The performance lasted 75 minutes. All students were cast in a role in the musical. Precautions were taken to protect students by not casting them into roles in which they would be extremely uncomfortable.

Student surveys measured self-esteem before and after being exposed to musical theater education. At the onset of study, the sample population was given consent forms so that all ethical issues were considered. Crouch and McKenzie (2006) reminded researchers that a small sample size does not necessarily impact the study negatively. Therefore, if up to 60% of parents did not consent to the study, there would still be enough remaining students to validate results. At the onset on the study, 11 families granted permission to participate in the study.

The case study students participated in semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted at three interval points of the semester class (before, during, and after the musical production) and discussed self-esteem issues. Parents and teachers of participating case study students also participated in the interview process at the same intervals. All interviews were conducted during non-school hours and off school property to protect the identity of participants, their parents, and their teachers. Open ended interview questions allowed students, teachers, and parents to describe any changes in classroom behavior, social interactions, or family

relationships that had become apparent in the student as a result of participating in musical theater education. Narrative stories allowed the individuals to share their experiences which allowed the researcher to see them and how they saw themselves (McMillan, 2012). Creswell (2013) believed qualitative research allows for participants to truly share their experiences. Qualitative research is especially helpful when the researcher seeks to empower the participants to share their stories, speak in their own voice, and reduce the power struggle that sometimes arises between researcher and participant (Creswell, 2013).

At the beginning of the study, at the midway point, and at the conclusion of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participating students, their parents and their teachers to discuss student academic achievement, social interactions, and self-esteem issues. Over the three-month rehearsal schedule, daily observations were made by the student's academic teachers and myself. A daily observation journal was kept by the researcher to record student behavior, using a rubric to guide and frame the observations. Weekly documents such as homework assignments, art projects, and other pertinent records were collected. In their musical theater class, students performed scene work and vocal selections weekly. The researcher used a rubric to gauge student preparation and confidence to reveal evidence of possible increasing self-esteem. In addition, projects from academic classes were collected to observe any change in academic behavior. Record, document, and artifact collection are an important part of qualitative design because they can combine together to create a tapestry of events, allowing the researcher to more fully understand the population. In addition, record, document, and artifact collection help to triangulate the observed and interviewed behaviors of a participant. Whittemore, Chase, and Mandle (2001) stated studies that gather data from a variety of viewpoints honor the science and art of research. Yin (2012) stated triangulation establishes a clear line of evidence that ties

data together. This, in turn, allows the findings to reflect a more complete picture of the individual.

### **Research Population and Sampling Method**

This study was conducted at a private K–12 Christian school in Minnesota. The school educates a total population of 100–300 students. Although students were immersed in a classical education atmosphere, musical theater had not been a part of their arts curriculum. The researcher examined the effects of musical theater on the self-esteem of middle school students, ranging from fifth through seventh grades. The purposeful sample was the entire five through seven grade population of 31 students. Convenience purposeful sampling was used to choose the study participants. Purposeful sampling is best used in qualitative study when the researcher seeks to collect information-rich data about a specific phenomenon with limited resources (Patton, 2002). Bernard (2002) and Spradley (1979) stated convenience sampling when participants are both available and willing to share their opinions and experiences. Since the participants attend a relatively small school limited by its student population, convenience sampling was the most realistic method of including participating students. After parental and student permission forms were disclosed to study minor participants (Appendix K), 11 families granted permission to be study participants.

### **Instrumentation**

A Likert survey modeled after the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Survey (Appendix A) was used to assess pre and post production self-esteem levels. Class observations and social interactions, academic records, and artifacts were collected to determine positive or negative

interactions with the production. In addition, student, teacher, and parent interviews were conducted to observe student experiences during the production.

### **Data Collection**

Following the guidelines that distinguish qualitative design from other forms of research, this study occurred in a natural setting (Creswell, 2013). Students in this study were working and rehearsing in their traditional music classroom. Secondly, qualitative design uses the researcher as a key instrument. Qualitative researchers collect data themselves through examining student documents, observing student behavior, and interviewing participants (Creswell, 2013). Although a researcher may use tools such as interviews or observing participant behavior, the researcher uses open ended questions, not questionnaires to collect and synthesize data. Next, qualitative design utilizes multiple methods of data collection instead of relying on one source for information (Creswell, 2013). Interview is most widely used data collection technique, allowing themes to emerge among participants. As themes begin to emerge from participant's interviews and behaviors, a focus for the theory begins to take shape.

After collecting data from a variety of sources, researchers then synthesize the information to paint a clear picture of the population. While Stake (2010) referred to qualitative research as interpretive, experiential, and situational, McMillan (2012) stated that qualitative researchers accept there may be more than one reality represented in the participants. The author (2012) continued to state context is very important in understanding what is being observed and investigated. McMillan (2010) believed that research should be without outside controls or

constraints and that the situational context of the study is imperative in understanding participant behavior.

After data collection is complete, qualitative researchers use complex reasoning through inductive and deductive logic. Qualitative researchers allow their themes to grow as they discover them. They do not come into the study only searching for one answer, but allow the data to guide their next steps. In the qualitative design, change and growth happens. When the findings are complete, there is a detailed account of the population, creating a holistic account of their experiences. The process of qualitative design grows and changes shape as it evolves.

When the rehearsal process was complete, students performed their musical production for parents, teachers, peers, and community members. After the performance, participating students, their parents, and their teachers participated in a post-production interview. Students also participated in a post-production self-esteem survey. These data collection tools were administered off-site and during non-school hours.

### **Identification of Attributes**

In studying the effects of musical theater education on the self-esteem of middle school students, there are key words that require definition so the study can be comprehended clearly. Self-esteem can be defined as the extent to which one values themselves (Blaskovich & Tomaka, 1991). This differs slightly from self-efficacy, which is a person's belief in their ability to accomplish a skill or task (Bandura, 2003). In using case study research as a framework for the study, the terms participants and researcher should be addressed. Participants as those who are allowing themselves to be interviewed, observed, and studied over the three-month research period. Minor participants give consent through assent approval. University of Virginia (2010) defined the researcher as the principal investigator and clinical research coordinator involved

with study. A participant observer is a researcher who participates in the study activities and records observations (Spradley, 1980). Participant observation extends beyond naturalistic observation because the observer is a "player" in the action (Spradley, 1980).

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

When self-esteem surveys were distributed and collected at the beginning and conclusion of the study, mean, median, and mode figures were calculated using an Excel spreadsheet. At the conclusion of the interview section of data collection, the entire transcript of participating student, parent, and teacher interviews was read. A software designed to identify emergent themes was utilized to manage the large amounts of data. As major themes of the participant's experiences surfaced, the themes were grouped them into categories. This process began in an open-ended manner. The data revealed common themes in the transcripts. During the second read through, highlighted keywords helped reveal the main themes in the participant's experiences. In stage three, these themes were coded and "chunked" together using an open coding method (Creswell, 2013; Gibbs, 2011). Coding is listing groups of data together that represent the same phenomenon or experience. Researchers comb through the data and look for codes or themes of the same idea coming up repetitively. Those ideas are then placed together to represent similarity (Gibbs, 2011). As the coding continues, repetition was removed from the responses. Axial coding was utilized to interrelate and compare the emergent themes. Finally, selective coding helped determine the driving theme of the study. Emergent themes were then compared to the original research questions and previous literature.

### **Limitations of Research Design**

According to Aquinas and Edwards (2014), it is important to recognize, acknowledge, and accept the limitations of research. Causes of limitations include data collection methods,

lack of prior research, effect size, and instrumentation. There were limitations in the usage of methodologies in the study discussed due to the limited number of minority students in specific demographic regions of the United States. Due to the low number of minority students in the specific area, this study was limited largely to Caucasian children and therefore is not able to be generalized to other populations. Also, most children were from a similar socioeconomic background, so the study only reflects the outcomes of upper middle class community students. Additionally, the teacher-student ratio at the sample school was thirteen to one, much smaller than the rest of the nation's classrooms. Hence, the study may not be applicable to the outcomes of larger cities' students. Finally, the school only educates 100–300 students, so the evidence found in this study may not be generalized to larger school district. Sampling may be too small to ensure the results can be generalized to a larger population.

The first delimitation of the study addresses the duration of the research. Since the middle school musical theater class only meets for one semester, the study was only conducted over a three-month period. Sanders (2004) stated studies that are not conducted over a longer period of time may lack validity. Sanders (2004) also stated in studies that are not conducted over a considerable amount of time it is difficult to be clear if results will be sustainable or permanent.

**Survey Research.** In addressing the use of survey research, surveys are valuable because it allows students to report their own thoughts and feelings (Adams & Lawrence, 2014).

However, survey research comes with a social desirability bias that may affect middle school

students, especially those who want to appear positive in the teacher's eyes. Bias may be a factor in this study, even though there were specific precautions against bias in place.

**Lack of Generalizability.** A key aspect of case study research is a clearly defined and narrow study focus. However, this narrow focus draws criticism from researchers because of a lack of generalizability (Horn, 2002). Studies that focus on a very specific situation and circumstance may not apply to the rest of the general population. In addition, because case study research studies a certain social phenomena, it often cannot be replicated in a repeated study (Checkland & Howell, 1997). However, Melrose (2010) discussed Stake's (1986, 1995) concept of naturalistic generalization, where the details and descriptions of a study allow readers to recognize similar patterns to their own experiences. The reader can then decide if the two experiences are alike enough to warrant generalizations. Lincoln and Guba (1985) expanded the idea of generalizability further by debating it is more the responsibility of the receiver to interpret the study findings as transferable to their context or not. Once the researcher has made thorough reports of their data, their responsibility of transferability is complete. The receiver becomes the researcher best equipped to determine generalizability. These authors do not suggest that naturalistic generalization should permanently take the place of traditional validity, but because educational action learning studies strive to improve learning opportunities for all students, naturalistic generalization may be an avenue to opening studies to be more widely practiced in other educational settings (McNiff, 2013).

## **Validation**

**Credibility.** McMillan (2012) defined credibility as the "extent to which the data, data analysis, and conclusions are accurate and trustworthy" (p. 302). Credibility and validity are essential to any research study. Creswell (2009) suggested eight procedures that can be used to

enhance credibility. This study was able to meet only six of them, leaving some room for limitation. First, Creswell (2009) stated studies without prolonged engagement can suffer from a lack of validity. It is important for the researcher to be closely engaged with the participants and the setting to provide details for the narrative that ultimately reveals results. Because this study only occurred over a three-month period, credibility may have suffered in this area.

Member checking, a second facet to enhancing credibility, is completed when the researcher asks the participants to review interpretations and conclusions, and the participants confirm the findings (Creswell, 2009). This can be accomplished by sharing drafts of final products, in writing or by interviews, and allowing participants opportunities to make comments. Member checking will be difficult to achieve with middle school students. Likert surveys and interviews were kept anonymous, so students were not be able to discuss study results at the conclusion of the data collection.

Triangulation is a technique that seeks convergence of findings and cross-validation among different sources and methods of data collection (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). In this study, triangulation will be achieved by using student surveys, observations, and interviews. In addition to reviewing three aspects of the student's data, triangulation was increased by collecting interview data from parents and academic teachers. Academic teachers also supplied student records such as art projects, classroom writings, and classroom observations to support their interview findings.

Employing negative case analysis is another tool to increase validity (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is beneficial to include information that contradicts themes, patterns, and overall results. In this study, negative case analysis can be achieved by reporting all negative findings. Because this study includes students who do not want to take the class,

negative case analysis was expected. Next, peer debriefing, a procedure that asks a colleague to review the study for credibility and determine if the results follow the data, was completed to ensure validity. This study also utilized an external auditor. Like a peer debriefer, the external auditor examines all aspects of the study to look for coherence, reasonableness, accuracy, data analysis, interpretation, and conclusions, and points out weaknesses or threats to credibility (Creswell, 2009).

Creswell (2009) suggested the use of researcher reflection to increase credibility. The researcher's self-reflection of possible biases, background, and values supports the validity of the study. Kemmis (2005) stated reflection is not merely an intellectual endeavor, but is completed with an action-based response. "Reflection is shaped by ideology; in turn, it shapes ideology" (Kemmis, 2005, p. 140). It is not just an internal language, but a form of social communication. As a result of individual self-reflection, social norms can be challenged and more efficient communication can be established. Because there is constant reflection occurring during action research, the study is emergent and fluid (Litchman, 2011). The case study researcher welcomes these challenges. The research can then influence the educational system for the greater good of the students it serves.

Finally, this study used thick descriptions to gather data from participants. Credible qualitative studies use detailed, in-depth, thorough, and extensive descriptions (Creswell, 2009; McMillan, 2012). McMillan (2012) concurred. Validity was enhanced in this study by allowing students, their parents, and their teachers to openly share their honest experiences and observations throughout the study. The researcher encouraged detailed recollections of their feelings, struggles, and successes. McMillan (2012) appreciated rich descriptions because it allowed the researcher to look beyond numbers and facts. From there, themes emerged from the

accounts of all 11 participants. The case study researcher accepted that in this framework design, themes will replace theories (Checkland & Howell, 1997). Whittemore, Chase, and Mandle (2001) stated validity standards are more difficult to maintain in qualitative research because of the need for not only research rigor but creativity intertwined into one study. If qualitative studies are not framed well, their results run the risk of becoming ambiguous and difficult to measure (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001).

**Dependability.** Shenton (2004) defined dependability as “if the work were repeated, in the same context, with the same methods and with the same participants, similar results would be obtained” (p. 71). Although this standard of validity is difficult to uphold in qualitative research, the best method to ensure dependability is for the researcher to be as detailed as possible in their reporting of methodology, allowing a future researcher to replicate the study and report similar findings. Fidel (1993) and Marshall and Rossman (1999) stated any change in study phenomena are difficult to repeat and may skew findings. Florio-Ruane (2001) agreed and described a qualitative design as a type of snapshot into an experience, one that is difficult to repeat. Nonetheless, to increase dependability, the researcher should take every precaution to carefully detail the research design to frame the next set of studies.

Shenton (2004) stated three steps may help to increase dependability. First, describing what is planned for the study and accomplished during every phase of the study. Shenton (2004) suggested utilizing great detail to explain every step of the research process. Secondly, the researcher should be very specific on the operational detail of data gathering, addressing to the very small detail of what was done in the field. Thirdly, the researcher should reflect on the project, evaluating the effectiveness of the processes taken. “It is the researcher’s creativity, sensitivity, flexibility and skill in using the verification strategies that determines the reliability

and validity of the evolving study” (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, & Spiers, 2002, p. 17). Following careful and complete research guidelines will increase the dependability of a qualitative research design.

### **Expected Findings**

Though this research, I expected to discover musical theater can have a positive effect of the self-esteem of middle school students. Prior to the onset of the research study, I expected students to be cautious about their participation in a musical theater production, especially because it will be a new experience for most of the students in the class. However, at the conclusion of the study, I expected over 80% of the chosen twelve students will express some kind of positive reaction to performing in a musical theater production. Students may feel more confident in learning a new skill or may feel increased self-esteem when they discovered talents they did not know they possessed. These results will add to the small body of growing research that supports the theory that musical theater education can be beneficial to middle school student self-esteem. In addition, if musical theater education demonstrates promise in helping students increase their self-esteem or academic awareness, teachers may be encouraged to use musical theater to connect to academic subjects. One example could be studying the Broadway production *Les Miserables* to enhance a historical study of the French Revolution. Cross-curricular activities can be an added tool in engaging students in academic and arts activities.

### **Ethical Issues**

**Conflict of interest assessment.** Slavin (2007) warned researchers against their own personal bias. Qualitative researchers must always keep their own bias in check (Slavin, 2007). Because the participants in the study are students in my class, I may have held a perceived authority position over them which may hinder their ability to be open and honest

about their experiences in the musical theater production. However, because behaviors in qualitative research are documented as they occur and are not modified, coerced, or manipulated, this documentation may have counteracted this conflict of interest. A detailed approach helps the researcher to observe a complete description of the participants (McMillan, 2012). One benefit to the case study research interview process is that the narrative is a true reflection of the participant's experience. It is not being interpreted by a researcher, it is flowing directly from the person experiencing the phenomena.

**Researcher's positions.** One negative aspect of qualitative research is the observations being recorded are the perceptions of the observer. The observations are shaded by the observer's personality and feelings. Case study researcher investigators may be susceptible to researcher bias because of their strong connection to the topic beforehand (Sagor, 2011). As a researcher, it was my responsibility to only report findings that occur in this particular study. I avoided relying on my experiences in my personal and professional background. As a young student, I found confidence, a strong sense of self-efficacy, and enhanced self-esteem by participating in the performing arts, most specifically music. McGuire (2014) stated it may be difficult to part with our prior knowledge when investigating a phenomenon. Although twenty years of teaching have demonstrated the arts may have positively impacted the students in my classroom, Machi and McEvoy (2012) warned a "researcher hobbled by unchecked bias can only produce biased findings" (p. 19). While conducting my upcoming research study, it was imperative that I separated my previous observations and experiences with students and simply focus on the current and recent data.

In this study, one way to avoid researcher bias was to only focus on the study at hand. Litchman (2011) warned of researcher bias. The role of the case study researcher is to carefully

examine their own position so they do not search out their own agenda (Litchman, 2011). Data would not be compared to past observations; only current data was reported. Also, researchers need to be open to negative results. Although my own performing arts experience was positive, there are many students that cannot relate to my experience and truly dislike being on stage. As a researcher, I was prepared for this reality. Only then can clear and honest findings be reported. Mezirow (1990) encouraged this reality and stated that only when we are released from our previous perspectives can we be open to new ones.

**Ethical issues in the study.** Creswell (2013) warned that ethical issues can arise in various stages of the study, from its' inception to publication. Researchers need to concern themselves with the ethical considerations of remaining outside of the study, maintaining honest communications and disclosures with the participants, and not labeling those being studied (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) continued to state that researchers must be sensitive to power struggles and the plight of the participants of any given study. To ensure all ethical considerations were addressed in this study, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Concordia University-Portland was consulted to protect the rights and identities of the students involved prior to the study commencing.

Yin (2009) stated human subjects need careful protection during the research process. Case study methodology may not be as structured as other research designs, so the researcher must take every precaution in protecting the participants. Following Yin's (2009) guidelines, the following steps were implemented to ensure participant safety and protection: informed consent, lack of deception, privacy and confidentiality, and additional precautions to protect children.

Prior to beginning the research, the study was explained fully to the participants. Because all students were minors during the course of the study, minor assent (Appendix K) as

well as parental consent (Appendix L) was obtained. During the collection of data, students rehearsed in their classroom, a safe and familiar place for them to express their feelings. Interviews were conducted off site and during off school hours. During the analyzing of the data, all data was disclosed, not just those results that demonstrated only positive outcomes. The reporting of data was authentic and honest. Finally, in publishing the study, information was shared with other researchers and demonstrate complete proof of compliance for ethical studies.

### **Chapter 3 Summary**

Qualitative research is interpretive and looks at meanings of human experience from different points of views. The qualitative researcher is comfortable with multiple meanings and relies on intuition when conducting the research. Qualitative research is experiential and field oriented. It is in this research form that learning through observation is in its natural iteration, without interference or preconceived end point. Because of the nature of qualitative research, those examining the situation are entering the study in the original environment.

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the research methodology used in this study, explain the sampling selection process, describe the procedures and techniques used in data collection, and provide an explanation of the findings. Stake (2010) stated that while quantitative research methodology relies on strict, mathematical, objective analysis, qualitative research is a “grand collection of ways: it is interpretive, experience based, situational, and personalistic” (p. 31) and relies on researchers to choose from many different approaches to collecting data depending on the research question.

It is important to summarize how data collection and analysis occurred, as qualitative design does not always begin with a clear outcome focus. McMillan (2012) stated that a qualitative researcher may begin a study with a partial idea about how the research will take

shape, only hindsight will fully reveal the study results. Qualitative research allows for emergent design. In the beginning of a qualitative study, the observations have no direction and the method of collecting information is narrative and rich in language. Only at the end of a qualitative study can the exact methods be ascertained and described. The process explains the results (McMillan, 2012).

This study examined a purposeful sample of 31 middle school students who were participating in a school-offered musical theater production class. They were a homogenous sample of similar age and background. At the beginning of the study, a Likert scale survey was administered to all students and eleven candidates were randomly chosen to participate. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the students and parents to discuss student academic achievement, social interactions, and self-esteem issues. Over the three month rehearsal schedule, daily observations were made by the researcher. Weekly documents such as homework assignments, art projects, and other pertinent records were collected. When the rehearsal process was complete, students performed their musical production for parents, teachers, peers, and community members. After the performance, students, their parents, and their teachers participated in a post-production interview. Students also participated in a post-production self-esteem survey. These data collection tools were conducted off site and during off school hours.

Data analysis was conducted by reviewing interview transcripts and coding the emergent themes of the participating students. Student records, artifacts, and observations were also analyzed for triangulation. Being able to defend a theory is a founding cornerstone of research, making synthesis an important part of qualitative design. Synthesis allows a researcher to glean

the important, binding facts that tie together to support a theory. By taking the strongest arguments and combining them together, a study can be verified and validated.

## Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine results derived from the data collection stage of the study. The purpose of the study was to examine the possible relationship between musical theater education and middle school student self-esteem. As previously noted, topics included how personal self-esteem affects student performance academically, emotionally, and socially (Chubb, Fertman, & Ross, 1997; Ferkany, 2008; Kuperminc, et al., 2001; Lunenberg, 2011; Scott, 2011). Students struggle with having confidence in their identity, social roles, and academic achievement. Without healthy self-esteem development, student issues broaden into their adult life, affecting relationships, financial decisions, career opportunities, and mental health issues (Rowe & Hall, 1991; Sang, 2015).

As cited in earlier chapters, middle school can be a difficult time in a student's growth due to rapid physical and emotional change and uncertainty in a student's life (Chubb, Fertman, & Ross, 1997; Kuperminc et al., 2001; Scott, 2011; Simmons, 1977). Research demonstrated a decline in student self-esteem from elementary to middle school years (Seidman, et al., 1994; Simmons, 1977; Wigfield, et al., 1991). These declines may be attributed to a variety of changes in middle school structure including the shift from small group to large group instruction, academic performance goals, less relational opportunities between student and teacher, social pressures, and the onset of puberty (Alspaugh, 1988; Britner & Pajares, 2006; Kuperminc, Leadbeater, & Sidney, 2001). Musical theater, which had often been included as a middle school extracurricular activity, had been used to encourage students to be more expressive, creative, and self-aware. However, studies have also suggested musical theater education may also enhance

student self-esteem (Lee, 1983; McCammon, Saldana, Hines, & Omasta, 2012; Perrine, 1989; Scott, 2011).

### **Description of the Sample**

The study was conducted in a private K–12 Christian school in suburban Minnesota that educates between 100 and 300 students. The researcher examined the effects of musical theater on the self-esteem of middle school students ranging from fifth to seventh grades. Convenience purposeful sampling was used to choose the study participants. Purposeful sampling is best used in qualitative study when the researcher seeks to collect information-rich data about a specific phenomenon with limited resources (Patton, 2002). Bernard (2002) and Spradley (1979) stated convenience sampling is used when participants are both available and willing to share their opinions and experiences. Since the participants attend a relatively small school limited by its student population, convenience sampling was the most realistic method of including participating students. The target population was comprised of 31 fifth through seventh grade students that were participating in a required performing arts class. The sample size was determined by the families who agreed to participate in the study. After parents received information explaining the research study, its guidelines, and goals, 11 families granted permission to participate in the study. The 11 participating students ranged in age from ten to twelve. There were eight female and three male students. Included in the study were the participating students' parents and academic teachers. All participating parents were females.

No male parents volunteered for the study. Of the academic teachers, four were female and one was male.

### **Research Methodology and Analysis**

**Case study.** According to Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2001), case studies can help decipher complex inter-relationships. In this study, students displayed a variety of complex factors that may have contributed to their lower levels of self-esteem when facing issues outside of their academic achievement. Factors included high levels of academic pressure, perfectionism, anxiety, and lack of flexibility.

Case studies also allow the researcher to examine how many factors intertwine to create a complete picture of the participant. In addition, Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2001) stated case studies can demonstrate how one process affects another. In this study, it can be theorized that the above factors of academic pressure, anxiety, perfectionism, and lack of flexibility may have contributed to lower levels of student self-esteem.

Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2001) continued to describe case study as a form of research that enables the study to focus on the "idiosyncratic" (p. 6). The participants in this case study may be described as idiosyncratic. They are high achievers with healthy academic self-esteem, but reported lower levels of self-esteem when faced with challenges outside of their academic success. In many research studies, student self-esteem parallels their willingness to attempt new tasks. However, in this study, students demonstrated high levels of self-esteem mainly in the area of their schoolwork, but struggled with insecurity when attempting new tasks outside of their knowledge base, especially ones that required creativity or spontaneity.

Finally, case studies allow for the exploration of the unexpected (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2001). In this study, it was unexpected that the participating students would have

high levels of self-esteem prior to the study. It was also unexpected that their levels of self-esteem would not be consistent across all of their interactions. However, Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2001) stated case studies are a reflection of the participants' "lived reality" (p. 3). The events and phenomenon of students in this study, although differing from other studied student experiences, are still valid and valuable to the body of literature.

**Coding.** Inside the case study research design, three types of coding help to decipher the major emergent themes of the study. The process began with open coding, which allowed for the data to shape the first emerging themes. After identifying the main themes, axial coding was utilized to observe and understand how the emergent themes were related and interconnected. Finally, selective coding narrowed the focus of the data to one major theme of high academic student achievement.

**Data analysis procedures.** At the onset of the study, a Rosenberg-like Self-Esteem Survey (Appendix A) was distributed to and collected from the student participants (permission to use survey was granted by University of Maryland). At the conclusion of the production, the second set of self-esteem surveys were distributed and collected. The Self-Esteem Survey asked students to address issues such as personal satisfaction, viewing themselves as adequate in comparison to others, and feelings of accomplishment or failure. When self-esteem surveys were collected at the beginning and conclusion of the study, mean, median, and mode figures were calculated using an Excel spreadsheet (Mean = 2.979, Median = 3, Mode = 3). Of the students surveyed, 91% reported strong self-worth and positive attitudes towards themselves and their accomplishments both at the beginning and conclusion of the study.

In addition to the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Survey (Appendix A), open coding was used to analyze 78 participating student, parent, and teacher interviews. Creswell (2009) stated open

coding allows the data to create labels and themes that can then be used to build research theory. Open coding allowed the researcher to examine what seemed to be evolving from the collected data and how it addressed the basic social problems the participants were facing (Creswell, 2009; Punch, 2014). An important aspect to open coding was the researcher did not look for preconceived theories, but allowed the data to shape the emerging themes. However, Punch (2014) stated since open coding is fairly fluid, it requires balance. Once open coding was complete, axial coding was then used to compare and contrast emergent themes. Miles and Huberman (1994) stated axial coding is beneficial to qualitative research because it connected concepts to each other. To increase validity, this study employed one final coding method, selective coding. Selective coding allowed the researcher to look for a common core from the emergent themes that were identified through open and axial coding.

Using the Quirkos software, (a qualitative software specifically designed to code and compare data from a variety of sources) major themes of the participants' experiences were grouped into categories. This process began in an open-ended manner. The data began to reveal common themes in the transcripts. During the second analysis, highlighted keywords revealed the main themes in the participant's experiences. In the third analysis, these themes were coded and "chunked" together (Gibbs, 2011). Coding lists groups of data together that represented the same phenomenon or experience. Those ideas were then placed together to represent similarity (Gibbs, 2011).

Triangulation was achieved in data collection by observing students' academic work, observing them in their academic and art classes, and personally interviewing them, their parents and their teachers. Triangulation was a key aspect of data collection because it looked for convergence of findings and cross-validation among different sources and methods of data

collection (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Academic work and art projects were observed and collected during the three-month data collection period. In addition, a daily observation journal was kept to record student behaviors and interactions during rehearsal.

### **Summary of the Findings**

**High student academic self-esteem.** The students who participated in this study have been immersed in highly academic environment for the past several years. These intense academic classrooms have created students who are confident in their academic abilities, which led to them feeling confident in their academic self-esteem. Many of the participating students, however, did not have matching levels of self-esteem in other aspects of their life. Students shared feelings of needing to be “right” each time they participated in class. They were cautious of their ability to try new concepts if they felt unsure of the ending goal or requirement. Some students revealed that art class (a classroom that allowed them to free draw and express their creativity) was actually a difficult class for them in which to excel. They were uncomfortable in settings that lacked structure, guidelines, and a specific goal. The participating students need for a strict framework restricted their creativity and ability to attempt new tasks.

**First student interviews.** As students’ first interview transcripts were analyzed, open coding revealed two major emergent themes; high academic self-esteem and low levels of self-esteem in other areas such as willingness to try new tasks, creativity, or flexibility. The most prevalent self-esteem themes revealed in the study revolved around student academic work. Student behaviors manifested in the areas of student classroom behavior and homework habits. In class, students were unwilling to raise their hand unless they were almost certain they were answering correctly. When interviewed, many participating students shared an unwillingness to engage in the discussion unless they felt strong about their abilities and the task being discussed.

Although most students in the United States may share a similar hesitancy, the researcher observed the actions of the students as unusually cautious and measured. In discussing homework practices, students shared they were willing to push themselves into the early morning without sleep to complete homework assignments correctly. The researcher observed that considering the participating students ranged between 10 and 12 years old, this behavior could be interpreted as extreme.

The student, teacher, and parent interview questions (Appendix B, C, and D) were used as a semi-structured framework that allowed the participants to guide the interview process. The two major emergent themes of high student academic self-esteem and lower student self-esteem outside of academic studies were then broken down into subthemes. The first subtheme described students as having attained high academic achievement. At the onset of the study, 91% of participating students had an A average in both their academic and elective classes. Student interviews revealed academic confidence in 10 out of 11 participating students. One student was proud that even though she had skipped a grade, she was still academically successful. Even those students who did not feel as academically accomplished as other students still demonstrated healthy self-esteem. Student Nine suffered from Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and created her own acronym to address when she falls behind in class, Being Totally Clueless (BTC). The student did not allow her attention issues to cloud her feelings of accomplishment. When asked what her best qualities were in her first interview, she expressed feeling proud of her level of creativity and sense of humor. Student Six, who may represent the anomaly of the study, did not display as high of self-esteem levels as other students,

but could not articulate what he wanted to improve. His teacher and parent interviews revealed he was an average student who is difficult to motivate.

The second student subtheme to emerge was that students felt proud of their accomplishments, both academically and socially. During the first set of interview questions, students expressed feelings of academic accomplishment. “Things come easy for me” (Student Eight). Students expressed feelings of success not only in the area of academics, but in their peer relationships as well. 10 out of 11 students were able to identify positive personal relationship traits and positive peer relationships. Female students One, Five, Nine, and Seven expressed having been confronted with cliques and other negative peer-related issues, but felt they had moved passed those encounters and that their friendships were restored.

The apparent preoccupation with academic success led to the third student emergent subtheme, student diligence and perfectionism. A participating student described their work ethic as “I will work until I drop” (Student Five). Likewise, Student Three stated “If it means I have to stay up until 3am to get the problem right, I won’t quit.” Other students shared this point of view. “I pretty much have to be good at all my classes” (Student Eight). When teachers were interviewed about Student Eight, they stated he is the “rock of the class, a born leader.” The researcher noted that on more than one occasion, this student played the understudy for several roles in class and not only had memorized the lines, but demonstrated the correct blocking instructions for each character.

While discussing the concept of perfectionism, students shared the final emergent subtheme of feeling anxious when attempting a new task outside of their established skill set. Although a majority of the participants demonstrated high levels of self-esteem, the participating students’ willingness to risk failure to attempt new tasks did not mirror their self-esteem levels.

In the first set of student interviews, 81 % reported feeling uncomfortable attempting new tasks or challenges. “I won’t raise my hand in class unless I know I am right” (Student Three). Student One echoed this sentiment. “I am usually scared of trying something out of comfort zone” (Student One). A few students explained they were willing to observe others and then attempt a task, but were nervous to be the first to try. Nine out of 11 interviewed students expressed concern about learning new aspects of the theater they had not previously learned, such as choreography, solo work, or large monologue memorization. Student One states “she can only be confident if she has nailed something.” Student Nine reported feeling anxious about learning choreography in the musical because she did not feel prepared to handle the task. This student demonstrated defensiveness about having to try something new. Student One claimed she is “not at all excited about learning the dances, already saying she can't do it.”

**Self-esteem outside of academics.** Using axial coding in comparing and contrasting student emergent subthemes, the concepts of overachieving, lack of flexibility, and perfectionism led to lower levels of self-esteem outside of the academic arena. Participating students demonstrated a lack of willingness to attempt new tasks if they did not feel they could accomplish them. If a student had difficulty seeing themselves as successful unless they have prior skill or knowledge, their overall self-esteem levels were lower. If students could not imagine themselves performing a task successfully, they would avoid the task altogether (Bandura, 1982). Self-esteem can influence choices students make and the effort they expend while attempting the new task. Students with lower self-esteem were less persistent and

therefore demonstrate less achievement than those who had higher levels of self-esteem (Bandura, 1986; Britner & Pajares, 2006; Hen & Goroshit, 2013).

In contrast to feeling proud of their accomplishments, the fourth student subtheme revealed students desired to achieve more in academic subjects where they did not feel successful. When asked what would be one thing you would like to improve in (and the choices were endless), 64% of students answered academically. For example, when the researcher asked if they would like to be a skydiver, a better friend, or a volunteer, most students answered they would like to be better in an academic class. One student expressed disappointment in his abilities in spelling and wished he could understand the subject more easily. Students explored this topic more deeply and discussed feeling anxious when they were not prepared for a task. “[Redacted] is clearly nervous when she auditions for Marian. When I ask her to try different scenes than she prepared, she is a bit defensive and short with me. I sense that she behaves this way because she is not sure how to react to what I am asking her to do. I am hoping she settles into her part” (Daily Observation Journal). One participating student shared she felt overwhelmed when she received a new project in class. “I feel like there is NO WAY I will ever get this done. I’ve even cried in class, in front of everybody, when I see a new homework assignment” (redacted, 2017).

***First teacher interviews.*** Five teachers were also interviewed at the onset of the study. Teacher interview questions (Appendix C) supported the two major emergent themes of high academic self-esteem and lower levels of self-esteem outside of their academic studies revealed during the student interviews, although their subthemes were slightly different. First, teachers did agree students were academically successful. The five teachers interviewed expressed that ten out of the 11 participating students had consistent academic achievements and a strong work

ethic. However, teachers were concerned that students were highly perfectionistic and too diligent in their study habits. During the first round of teacher interviews, Teacher One discussed how one of the participating student's families came in to a conference to inquire why the student had an A in the class instead of an A plus. Teacher Two did point out one student who seemed to temper their work ethic well. "[Redacted] is a balanced academic worker. She is not the smartest student in the class, but she is willing to work hard" (Teacher Two). However, other teachers agreed there were nine participating students that were extremely driven in their academic endeavors. During one interview, a teacher shared it was so important that a certain student be correct that she would defend and disguise her incorrect answer, almost to an argument (Teacher One).

Teachers also agreed with the second student subtheme that participating students were socially stable in and amongst their peer groups. They attributed these strong relationships to the small school environment, the mixed grade level classes, and the intentional emphasis placed on integrity and morality at the school. "When she came to this school, she had a hard time connecting to peers, now she is a chatterbug!" (Teacher Three). Teachers and other staff members make it a priority to be aware of how the student body is interacting, whether it be positively or negatively. "Students Three and Eight are able to be great friends even though they are both strong leaders" (Teacher Three).

However, although teachers believed most participating students were academically and socially successful, they shared that 72% of participating students demonstrated a clear lack of confidence in the classroom. Teacher interviews revealed that although 10 out of 11 were academically successful, many lacked confidence in their abilities. During the first set of interview questions, Teacher Three shared that two of her students "exude confidence, both

academically and socially.” The majority of the participants, however, struggled with self-esteem even though they were academically accomplished. “[Redacted] is smart and a hard worker, but is soft-spoken and lacks confidence” (Teacher One). Teacher Two supported this observation. He stated in his class, “Student Seven is a perfectionist, a strong A student.” He noted, however, “She does not seem to carry stress because of her perfectionism.” Some students, however, outwardly demonstrated stressful reactions to their academic habits. Teacher One commented that several students struggle with a lack of confidence. Teacher Three agreed with this opinion. “A particular student had a hard time finding her way when she first came to this school, and it seemed to rattle her. Even now that her personal relationships are stronger, she is an academic perfectionist who is too hard on herself.” Teacher Three also conveyed concern for a student who suffered a tragic loss in his family recently, but does not allow it to break his concentration academically or let it show emotionally.

Teacher Two expressed frustration with one apparent anomaly of the study. “(I have a student who) has no intrinsic motivation. He will comply with doing work while you stand over him, but out of sight he is difficult to motivate. He is a “C” student, but is so much smarter than that. He does just enough to get by.” Researcher observations support this opinion. He is difficult to motivate in theater rehearsals, did not memorize lines in a timely fashion, and did not appear to be embarrassed that he was struggling in scenes with other actors (Daily Observation Journal).

***First parent interviews.*** Parents also participated in the first set of interview questions (Appendix D). Parent interviews revealed similar major emergent themes of high student academic self-esteem and lower levels of self-esteem in other areas, but revealed differing opinions in several of their emergent subthemes. The most prominent parent emergent subtheme

was the concern that students are too driven in their academic endeavors and encouraged their student to develop a better balance between being a good student and being a perfectionist. “My student will push till she drops” (Parent 15). Like Parent 15, 10 out of 11 surveyed parents expressed concern about their student’s work ethic. “I would be thrilled if she would get a B and feel good about herself” (Parent 20). Parents discussed many students come to school sick because it is harder to be absent from school and be responsible for the makeup work than it is to just come to school sick. Parent 19 expressed concern that her student constantly second-guesses herself, compares herself to others, and has a difficult time celebrating her achievements. Most parents are in agreement that the high level of academic achievement at the school is both a positive and negative aspect for their student.

In the second subtheme, parents encouraged their student to think outside of the box and be comfortable with making mistakes. 10 out of 11 parents believed their student had hidden abilities, particularly in the arts, but were afraid to try for fear of failure or ridicule. Parent 15 stated, “She is such a pleaser and gets so down if she thinks she has disappointed someone.” Parent 21 stated her student “measures herself too harshly.” Parent 14 was surprised to hear her student does not volunteer for solo parts in the theater classroom because at home, her student continually shares how it is her dream to be a stage actress. (The researcher has never observed this in the classroom.) Only one parent felt that although their student expressed a desire to take part in the performing arts, she did not believe her student had significant talent in that area. (Parent 17). Her student was aware that her parents were not extremely impressed with her artistic abilities. “When I grow up, I really want to be a dancer or singer, but I know I probably won’t be because my parents won’t take me to the auditions” (Student Seven). Most parents, however, felt their student had hidden abilities that they had not fully realized. Parent 16 stated

she believes her student has innate musical ability. “He could be a great singer! I would love to see him try.” Parent 21 echoed this sentiment. “I think Student 11 has so much talent that no one sees. Maybe it’s that she doesn’t allow people to see.” Parent 12 commented she was hopeful that participating in a musical production would spark an interest in her student.

The next emergent subtheme from the first set of parent interviews was a feeling that although students felt they had successful peer relationships, parents felt peer relationships were sometimes difficult for their student. A distinction between the students’ opinion of their peer relationships and their parents’ observations of their social structure became evident during the interview process. 10 out of 11 student participants believed they had strong peer relationships, but parents showed concern for their student’s friendships. “We’ve had to really crack down on the texting language and bullying” (Parent 12). Parent 11 shared that neither of her students had close friends at school. Although one of her students is friendly and approachable, the student is confronted with cliques and cattiness within her peer group. She continued to explain, “Student Five is very sensitive and empathetic to a fault, which makes close relationships dangerous for her.” Parent 19 shared a similar concern. “My student prayed for just one good friend. She wrote it in her prayer journal. Early in her academic career, she was confronted and hurt by a mean girl clique.” Parent 19 believed the problem has passed, but she still does not observe her student having close peer relationships.

The final emergent subtheme from the initial parent interview concerned student self-esteem itself. Although 10 out of 11 student participants reported healthy self-esteem levels, parents were still concerned for their students. Parent 21 worries for her student’s self-esteem outside of her academic achievements. “Student 11 is in a warzone of being proud of her strengths and keeping herself in check in compared to what her peers want from her.” Parent 15

agreed. “I wished she had more confidence in herself (Parent 15). Other parents felt no need for concern. “My student does not have any self-esteem issues” (Parent Three). Likewise, Parent 11 felt that “Student One likes what she sees in the mirror.” However, most parents expressed a need for greater student confidence and self-esteem. “I believe my student’s outward posture is a reflection of her inward self-esteem. She looks unsure, shy, scared” (Parent 21). Parent 19, an educator herself, stated her student has “no executive functioning. She severely lacks organizational skills, which makes being at a high performance school difficult.” She worried that this affects how her daughter views herself. However, she did admit her student is one of the few students who allowed herself a break from academic work if she was tired or stressed. She was hoping her student recognized her shortcomings but did not allow them to affect her self-esteem.

*Second student interviews.* The framework questions used in the second student interview (Appendix E) were similar to the first set of questions, but included inquiries about their experience during the rehearsal process. The first subtheme to emerge in the second set of student interviews was how much fun students were having in rehearsal. Students consistently reported that the musical production is their favorite class of the day. Students enjoyed being able to move around, act silly, get into costume and character, and build sets. They were laughing and interacting in class, as well as practicing their dance steps and dialogue on the playground after lunch. They requested to add another rehearsal day in place of their gym class, which was not possible. 11 out of 11 students articulated that the opportunity for physical activity and the creative nature of the class helped them concentrate in their academic classes.

However, even though students were enjoying class, interviews revealed the second subtheme of continued anxiety about performing tasks outside of their comfort zone. In the daily

observation journal it is noted, “[Redacted] is an absolute creature of habit and does not adapt to change well. She took the dance steps home and practiced, which left her feeling great about the opening 32 counts but is getting frustrated with moving on” (Daily Observation Journal).

Likewise, the researcher observed similar behavior in other students. “[Redacted] does well at her role, but I am not sure she allows herself to have fun. I am looking forward to helping her relax. She has ability to learn, but not a lot of confidence. For today, I wish she could relax and appreciate her diligence. Her mom was right about her constant questioning of herself” (Daily Observation Journal).

Other students seemed to enjoy rehearsal but were inhibited in their performances. “As I watch (a specific student) in dress rehearsal, I am noticing she knows and understands what to do, but her incredible shyness keeps her from letting go. She holds her vocal part well, but she seems inhibited. Her rubric scores are low not because she is a bad performer, I just want her to act outside of her very small box.”

Students were consistently demonstrating anxiety about new performing tasks outside of their skill set or having to be flexible to change. “Costume day. . .this student seems a bit uncomfortable, but she looks stunning” (Daily Observation Journal). One student, who demonstrated anxiety in new situations, seemed very concerned about her costume. Researcher notes documented her anxiety. “She is freaking out about costume, so I switched to another. Now she is anxious about that one because straps are too long. She was frustrated so I took it to shorten.” Upon observation, it was not the length of the actual dress that was bothering her, but that she was out of school uniform and was clearly uncomfortable in front of her peers. To lessen her anxiety, she was allowed to choose a friend to perform choreography with instead of a

male partner since females outnumbered the males (Researcher Daily Observational Journal). Likewise, the researcher observed a participant who is extremely stifled by her fear of failure.

[Redacted] is probably the most shy and equally quiet student I have ever encountered. In addition to her shyness, her speaking voice is so incredibly quiet you can barely understand her. I am enjoying listening to her singing with the Pick-A-Little ladies. She holds her part well! When I encourage her, she sings strongly. Needs to be reminded, but she can do it! I am observing her sitting with friends and having fun with them. Her shyness does not seem to prohibit her from doing well in group numbers. I think she enjoys that they are all singing parts. (Researcher Daily Observation Journal)

It was apparent that even though students were enjoying rehearsal, they did not like being absent because when they returned, they were even further outside of their comfort zone than before. “(This student) seems frazzled because of absences. Because she has missed blocking and choreography rehearsals due to illness, she feels unprepared. Observing she does not like to be behind the 8 ball” (Daily Observational Journal). “This student shares my class with a band class, so she is with me only 50% of the time. This seems to frustrate her because she misses things in my class and then looks lost when she returns. When we work ahead, she feels unsure. I just laugh and tell her to jump in, but that does not satisfy her. This is where the efficacy piece seems to come into play. She does not fly by the seat of her pants well” (Daily Observation Journal).

Even when students demonstrated small signs of growth in rehearsal, they were still fairly unsure of their new-found knowledge. “Because Student Four did well last rehearsal vocally, I asked her to cover a spoken line for someone who was absent. She delivered it as she is, quietly, shy, a bit scared. I was happy she agreed to do it, but I realized it may have caught her off guard.

When I asked her if I had made her nervous, said she was fine. However, I think she may get nervous in any class if she is called on. I am hoping I can continue to encourage her without scaring her off” (Research Daily Observation Journal).

The fourth subtheme that emerged from the second round of student interviews was participating students had a strong desire to please. Halfway through the production rehearsals, the researcher noted Student Five was unsure of herself and second guessed her wonderful stage abilities. Instead of celebrating the very large role she earned, she focused on how her character did not have a singing solo. She saw this as an indication that she was not a good enough singer to have the solo, which was not the case at all. Student Three and Eight, who were clearly performing well at their roles, continued to ask if they were doing well and if their scenes looked good.

Finally, the second round of student interview questions revealed a subtheme that students continued to be high achievers. The researcher’s daily observation journal stated the following about a particularly gifted participant: “It is only two weeks into rehearsal and Student Eight is completely memorized on not only his own parts, but everyone else’s as well!” As journaling continued, Student Eight continued to impress. “Today Student Eight rose to the occasion- The student who plays Winthrop was out sick and he played the role without any prompting, off script. I truly believe he may be one of the most astute actors I have worked with. And he is in the 5th grade.” In consistent fashion, the journal documented another successful rehearsal. “Now leading man is out sick, and he played Harold Hill perfectly. Nailed the songs, which he had not rehearsed, and used Hill’s blocking that I had assigned the other character.”

Other students were exceling in their roles as well. “Student Three is memorized and completely getting into character! He does not bat an eye at playing the youngest member of the

cast (Winthrop) and even is happily willing to wear the knickers his character wears!”

(Researcher Daily Observation Journal). The researcher noted that most students were diving into their roles and really trying to excel at a new skill. “Student 20 is such an interesting student to watch. She is concentrating and trying so hard that her forehead gets all scrunched up!

(Researcher Daily Observation Journal) Although some students found it hard to celebrate their successes, it was inspiring to see how much they were progressing. “Student 11 is beginning to show a profound amount of composure for a 12-year-old.”

The last emergent subtheme in the second set of student interviews stated peer relationships did not demonstrate significant change in comparison to the first set of interviews. Students continued to state they have healthy friendships, but the researcher sometime observed a different reality. “Student 11 (a female student) quietly sitting in class, not interacting much with girls in the class. Similarly, Student Five sits alone in class and although she interacts with the researcher well, she does not interact with peers hardly at all” (Daily Observational Journal). There are some positive peer interactions in class. Consistent with the onset of the study, Student Three and Eight still maintained a strong, healthy relationship even though Student Eight would enjoy having a larger role. They were encouraging and supportive of one another.

***Second teacher interviews.*** There were three emergent subthemes revealed during the second set of teacher interview questions (Appendix F). First, teachers reported a subtheme of little to no change in student academic performance. The 10 participating students who demonstrated prior academic accomplishment continued to do so. Likewise, the one student who originally struggled academically continued to frustrate his teachers. During his second interview, Teacher Two stated there is “absolutely no change in (this particular student’s) behavior. He still struggles with motivation and continues to be a C student.” When discussing

how to encourage Student Six to learn his lines and perform with character, Parent 16 admitted her student only seems motivated by screen time. Teacher Three, although she did not teach him personally, overheard his sister sharing how their family sometimes struggles financially. In addition, the children come from a divorced family with an absent father. Teacher Three hypothesized this student may involve himself heavily in video games to escape his reality or to be equal to his peers in some way.

The second emergent subtheme stated there is no significant change in student participation in class or documented changes in self-esteem, but teachers noticed students singing and practicing choreography in the hallways in between classes. All five teachers expressed interest in seeing the production because they were curious to see another aspect of their students' personalities and talents. However, Teacher Three did report that student one was improving in her class. "She has not had a breakdown in class recently. She is usually very anxious if she does not understand assignment immediately, but is handling pressure better" (Teacher Three). Although the five teachers did not discuss significant changes in peer relationships, they were noticing different students interacting due to being paired together in scene work or choreography. Teachers One, Three, and Four stated it is interesting to see different peer relationships begin to develop.

*Second parent interviews.* There were five emergent subthemes from the second set of parent interview questions (Appendix G). First, parents stated their student was learning to handle new situations by being more flexible and spontaneous. "This experience is so good for her. Is challenging her, stretching her. She is having to handle mature matter (romantic scenes) and is working through being jokingly teased by classmates, etc. As far as her role, she is excited, nervous, and is ready to go." Parents discussed how students are having to take

responsibility to work together on scenes that are not flowing well, making acting and blocking choices that make sense for each of their characters while also having to complement the other actors on stage. Parent 11 shared her excitement about the upcoming performance. “Student One is growing! I see it! Although she still can get overwhelmed, she is either benefitting from being able to let lose in this class and she is learning skills to let some stuff go!”

Although students were demonstrating increased flexibility in new situations, parents were not noticing any significant change in student self-esteem or academic behavior. This student behavior supported a subtheme revealed in the first set of interviews. Additionally, emergent subtheme three stated peer relationships continued to be an issue for some students. During the second set of interview questions, Parent 15 shared that although her student continued to be academically strong and loves being in the play, she still has not established any close friendships. The researcher’s observation journal supports this statements. “[Redacted] is such a people pleaser. She continues to be a great actress, but is extremely needy. She needs a daily hug, before and after class, and asks for affirmation constantly. Although she looks as though she is having fun in rehearsal, she sits alone in class, and does not interact with peers much at all.”

***Final student interviews.*** The last set of student interview questions (Appendix H) addressed similar topics to the previous two interviews, but added inquiries about their overall experience performance during the musical. The most prevalent emergent subtheme from the post-production student interviews was that students found it easier to be spontaneous and less anxious about change. “I actually feel better about being more spontaneous, I figured out I won’t die!” (Student Five). Student Nine agreed. “The show was so fun! I freaked out about being outside of my comfort zone, but then it was great!” (Student Nine). One student, who could be

characterized as the most anxious student participant, shared in his/her post show interview, “I want to do one more show with a small part, then I think I am ready for a lead!” (redacted).

The second emergent subtheme from the post production student interviews was students were less anxious about change. Students stated they were able to look at things differently now that they had some experience in improvisation on stage. The researcher observed this phenomenon when, during the performance, a scene’s dialogue was not being performed perfectly. In the past, students would appear stuck and stop the scene. However, during the performance, students were able to improvise until they found their way back to the original dialogue. Even to veteran actors, improvisation can be difficult, but students demonstrated they were able to think on their feet, stay calm, and deliver an outstanding performance.

Daily journal observations mirrored this growth. Student 11 “did not freak out about the costume, but did ask if she could take it home to alter it, which was a good solution. Seems to be handling new situations and taking them in stride.” In the final performance, the researcher made these notes: “Student Ten did so well at the performance! She nailed her part! When she watches the video, she will probably comment that she still scrunches her face when she is concentrating. No big deal, just a stage presence issue. So proud of her!” (Researcher Daily Observation Journal). On the night of the production, over 175 audience members comprised of parents, extended family members, and school staff attended the production. (Community members may have attended as well, but the audience attendance was not surveyed). The musical was performed on the school gym stage. Students received a standing ovation from their audience on the night of the production.

To complement earlier subthemes, subtheme three stated students are more comfortable thinking outside of the box expressed pride about conquering their fear of failure. Student 11

reported “I feel like the show really challenged me and I conquered my anxiety.” The student’s mother reported her student “is naturally very shy, but feels like she conquered her stage fright and concern about what everyone was thinking about her.” Addressing the same student after the final production the researcher noted “I am really happy about the growth I see” (Researcher Daily Observation Journal). Student 11 was able to articulate her accomplishments in the production:

The best thing about being in the show is that I feel like I played my character well. I think my biggest accomplishment was getting over fear of the footbridge scene (romantic scene work). I worked together with my co-star to get through the awkward stuff. I think I am feeling better about my self-esteem, but I still feel really uncomfortable accepting compliments (Student 11).

The researcher noted her neck blushes terribly, and she still finds it hard to be proud of herself.

Thirdly, students were less anxious and defensive about being wrong. During rehearsal, the researcher observed a shift in attitude towards trying new tasks without worry or defensiveness. “I am able to make a mistake in front of everyone and not die of embarrassment” (Student Ten). Researcher notes revealed “I am really pleased that today Student 11 had a question and was not defensive, or brash, or rude. She was able to feel unsure without blaming those around her source” (Daily Observation Journal). At one dress rehearsal, Student Ten completely blanked on her lines and for a moment, appeared incredibly uncomfortable on stage. However, when she noticed the director laughing, she laughed as well and said “I think we need to run that again!” It was so rewarding to see her laugh off mistakes and simply try again. At the close of the production, Student Four, who started the musical as an extremely shy, introverted student, asked to take solo voice lessons. When she came in for her first lesson, she

sang beautifully and with *strength*!! While singing, her shyness was amazingly mostly gone! When she is speaking, she is still soft-spoken and shy, but when she is singing, she is confident, loud, and smiling. (Researcher Daily Observation Journal).

***Final teacher interviews.*** Two emergent themes were revealed from the last set of teacher interview questions (Appendix I). First, teachers were able to see students in a different light and from a different point of view. “I never knew he could do that!” (Teacher One). Teachers stated seeing their students performed gave them new ideas on how to interact with them in the classroom. “Since he is such a ham, I should have him do some things for me in class!” (Teacher Four). One teacher observed a student who was an unusually quiet and reserved person smiling and laughing more with her and the other students. “I believe [redacted] became incredibly quiet when dad lost ability to speak due to Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS or Lou Gehrig’s Disease). Silent communication became a way to connect with her father when he could no longer speak. However, I have recently noticed she has started smiling much more in class.” Although the researcher allows for coincidence, it was discovered during the study that this student has a beautiful singing voice. Students celebrated her new-found talent and teachers were able to see another side to a once painfully shy student.

Secondly, teachers shared students were handling change more easily. “Since the production, Student One is able to adapt to get the job done” (Teacher Three). Although teachers did not observe a significant change in academic achievement, students seemed to be more willing to take risks in the classroom and be willing to engage even if they did not feel sure of their answer. “I am noticing Student Nine can interact with me more freely, doesn’t look as

anxious as they sometimes do when they ask questions. It's as if the answer doesn't matter, they can handle it either way" (Researcher Daily Observation Journal).

*Final parent interviews.* During the post-production interviews questions (Appendix J), parents shared two emergent subthemes. First, parents felt their student had grown in flexibility as a result of participating in the musical production. A participating parent explained prior to the production, their student was anxious and easily overwhelmed.

When she gets rattled, she completely shuts down. She will breakdown openly in class over the scope of an assignment. Even as a child, she would choose being in a small class over being with a bigger class with friends. She has always been aware of her limitations. I wish I could unleash her creative side (Parent 11).

However, after the show, the same parent reported their student demonstrated growth in flexibility and seeing assignments in smaller chunks, taking assignments one step at a time. This scaffolding in teaching new material parallels how students learned choreography for the production. At the beginning of a choreography session, students observed the entire dance, which seemed to overwhelm them and make them nervous about the expectations of the task. However, because the steps are taught in counts of 8, students are able to break down their learning, scaffold their understanding, and eventually find success as they perform the entire routine.

Secondly, parents discussed how their student had developed more tools to handle change and challenging situations. "I am so proud of Student 11. She got outside her comfort zone and did it! Although it was hard for her to interact with boys, she found ways to adapt and get the job done. My student has grown! She is more flexible and not as defensive" (Parent 21). Even the student who had been described as an anomaly of the study seemed to benefit from

participation in the production. He disliked the workload at school and stated he was not a motivated student. His parent, who was also a teacher at this school, commented “he doesn’t really care about homework, which is hard for her to watch” (Teacher One/Parent 16). His personal interview revealed he felt he did not have good time management skills and was worried he would not memorize his lines because he had other things to do. He admitted to valuing playing video games over studying or pleasing his parents or teachers. In rehearsal, the researcher observed he did not memorize his lines or strive to be a strong actor on stage. The researcher noted in the daily observation journal, “Now that he got the role, he is feeling the pressure of actors around him needing to step up. I observe him feeling insecure about dancing and really doesn't like having a ‘wife.’ He is so smart and capable. I am frustrated that he is not nailing this” (Researcher Daily Observation Journal). However, although the researcher felt his performance was mediocre, his mother reported “although I knew he did not pull his weight, he was very proud of himself. She thinks he was proud of actually completing something. He felt like he had to finish this task, which made him feel accomplished” (Teacher One/Parent 16). Even in the case of a student who did not fully succeed on stage, he felt good about his performance. All 11 participants stated they would perform in another musical, though Student Six stated, “Let’s wait awhile before we do it again!”

The musical production also exposed students to difficult situations such as auditions and casting. “My student enjoyed show but felt it was unfair to let students have leading roles who were not memorizing their lines. It bothers his sense of fairness. It is hard for him to understand why kids don't work hard at their assigned role. He had to accept that sometimes

things out of his control, (ex, height, age, vocal range) can decide who is cast in a show and that he needs to focus on doing his part well, not worrying about why others are not” (Parent 18).

**Academic and art class observations.** Academic class observations mirrored those of musical theater class observations. Most students were confident in their factual knowledge, but did not want to be called on or engage in class conversations unless they were confident of their answers. Those students who demonstrated extroverted tendencies in theater class also showed extroverted tendencies in their academic subjects. Likewise, those students who demonstrated more introverted tendencies in theater class displayed the same behavior in their academic classes. In art class, several interesting observations were made. Students who were careful and cautious in their academic work were also very measured when engaged in artistic drawings. The researcher noted one study participant drew very lightly. When asked why, they answered, “in case I am wrong, it is easy to fix” (Student Seven). Student Five’s drawings were very measured, taking the time to use a ruler to make sure their drawing was to scale, even though that was not a requirement of the assignment. However, Student 11, who was usually a cautious student, had an extremely fluid and beautiful style, much like watching stream of consciousness drawing. “In art class, she is free and relaxed” (Daily Observation Journal). Interestingly, the participant who teachers suggested may need more humility believes he is the best in the art class. The art teacher disagrees.

### **Presentation of the Data and Results**

In reviewing how the study results answered the original research questions, several aspects of the study need to be examined.

1. Does musical theater education influence middle school student self-esteem?

2. If musical theater education can effectively enhance student self-esteem, how can teachers integrate this method of teaching into an already crowded standard driven curriculum?
3. If student self-esteem is enhanced in the musical theater classroom, can higher self-esteem be transferred into the academic classroom?

First, the concept of existing healthy student self-esteem may have skewed the results. In this particular group of students, healthy levels of prior student self-esteem were already being reported. Therefore, the musical theater production did not contribute to any significant changes in self-esteem. However, students, teachers, and parents did report emergent themes of increased student willingness to attempt new tasks, think creatively, and opening themselves to failure. These factors may lead to increased student self-esteem, but study results cannot fully determine this theory at this time. It is unknown if studying students with lower original levels of self-esteem would alter the outcome of the data results. This study was not able to effectively answer research questions two and three due to the first emergent theme of existing healthy student self-esteem. In comparing results to the original research questions, only question one can be directly linked to study findings. Although teachers did report an increase in student willingness to be flexible, open to change, and more willing to try new tasks, this did not alter their already strong academic achievements. Because self-esteem was not affected in this study, research questions two and three are left unanswered. However, suggestions for further research may help address research questions two and three.

#### **Chapter 4 Summary**

During the first set of interviews, 10 out of 11 students shared healthy, if not inflated, levels of self-esteem, stemming from their academic accomplishments. In addition, prior to the

beginning of the study, 81% of the student participants demonstrated a high level of driven academic behavior. At the beginning of the production, common themes were feelings of perfectionism, diligence, perseverance, and an overly engaged academic work ethic. This academic determination enhanced student self-esteem, leading to consistently high academic self-esteem reporting. Student self-esteem outside of the academic arena, however, did not equal their academic confidence. Many of the participating students did not feel comfortable answering questions in class if they were not confident in their answer. Similarly, those same students were not comfortable in arts classes that encouraged them to be spontaneous or creative. The anxiety of not succeeding seemed to stifle their ability to work.

During the rehearsal process, students did not report any significant changes in self-esteem, but students reported taking small steps to increase their willingness to try new tasks. New experiences such as choreography rehearsals, dialogue memorization, and working closely with other actors who were outside of their peer group challenged them to look beyond their comfort zones. Small changes were reported in social relationships, but no significant changes were evident in academic work or classroom behavior. Teacher and researcher observations concur that although small steps were being made in social behavior and a willingness to be more interactive in class, the changes were not significant enough to credit musical theater production.

At the conclusion of the production, no significant changes were present in the self-esteem surveys or academic performance of the participating students. However, after the production, 72% of students reported increased ability to attempt new tasks and step out of their comfort zone. These students demonstrated increased flexibility, lower anxiety, and greater confidence both on and off the stage. Many of the participating students shared a feeling of

accomplishment, less anxiety when attempting new tasks, and increased spontaneity and creativity. The researcher observed certain participants becoming more flexible and less anxious about change.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of musical theater education on middle school student self-esteem. The first four chapters explained the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, research methodology, research limitations, and the study's findings. This chapter outlines a summary of the study, conclusions, and recommendations for further study. The study explores the experiences of 11 middle school students, their teachers, and their parents at a private school in Minnesota. A qualitative case study research design utilizing surveys, interviews, and observations provided research data. Emergent themes were identified through open, axial, and selective coding.

### **Summary of the Results**

The researcher examined the relationship between musical theater education and middle school student self-esteem using the following research questions:

1. How does musical theater education influence middle school student self-esteem?
2. If musical theater education can effectively enhance student self-esteem, how can teachers integrate this method of teaching into an already crowded standard driven curriculum?
3. If student self-esteem is enhanced in the musical theater classroom, can higher self-esteem be transferred into the academic classroom?

In this study, musical theater education did not enhance student self-esteem in those students who previously reported existing healthy levels of self-esteem. However, musical theater education did demonstrate the ability to increase student flexibility, an openness to change, and a willingness to attempt new tasks in those students originally reporting lower self-

esteem scores outside of their academic achievement. Given this improvement, the study attempted to determine how musical theater education be incorporated into existing academic curriculum. However, the study was not able to encompass this original research question. Therefore, it is addressed in the recommendations for further research section of this chapter.

As previously stated, the results of the study demonstrated increases in student flexibility, openness to change, and a willingness to attempt new tasks. These new characteristics have been described as components of self-efficacy, a subset of self-esteem (Bandura, 1993). If self-efficacy can be enhanced through musical theater education, it can be theorized that student self-esteem may be influenced as well. Increased student self-esteem can positively affect student academic performance (Wigfield, et al., 1991). If musical theater education can be successfully integrated into the academic classroom, alternative pathways to student learning may be developed and possibly enhance overall student comprehension and retention.

### **Discussion of the Results**

At the onset of the study, 10 out of 11 students shared healthy levels of self-esteem, stemming from their academic accomplishments. In addition, prior to the beginning of the study, 81% of the student participants demonstrated a high level of driven academic behavior. At the beginning of the production, common emergent themes were feelings of perfectionism, diligence, perseverance, and an overly engaged academic work ethic. This academic determination enhanced student self-esteem, leading to consistently high academic self-esteem reporting. Student self-esteem outside of their academic success, however, was not equal to their levels of academic self-esteem levels. Many of the participating students did not feel comfortable answering questions in class if they were not confident in their answer. Students demonstrated an unwillingness to attempt new tasks if they did not envision themselves

completing them successfully. Similarly, those same students were not comfortable in arts classes that encouraged them to be spontaneous or creative. Students demonstrated a lack of flexibility and avoided change.

During the rehearsal process, students did not report any significant changes in self-esteem, but reported taking small steps to increase their willingness to try new tasks. New experiences such as choreography rehearsals, dialogue memorization, and working closely with other actors challenged students to look beyond their comfort zones. Small changes were reported in social relationships, but no significant changes were evident in academic work or classroom behavior. Teacher and researcher observations concurred that although small steps were being made in social behavior and a willingness to be more interactive in class, the changes were not significant enough to credit musical theater education.

At the conclusion of the production, no significant changes were present in the self-esteem surveys or academic performance of the participating students. However, in those students who originally demonstrated lower self-esteem outside of their academic subjects, 72% of students reported increased ability to attempt new tasks and step out of their comfort zone. These students demonstrated increased flexibility, lower anxiety, and greater confidence both on and off the stage. Many of the participating students shared a feeling of accomplishment, less anxiety when attempting new tasks, and increased spontaneity and creativity. The researcher observed certain participants becoming more flexible and less anxious about change.

In examining the results of the research study, the concept of existing healthy student self-esteem may have skewed the results. In this particular group of students, prior healthy levels of student self-esteem were already being reported. Therefore, the musical theater production did not contribute to any significant changes in self-esteem. However, the

unexpected results of differing levels of academic self-esteem and self-esteem outside of academic achievement helped shape the focus of the study. In comparing results to the original research questions, only questions one and three can be linked to study findings. Question one addressed how musical theater education effects middle school student self-esteem. Although student self-esteem surveys did not change due to performing in the musical production, teachers stated students who showed increased self-esteem by being more flexible to change, interacting more easily with peers, and were more willing to attempt new tasks and challenges in the academic classroom. Question three asked if increased self-esteem can be transferred into the academic classroom. Again, significant self-esteem was not recorded, but teachers did observe changes in flexibility, an openness to change, and a willingness to try new tasks. Because musical theater was not integrated into the academic classroom in this study, research question two was left unanswered.

### **Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature**

**Current body of literature.** In considering how these results relate to the current body of literature, this study aligns with current research literature stating students can benefit from music and theater education academically, socially, and through positive self-esteem interactions (Brandt, 1980; Darrow, et al., 2009; Deasy, 2002; Dietry, 2012; Martin, 1983; McLendon, 1982; Parker, 2011; Putnam, 2009; Sarokon, 1986; Scott, 2011; Sunyak & Kaufman, 1983; Zuffiano, et al., 2013). Although research on musical theater education is lacking, this study did support Pitt's (2007) study that demonstrated students shared feelings of accomplishment and feelings of being part of a larger community.

In considering how this study relates to the current body of literature, it is important to note that musical theater education has not been widely studied, especially in highly academic

classroom environments. Therefore, this study helps address a gap in current research literature. Also, in this study, student self-esteem varied substantially between academic achievements and feelings of self-concept outside the academic classroom. It may be beneficial to conduct research that compares levels of self-esteem in a variety of other educational settings, such as schools with differing academic levels, charter schools, and private schools.

**Community of practice.** In considering how this study influences the community of practice, new concepts may be developed on how to integrate musical theater education into academic curriculum. One unique opportunity to enhance teacher efficiency, cross-curricular activities, and more comprehensive instruction would be to create and implement a website that would provide academic teachers with musical theater scenes and productions that support the topic they are teaching. A database cataloging lesson plans that include both academic and arts instruction may increase student comprehension.

Brand and Triplett (2011) stated because of scripted curriculum and time constraints, cross-curricular instruction is difficult for teachers to integrate into their teaching, even though it can be helpful to overall student learning and comprehension. Because teachers often individually teach every aspect of their curriculum, integrated learning can be stifled. However, musical theater education may be effective in complementing academic curriculum by integrating several layers of comprehension into the learning process. Students who study musical theater are not only memorizing dialogue, but are experiencing a point of view other than their own, furthering their understanding of someone other than themselves (National

Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

**Possibilities for and hindrances against cross-curricular instruction.** Since musical theater has demonstrated it may enhance student self-efficacy, it may be beneficial for academic teachers to utilize this particular teaching style to enhance their existing curriculum. Although student theater experiences may demonstrate a pathway to further student comprehension, there currently is no database where academic teachers, who may not have an abundance of theatrical knowledge, can easily access production scenes to share with their students. One possibly helpful resource could be a database of existing theater productions that complement certain areas of curriculum. For example, a history teacher may utilize scene work from *Les Miserables* to add an additional layer of student understanding to the French Student Revolution. Elementary teachers could incorporate scenes from *School House Rock* to differentiate learning about government policy, civics, and social studies. Using musical rhythms from the rap music in *Hamilton*, mathematics teachers can help students break numbers down into fractions, helping those students who learn best aurally and kinesthetically. In an effort to help students understand the effects of the Great Depression, teachers could allow students to perform scenes from *Annie*. With the addition of a national database cataloging how each musical theater performance can benefit the academic environment, cross-curricular learning is achieved, helping teachers educate students at a deeper comprehension level.

In addition to academic teachers not possessing enough information on which productions may complement their curriculum, full-length productions require show royalties, and teachers often do not have a budget that will support paying these costs. One solution to this challenge is allowing academic and arts teachers in-school time to collaborate and design lesson

plans that create cross-curricular instruction. With appropriate preparation time, performing arts teachers can plan productions that complement their students' academic instruction. By allowing musical theater to enhance, not replace, academic instruction, valuable instruction time is not lost.

## **Limitations**

**Sample population.** Aquinas and Edwards (2014) stated it is important to recognize, acknowledge, and accept the limitations of research. Causes of this study's limitations include issues with sample populations for data collection, methodology, and lack of prior research. First, there are limitations in the study discussed due to the limited number of minority students in specific demographic regions of the United States. As a result of the low number of minority students in the specific area, this study was limited entirely to Caucasian children and therefore was not able to be generalized to other populations. Also, most children are from a similar socioeconomic background, so the study only reflects the outcomes of upper middle class community students. However, it is important to note that Mason (2010) argued that homogenous populations increase saturation, which is helpful to qualitative research.

Additionally, the teacher student ratio at the sample school is thirteen to one, much smaller than the rest of the nation's classrooms. Hence, the study may not be applicable to the outcomes of larger cities' students. Finally, the school only educates 100 and 300 students, so the evidence found in this study may not be generalized to larger school district. Sampling may be too small to ensure the results can be generalized to a larger population. Finally, since student interviews were conducted by their teacher, bias may be a factor in student responses.

**Methodology.** Methodology may also be a limitation for this study. A key aspect of case study research is its narrow study focus. This narrow focus draws criticism from

researchers concerning a lack of generalizability. Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2001) stated there are a few limitations to using case study research. First, case studies often lead to a tremendous amount of data representing many points of view. This can be difficult to represent numerically, though it may be valuable information. Secondly, the expertise and intuition of the researcher are key to the study, but also a drawback to their objectivity (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2001). In this study, the researcher did rely heavily on her expertise and teaching intuition, but only to observe and interpret student behaviors as clearly as possible. Finally, case studies often cannot answer a large amount of research questions in a given study (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2001). In this study, only three research questions were asked and only two were answered. However, case studies can offer “provisional truths” and “ring true” in other situations (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2001, p. 11). The reader may decide if study results align closely enough with their own research study.

**Lack of existing research.** Finally, due to a lack of existing research literature in the area of musical theater education, this study did not explore a vast literature review. The majority of this study’s literature review focused on the benefits of music education and theater education. Further research is recommended to increase the depth of educational research into musical education specifically.

**Survey research.** In addressing the use of survey research, surveys are valuable because it allows students to report their own thoughts and feelings (Adams & Lawrence, 2014). However, survey research comes with a social desirability bias that may affect middle school

students, especially those who want to appear positive in the teacher's eyes. Therefore, bias may be a factor in this study, even though there are specific precautions against bias in place.

### **Implication of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory**

This study does not support or deny the concept that musical education can be beneficial to student self-esteem. However, the study did demonstrate increases in student flexibility, openness to change, and a willingness to attempt new tasks. These new characteristics have been described as components of self-efficacy, an aspect of self-esteem (Bandura, 1993). If self-efficacy can be enhanced through musical theater education, it can be theorized that student self-esteem may be influenced as well. If musical theater education can be successfully integrated into the academic classroom, alternative pathways to student learning may be developed and enhance overall student comprehension and retention.

Although the two of the original research questions did answer certain inquiries, many more questions were generated by the data collection. A gap exists between the original research questions and the outcome of the study. This study only surveyed and measured student self-esteem. Characteristics of self-efficacy, such as willingness to try new challenges and be open to change, frequently arose in the interview topics. Because the levels of student self-efficacy were not measured, it is unclear if student participation in the musical theater production enhanced their overall self-esteem. In addition, there are gaps in the literature studying not only the effects of musical theater education in a highly competitive academic setting, but also in schools with lower academic performance. There also continues to also be a gap in the current literature

concerning student self-esteem and self-efficacy in non-traditional settings such as private and charter schools.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

**Study examining student self-esteem versus self-efficacy.** There are several suggested recommendations as a result of the findings in this research study to expand and strengthen the existing body of research literature. The most significant suggestion for further research stemming from this study is conducting research that measures student self-efficacy in addition to measuring student self-esteem. Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as “the belief in one’s ability to manage and carry out actions that will produce positive outcomes” (Stuart, 2013). Rates of self-efficacy affect middle school student in a variety of ways. Students with high self-efficacy tend to set higher goals for themselves, imagine accomplishing tasks, and demonstrate more perseverance when facing adversity (Bandura, 1977; Schunk, 1989; Zelenak, 2011). Conversely, research has demonstrated students with lower self-esteem can lack school engagement, leading to poor decisions such as school dropout, substance abuse, and teenage pregnancy (Caraway, Reinke, & Hall, 2003). Students with lower self-esteem tend to set lower, more attainable goals for themselves, whereas students with higher self-esteem are willing to work harder to achieve a larger goal.

Healthy, stable self-efficacy is a tremendous asset to students. Self-efficacy influences actions student take, the level of effort put forth, the amount of time that students persevered to achieve the goal, the degree of resiliency to recover from mistakes, the intensity of stress and anxiety, and the level of achievement (Zelenak, 2011). However, there is one distinct characteristic of self-efficacy that should be highlighted for educators; self-efficacy can be built and shaped (Berry & West, 1993). This characteristic of self-efficacy places significant

importance on the educational system. Teachers, parents, and even peers may have the ability to influence student self-efficacy.

Bandura (1977) theorized there are four aspects that regulate self-efficacy: mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal/social persuasion, and physiological and affective states. Usher and Pajares (2008) discussed self-efficacy can be greatly enhanced through skill development, leading to skill mastery. These experiences are important because they represent the most authentic evidence of student progress (Usher & Pajares, 2008). Mastery experiences prove influential when students overcome obstacles on particularly challenging tasks (Bandura, 1997). As students show effort and accomplish a goal, their confidence and esteem are increased (Widmer, et al., 2014). However, likewise, when a student attempts a goal and fails, their confidence and esteem are lessened (Usher & Pajares, 2008). When students are feeling insecure about attempting a skill, social modeling can be an effective tool in encouraging student self-efficacy (Usher & Pajares, 2008). In the musical theater classroom, allowing more seasoned and experienced actors demonstrate character development may encourage students with lower self-efficacy to begin to build their character without fear of failure.

According to Bandura (1977), vicarious experience is also a valid method of enhancing student self-esteem. Students seek out models that they admire, relate to, and believe they can perform similar tasks (Schunk, 1987). If, however, the model demonstrates that the task as easy, students can feel even more insecure of their own abilities, ultimately hindering their self-efficacy. In musical theater classes, students observe other classmates creating, developing, and fine tuning characters in their repertoire. This observation of trial and error can encourage students to make themselves vulnerable to the arts process. It is important, however, that the experienced actors share their creative process, allowing other students to see how they

struggled, made revisions, and ultimately succeeded. Allowing students with lower self-esteem to see others grapple with challenges may encourage them to attempt tasks out of their comfort zone.

A third influence on student self-efficacy is social persuasion (Bandura, 1977). Students, especially those with low self-efficacy, seek out feedback about their performance from teachers, parents, and peers (Usher & Pajares, 2008). Encouraging feedback is especially valuable when paired with clear instructions on how to improve performance (Evans, 1989). Verbal and social persuasion can also be present in arts classes. In musical theater classes, students are often given constructive criticism or praise. Although these comments can sometimes be helpful, social persuasions are limited in their ability to increase self-efficacy. Students, especially those in the formative years, are particularly in tune with social feedback. This leads to sometimes hurting rather than helping self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). In order to be effective, social feedback should be delivered with sensitivity to the student's current self-efficacy. Even if students are surrounded by positive self-efficacy conditions, how students interpret cues around them affects their overall self-efficacy beliefs. Bandura (1997) hypothesized that students interpret cues differently based on a variety of situation. A student may weigh feedback as more important if the feedback is additive (the more often the student hears the same feedback, the more valuable it is), relative (a student values the feedback based on the source), multiplicative (a student receives feedback from two sources that interact) or configurative (the student values the feedback based on the presence of others). (Usher & Pajares, 2006).

The fourth aspect of self-efficacy beliefs is actually centered around the affective psychological state of the student (Bandura, 1977). Emotional states such as anxiety, fear, stress, and even mood can affect how a student gauges their self-efficacy (Usher & Pajares, 2006).

Teachers can help increase student self-efficacy simply by lowering stress while a student is learning. The arts classroom can be one of openness and freedom. Musical theater classrooms can be safe places for students to express themselves and try new creative outlets without judgment or ridicule. Students often feel a part of something larger than themselves while learning to creatively work together (Diamantes et al., 2002; Shields, 2001). Palmer (2004) stated that when a student feels safe in an environment, they can speak and hear truth. Barnes (2015) agreed and stated student learning and growth occurs when they are not afraid to make a mistake.

The arts classrooms often represent individuality, personality, and autonomy. Sawyer (2006) stated the arts allow for improvisation, collaboration, and the emergence of interconnectedness. In a study conducted by Morefield and Lang (2010), researchers investigated the relationship between arts education and personal motivation and self-efficacy in rural middle school students. Their findings concluded students showed signs of stronger confidence as a result of arts education. This increase led to a departure from parent or teacher approval by building inward self-efficacy (Morefield & Lang, 2010). McPherson and McCormick (2000, 2006) and McCormick and McPherson (2003) reported a positive relationship between self-efficacy and musical performance. In their findings, self-efficacy was a more reliable predictor of achievement in music performance than a student's intrinsic talent, general self-efficacy, and self-regulation (McPherson & McCormick, 2000, 2006; McCormick & McPherson, 2003).

Self-esteem and self-efficacy are often grouped together to describe student self-concept. However, self-efficacy differs slightly from the overarching theme of self-esteem. "Self-efficacy refers to people's judgments of their own capabilities to organize and execute courses of action

required to attain designated types of performances” (Bandura, 1982). In this study, levels of student self-esteem and self-efficacy were not equal. The students who participated in this study have been immersed in highly academic environment for the past several years. These intense academic classrooms have created students who are confident in their academic abilities, which led to them feeling confident in their academic self-esteem. Many of the participating students, however, did not have matching levels of self-esteem in other areas of their life. Students shared feelings of needing to be “right” each time they participated in class. They were cautious of their ability to try new concepts if they felt unsure of the ending goal or requirement. Some students revealed that art class (a classroom that allowed them to free draw and express their creativity) was actually a difficult class for them in which to excel. They were uncomfortable in settings that lacked structure, guidelines, and a specific goal. The participating students need for a strict framework restricted their creativity and ability to attempt new tasks. These behaviors demonstrate lower levels of student self-efficacy.

Levels of self-efficacy determine how a student predicts success or failure in performing assigned tasks (Bandura, 1982; Zimmerman, 2003). Self-efficacy influences how much effort a student will exert when attempting a new task and how long they will persevere when challenges arise (Bandura, 1982; Zimmerman, 2003). Students who can exercise some control over decisions demonstrate increased self-efficacy (Britner & Pajares, 2006; Hen & Goroshit, 2013; Pajares, 2005; Siddall, 1999). In the musical theater classroom, students are given opportunities to create their own characters, make costuming and set design decisions, and have a voice in how their character interacts with others in the story. Students who are given choices, freedom, and opportunities for creativity ultimately have a higher sense of locus control. Since these learning opportunities may demonstrate a pathway to increased self-efficacy, further research should be

conducted to examine how musical theater education can influence and increase student self-efficacy.

**Suggestions for implementing musical theater education into the academic classroom.** The concept of a cross-curricular database is a significant and important one. Barnes (2015) stated although many educational researchers value the benefit of cross-curricular learning, there are very few models on how to achieve a creative learning environment. Cross-curricular learning is achieved when the “skills, knowledge, and attitudes of a number of different disciplines are applied to a single experience, problem, question, theme, or idea” (Barnes, 2015, p. 11). Performing arts classes may be a valuable tool in enhancing academic curriculum. However, Barnes (2015) warned not to allow arts classes, such as music and drama, to consistently play a secondary role in the curricular process. Each piece of the puzzle is unique, valuable, and adds another layer of understanding to the overall learning theme. “Effective and lasting learning in one subject is often provoked by calling on another” (Barnes, 2015, p. 64).

When students have a voice in what they study, they are more motivated to learn (Hen & Goroshit, 2013; Pajares, 2005). Barnes (2015) encourages teachers to allow the curiosity of the topic drive the student learning. If a history teacher seeks to teach American racism and prejudice in the 1950’s, allowing students to choose from the shows *Hairspray*, *West Side Story*, or the more recently produced *In the Heights* gives them intrinsic motivation to study and understand the subject matter. Abbs (2003) stated learning should be “creative and geared toward experience” (p. 15). When a student develops and becomes a character in a musical production, especially when that character is not a reflection of who they are personally, they understand the mindset and motivations behind real people and their personal experiences. This

increase in understanding can deepen their levels of empathy towards those who are different from themselves (Ferguson & Montgomerie, 1999; Guetzkow, 2002, Matarasso, 1997; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010; Williams, 1995). Barnes (2015) stated when students learning in a cross-curricular model, they make “multiple and unexpected connections” (p. 201). Students may discover characteristics in their role that reflect their own experiences, challenges, or backgrounds.

**Varying sample population.** Because the study was conducted in a private school in suburban Minnesota, students were of similar ethnicity and socio-economic background. Studies broadening the scope of participating students may be helpful in demonstrating how musical theater education effects the self-esteem of students of various backgrounds.

**Varying academic achievement.** Secondly, this study was conducted in a highly competitive academic environment, possibly influencing the participating students’ high self-esteem. The students who participated in this study have been immersed in a highly academic environment for the past several years. These intense academic classrooms have created students who are confident in their academic abilities, which led to them feeling confident in their academic self-esteem. As a result, most of the participating students reported healthy levels of self-esteem at the beginning of the study. If musical theater education was introduced into an environment of lower academic achievement, results may differ from this study. Similarly, if this research was conducted in an environment where students began the study with significantly lower self-esteem, ending levels of self-esteem may have been higher. Further study, particularly in schools that struggle academically, may demonstrate different results.

**Longevity of study.** Finally, this study occurred over a three-month period, making it difficult to predict if the study results will have lasting effects. Earlier, Guetzkow (2002) stated

the performing arts are often criticized because studies are not conducted for a long enough period of time, creating inferences that cannot be fully supported. Additionally, thorough funding for these studies may be lacking for long term studies. Considering the concept of enhanced student self-esteem being transferred into the academic classroom, no evidence was reported during the course of this study. Further research studies should be conducted over a longer period of time to reveal if student self-esteem can affect their academic behavior. During the course of data collection, no significant academic changes were observed or recorded, but changes in student self-esteem outside of their academic studies were prevalent. Again, further studies need to be conducted over a longer period of time to allow significant and lasting change to occur.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of musical theater education on middle school student self-esteem. Data reported students did not demonstrate a significant change in self-esteem, but interviews and observations revealed students demonstrated increased confidence in experiences outside of the academic classroom, increased ability to accept change, and increased willingness to attempt tasks outside of their existing abilities. This research added to the small body of literature studying musical theater education and suggested new research opportunities to further expand the body of current research knowledge.

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## Appendix A: Self-Esteem Survey Questions

Instructions:

Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.

1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

2. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

3. I am able to do things as well as most other people.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

4. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

5. I certainly feel useless at times.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

6. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

7. I wish I could have more respect for myself.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

8. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

9. I take a positive attitude toward myself.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

## **Appendix B: First Student Interview Questions**

The framework questions used during the first student interviews were as follows:

Can you explain the idea of self-esteem?

How do you feel about speaking in front of other people?

Do you raise your hand in class often?

Do you feel you have artistic talent?

How do you interact with your peers?

Do you feel you have strong friendships at school?

Have you ever performed on a stage before?

Do you think you will like performing in a musical?

### **Appendix C: First Teacher Interview Questions**

The framework questions used during the first teacher interviews were as follows:

Does this student participate in class?

Does this student appear to struggle with self-esteem in any way?

Does this student have strong peer relationships?

Do you think this student has hidden talent?

## **Appendix D: First Parent Interview Questions**

The framework questions used during the first parent interviews were as follows:

Does this student participate in class?

Does this student appear to struggle with self-esteem in any way?

Does this student have strong peer relationships?

Do you think this student has hidden talent?

## **Appendix E: Second Student Interview Questions**

The framework questions used during the second student interviews were as follows:

Now that you are halfway through the rehearsal process, how are you feeling about your self-esteem?

Now that you are halfway through the rehearsal process, how do you feel about speaking in front of other people?

Now that you are halfway through the production, do you raise your hand in class often?

Now that you are halfway through the rehearsal process, do you feel you have artistic talent?

Now that you are halfway through the rehearsal process, how are you interacting with your peers?

Now that you are halfway through the rehearsal process, do you feel you have strong friendships at school?

Are you enjoying rehearsing for the musical?

Is dancing in front of your peers scary?

Are you comfortable at rehearsal?

## **Appendix F: Second Teacher Interview Questions**

The framework questions used during the second teacher interviews were as follows:

Does your student enjoy school?

Does your student talk about interacting with the student body?

Do you think your student is shy or outgoing?

Do you think your student has hidden talent?

Does your student have healthy self-esteem?

## **Appendix G: Second Parent Interview Questions**

The framework questions used during the second parent interviews were as follows:

Does your student enjoy school?

Does your student talk about interacting with the student body?

Do you think your student is shy or outgoing?

Do you think your student has hidden talent?

Does your student have healthy self-esteem?

## **Appendix H: Third Student Interview Questions**

The framework questions used during the third student interviews were as follows:

How do you feel about speaking in front of other people?

Do you raise your hand in class often?

Do you feel you have artistic talent?

How do you interact with your peers?

Do you feel you have strong friendships at school?

How was your experience performing in a musical?

What would you tell another student who was thinking about participating in the school musical?

They also revealed they hoped the student developed humility as he grew.

### **Appendix I: Third Teacher Interview Questions**

The framework questions used during the third teacher interviews were as follows:

Does this student participate in class?

Does this student appear to struggle with self-esteem in any way?

Does this student have strong peer relationships?

Do you think this student has hidden talent?

## **Appendix J: Third Parent Interview Questions**

The framework questions used during the third parent interviews were as follows:

Does your student enjoy school?

Does your student talk about interacting with the student body?

Do you think your student is shy or outgoing?

Do you think your student has hidden talent?

Does your student have healthy self-esteem?

## **Appendix K: Minor Informed Assent Agreement**

### Minor Informed Assent Agreement

Please read this assent agreement with your parent(s) or guardian(s) before you decide to participate in the study. Your parent or guardian will also give permission to let you participate in the study.

**Purpose of the study:** We want to learn about how musical theater might be used as a tool to help teachers influence and increase middle school student-self-esteem.

**What will you have to do?**

As part of our study, we would like to ask you to take part in the school musical theater production and describe your experience. At the beginning of the study, the class will participate in a self-esteem survey. The questions will ask you to answer honestly about how you feel about yourself. When we begin rehearsals for the show, you will take part in an interview. You may skip any question that makes you uncomfortable or you simply do not want to answer. You also may stop the interview at any time. You will not be rewarded or punished in any way for participating in the study. Interviews will take place at the local White Bear Lake Library to protect your privacy. You will take part in three interviews that will take approximately 15-30 minutes each interview. Interviews will occur before you start rehearsal, halfway through the rehearsal process, and at the end of the production. In addition, the researcher will be speaking

with your academic teachers about your classroom behaviors and viewing academic work. All of your classroom information will be kept private.

During class, the researcher will take notes on your behaviors during rehearsal on your progress throughout the musical. These notes will be kept completely private and your identity will be protected.

Can this study hurt you?

If you participate in the study, you may be uncomfortable discussing your level of self-esteem. If you do not want to answer a certain question, you can absolutely skip it. There is no consequence to not answering a question. If you feel you need to speak to a school counselor to discuss the study in any way, please contact [redacted] at [email redacted]. If you participate in this study, there won't be any financial benefit to you.

Will anyone know how you answer?

The information that you give to us during this study will be kept private. Your name will not be used, and the list linking the code name assigned to your real name will be destroyed after all the data is collected no one who reads about our study will know it was you. We keep things locked up so that only our researchers see them. Research notes will be kept private and participant's names will be coded so that they will remain confidential. Research notes and transcripts will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in a locked closet in the school office.

You don't have to participate in this study. Even though this study is taking place during a class, your grade will not be affected in any way for choosing not to participate.

You can stop doing the study at any time. If you want to stop doing the study, tell Mrs. Kokx. If you choose to stop before we are finished, any answers you already gave will be



Investigator: Kimberly Kokx [Researcher email redacted.]

c/o: Professor Mark Jimenez

Concordia University – Portland 2811 NE Holman Street

Portland, Oregon 97221

## **Appendix L: Parent Consent Agreement**

**Research Study Title:** Effects of Musical Theater Education on Middle School Student Self-Esteem

**Principal Investigator:** Kimberly Kokx

**Research Institution:** Concordia University-Portland

**Faculty Advisor:** Mark Jimenez

**Purpose and what you will be doing:**

The purpose of this study is to examine how musical theater might be used as a tool to help teachers influence and increase student-self-esteem. This study is important because in addition to addressing the problem of a gap in current literature, this study should add to the current knowledge base of how the performing arts may enhance student learning. By discovering new techniques to reach a diversity of learners, such as using cross-curricular collaboration that allows for intentional alignment of coursework, teachers may discover new meaningful practices to help students comprehend and retain academic curriculum. We expect approximately 12 participants. No one will be paid to be in the study. We will begin enrollment on October 15, 2016 and end enrollment on January 15, 2017. To be in the study, you will be asked to allow your student to participate in three interviews addressing their experience in a musical theater production. In addition, you will be asked to participate in three interviews to address your student's experience in a musical theater production. Doing these three interviews

should take less than two hours total of your time. Interviews will be conducted during non-school hours and off school property.

**Risks:**

There are no risks to participating in this study other than providing your information. However, we will protect your information. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. When we or any of our investigators look at the data, none of the data will have your name or identifying information. We will only use a secret code to analyze the data. We will not identify you in any publication or report. Your information will be kept private at all times and then all study documents will be destroyed 3 years after we conclude this study.

**Benefits:**

Information you provide will help educators identify new teaching techniques that could benefit students who do not necessarily learn from traditional methods. You could personally benefit by knowing your input will contribute to the overall educational research body of literature.

**Confidentiality:**

This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell us abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

**Right to Withdraw:**

Your participation is greatly appreciated, but we acknowledge that the discussing self-esteem is a sensitive topic. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and



\_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature (Parent)

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Investigator Name

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Investigator Signature Kimberly Kokx

\_\_\_\_\_

Date August 29, 2016

Investigator: Kimberly Kokx [Researcher email redacted.]

c/o: Professor Mark Jimenez

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## **Appendix M: Statement of Original Work**

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

### **Statement of academic integrity.**

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

### **Explanations:**

#### ***What does “fraudulent” mean?***

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

#### ***What is “unauthorized” assistance?***

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or

any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another's work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

### **Statement of Original Work**

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or

materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the  
*Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*

Kimberly Kokx

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Digital Signature

Kimberly Kokx

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Name (Typed)

November 26, 2017

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Date