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Understanding the Liberal Arts Experience: Developing Leadership Skills from Classical Education

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Understanding The Liberal Arts Experience:

Developing Leadership Skills From Classical Education

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College of Education

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Abstract

This descriptive case study seeks to determine how public high school students perceive the value of participating in liberal arts activities and how they believe these activities influence their academic success and future choices after their high school graduation. Participants were selected from students who participated in both a liberal arts and leadership activity at the research site during the 2018 spring semester. The eight selected participants were asked to complete an initial interview and a member checking interview. The researcher also observed each participant's leadership activities twice. Themes emerging from the collected data included participant's access to leadership development opportunities, enhanced self-confidence, increased self-efficacy, and improved interpersonal communication skills. The results of this qualitative research will add to the academic literature concerning the benefits of liberal arts participation. The implications of this research suggest that high schools need to include a variety of liberal arts programs in their curriculum and that liberal arts teachers can use the results of academic research to serve as stronger advocates for the inclusion of liberal arts programs in their schools.

Keywords: liberal arts, self-efficacy, self-confidence, interpersonal communication skills, leadership

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents. It's been a long journey, yet it has been comforting to

have your support and encouragement through the whole process.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my committee members for their time and dedication throughout the research and writing process, especially Dr. Brianna Parsons for calming my anxieties and patiently answering all my questions. I have become a more thorough researcher and confident academic writer because of the dedication of my committee. Thank you Dr. Brianna Parsons, Dr. Tony Goss, and Dr. Michael A. Thomas for agreeing to serve on my committee.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

With the introduction of *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) in December of 2015, educators and policymakers within each state are beginning to adjust to a new educational policy (Darrow, 2016; Fránquiz & Ortiz, 2016). Under ESSA, greater responsibility is given to the states "for designing and building their state accountability systems and for determining supports and interventions for schools and districts," unlike the amount of educational control given to the federal government previously under the No Child Left Behind Act (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016, p. 1). During the time of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), introduced in 2001, high-stakes testing became the normative standard (Greenberg et. al., 2003; Heilig, Cole, & Aguilar, 2010; Ruppert, 2006). Nationwide, public school administrators diverted time and money to the areas of English and math, as they were heavily tested and used to assess overall school success (Gerrity, 2009). Instruction time was reduced in liberal arts classes, as well as physical education and social studies, as teachers were asked to include standards from English and math in their curriculum (Gerrity, 2009; Pederson, 2007).

The liberal arts curriculum is organized to develop well-rounded individuals with the use of a wide range of subjects, including, among others, mathematics, astronomy, geometry, grammar, rhetoric, logic, music, and the natural and social sciences (Haidar, 2014; Thomas, n.d.). The wide range of subjects in the liberal arts curriculum is set to help students gain the mastery of a range of transferable skills (Haidar, 2014). Most research related specifically to liberal arts education is tied to the college level. It is difficult to find research that deals with liberal arts education as it fits with the definition of liberal arts curriculum at the high school level. For example, the high school where this researcher is employed defines classes as "core classes," that students must take to graduate, and "electives," as the extra classes not required for

graduation. When considering education at the high school level, the definition of classical education is more in sync with the way educators create curriculum. Perrin (2004) defined classical education as the three levels: 1) the grammar stage, where memorizing facts is easier for children; 2) the dialectic or logic stage, where students begin to question authority and facts; 3) and the rhetoric stage, when students become independent thinkers and communicators. One emphasis of classical education is the study of the liberal arts. Liberal arts education fits into these stages as it helps students develop the general knowledge and skills to become independent thinkers and communicators.

This researcher has chosen to limit the choice of liberal arts classes and activities in this study to those that are considered electives at the school where the research will be conducted. The liberal arts activities selected for this study will be restricted to choir, band, speech team, journalism, one-act play, spring musical, and art club. At the chosen study site these classes and activities are considered extra. While math, science, and history are included in the broader definition of liberal arts education used at the collegiate level, they are required classes that all students must take to graduate high school, so therefore are not elective courses. This study will focus on the classes and activities included in the definition of liberal arts that are considered optional to students at the high school level, which may also be considered classes and activities that might be cut from the curriculum if necessary to save money or increase time spent on core subjects. Although these classes could all be placed in other categories, such as fine arts, performing arts, and communication, the term liberal arts covers them in a more overarching manner.

The more recently adopted ESSA enforced the need for schools to include a variety of programs that support college and career readiness, including music and arts, in their curriculum

(Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). Liberal arts classes and activities help students gain

cognitive skills (Costa-Giomi, 2015), self-esteem (Severs, 2016), self-regulation, and self-

efficacy (Kindekens et al., 2013). These same skills are needed for students to become ready for

college or a career after graduation (Franklin, 2011). While ESSA supports the need for liberal

arts classes and activities in schools, some teachers and parents fear that the high-stakes testing

mentality created by NCLB will remain a constant as schools attempt to transition to this new

regimen (Mathis & Trujillo, 2016). Liberal arts teachers need to be proactive in helping their

schools find a balance and create indicators that measure the college readiness skills connected to

liberal arts classes, such as self-regulation and critical thinking skills (Darling-Hammond et al.,

2016; Franklin, 2011). Darrow (2016) stated that liberal arts teachers need to be advocates when

it comes to including and protecting educational time spent in liberal arts programs. According

to Darrow (2016), teachers need to remember to reinforce ESSA's policy, which supports

strongly the inclusion of music and the arts in schools, to remind others about the benefits of

liberal arts education, and to request that liberal arts programs are expanded in their school. All

this is necessary to keep the need to include liberal arts classes and activities in the forefront of

the minds of administrators and policymakers.

Problem Statement

Throughout the 14 years of NCLB, policymakers learned that high standardized test

scores did not always correlate with the development of college and career readiness skills

(Darling-Hammond et. al., 2016). The narrowing of curriculum to focus mainly on English and

math and the multiple-choice test-taking format meant students often missed out on the

development of research and inquiry, oral and written communication, and other problem-

solving skills (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2016). Development of strong oral and writing skills,

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scientific thinking skills such as critical questioning and hypothesis formation, and the ability to come up with innovative solutions are necessary for student success post-graduation (Adler, 2006; Conley, 2008; Franklin, 2011; Mumford, Campion, & Morgeson, 2007). Liberal arts classes help students develop these skills (Bahls, 2013; Costa-Giomi, 2015). This study will investigate the impact of student participation in liberal arts classes and activities and how these activities affect students' academic success and future choices.

For the past 10 years, this researcher has worked in a school system that provides several liberal arts activities for students. However, there is an imbalance of support from administrators and community members when it comes to extracurricular activities. The majority of support is aimed at sports. This researcher's colleagues, as staff members at the high school, are expected to be involved with sports activities through collecting tickets, working the concession stands, and even just attending the competitions. However, there is no reciprocal expectation for liberal arts activities. Sports are still funded strongly throughout the district, while the liberal arts programs are questioned as to their relevance and sometimes just shuttered. As a result, students are less likely to join liberal arts activities.

This researcher has witnessed the reduction of time spent in liberal arts classes due to the need to improve school test scores. Many school development sessions are spent on how to improve student test scores and asking non-English and math teachers to include English and math standards into their curriculum, further reducing educational time spent on liberal arts standards. This researcher is interested in becoming an advocate for liberal arts programs. The activities and classes that this researcher sponsors can help students improve their cognitive and self-efficacy skills (Bahls, 2013; Costa-Giomi, 2015), without the addition of standards imported awkwardly from other academic disciplines.

Research Questions

Gaining insight into student perceptions about high school liberal arts classes and activities will help liberal arts teachers become better advocates to reinforce ESSA policies, remind others of the benefits of a liberal arts education, and request more time for liberal arts activities (Darrow, 2016). The research questions asked in this study reflect this general goal. The aim was to determine why students choose to be involved in liberal arts classes and activities, how they perceive these types of activities in their current life, how their liberal arts classes and activities influence their leadership roles, and how they perceive that these activities influence their future decisions. The researcher will attempt to find the answers to the following research questions:

RQ$_1$: How do public high school students describe their involvement in both liberal arts and leadership activities?

  o How do public high school students perceive participation in liberal arts and leadership activities with relation to academic success?

  o How do public high school students perceive participation in liberal arts and leadership activities with relation to decisions about their future?

Purpose of the Study

The majority of the academic literature on the benefits of the liberal arts focuses on specific activities and their specific benefits (Bahls, 2013; Morrison, 1994; Stapelton, 2011). Liberal arts involvement continues to show benefit to self-esteem, cognitive skills, academic performance, self-efficacy, and self-regulation (Costa-Giomi, 2015; Kindekens et al. 2013; Severs, 2016). These skills are necessary for students to achieve higher academic success and to become competent leaders (Bahls, 2013; Mumford et al., 2007). College or career-ready

students need to develop the ability to understand what skills they possess (self-efficacy), set goals for improving those skills (self-regulation), and increase the skills needed (cognitive skills) to learn and succeed after high school graduation (Adler, 2006; Mumford et al., 2007).

The purpose of this study was to determine how public high school students perceive the value of participating in liberal arts activities and how they believe these activities influence their academic success and future choices post-graduation. This study sought to contribute to the research on the benefits of liberal arts participation, increase the understanding of teachers regarding how liberal arts classes and activities benefit students outside of the classroom, and improve understanding of how students perceive liberal arts activities in their lives. Research was conducted through observations and interviews to gain insight from students involved in liberal arts activities. Observation of study participants during their leadership activities revealed how liberal arts students participate outside of liberal arts classes and activities. Individual interviews allowed the researcher to gain insight into participant's thoughts and perceptions about their liberal arts involvement. Interviews and observations helped the researcher fulfill the purpose of the study to gain a deeper understanding of the benefits of liberal arts classes and activities for high school students.

Operational Definitions

Core Subjects: In this study, English, math, science, and social studies constitute "core" subjects, because all students are required to take these courses (Conley, 2008).

Liberal Arts: In this study, the extracurricular activities of choir, band, speech, art club, journalism, one-act play, and spring musical were the focus of liberal arts classes and activities. The liberal arts curriculum is set to develop well-rounded individuals with general knowledge of a wide range of subjects and mastery of a range of transferable skills (Haidar, 2014, para. 4).

Leadership Activities: In this study, the extracurricular activities of Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA), Future Farmers of America (FFA), Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA), National Honor Society (NHS), Student Council, and Class Officer were considered leadership activities. Leadership activities focus on educating students about the "process of influence, whereby people are inspired to work toward group goals, not through coercion, but through personal motivation" (Bolden, 2004, p. 5).

Extracurricular activities: Extracurricular activities are activities that "are optional, ungraded, and are usually conducted outside the school day in school facilities" (Mahoney & Cairns, 1997, p. 241)

Faculty Sponsors: Faculty members who serve as guiding mentors for extracurricular activities (Augusta, 2013).

Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA): FCCLA is a nonprofit national career and technical student organization for young men and women in Family and Consumer Sciences education in public and private school through grade 12 (FCCLA, 2015).

Future Farmers of America (FFA): FFA is an intra-curricular student organization for those interested in agriculture and leadership (National FFA Organization, 2015).

Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA): FBLA is a student business organization that helps members prepare for careers in business (Future Business Leaders of America-PBL, 2017).

National Honor Society (NHS): NHS is the nation's premier organization established to recognize outstanding high school students who have demonstrated excellence in the areas of scholarship, service, leadership, and character (National Honor Society, n.d.).

College Readiness: This concept refers to "the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in a credit-bearing general education course at a post-secondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree . . ." (Conley, 2008, p. 24).

Assumptions

For the purpose of this study, this researcher assumed certain beliefs were true. First, it was assumed that seniors and juniors in high school had the most insight into the connection between their liberal arts activities and their leadership activities, as they have spent more time participating in these activities than students in lower classes. Second, it was assumed that participants had observed some connection between their activities and their academic performance, because they have been exposed to the reasoning behind their activities and their benefits from faculty sponsors for four years. Finally, it was assumed that participants had a general idea about their future goals and plans beyond high school graduation. Graduation is closer for seniors, and they should have been planning for their future after high school for at least one semester by the time the observations and interviews are conducted for this study.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study utilized a descriptive case study designed to guide the research methodology. One aspect of a case study design is that it allows the researcher to study contextual conditions that the researcher believes to be relevant, as well as how and why the conditions exist (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Selecting a descriptive case study design further guided this research, allowing this researcher to study contextual conditions in the real-life setting in which they occured (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This design allowed the researcher the flexibility to conduct research within a natural setting, allowing for more in-depth conversations with study participants.

Choosing a descriptive case study design meant there were inherent limitations. Limitations in research might include, among others, circumstances that happen that are out of the researcher's control (Simon & Goes, 2013, para. 2). The choice of a case study design meant causal inferences could not be made because the sample for this study was taken from one population and may not be generalizable elsewhere (Baron, 2008; Simon & Goes, 2013). The attempt to reduce bias also limits the study as potential participants in the researcher's sponsored activities were not be asked to participate.

While some elements of the case study design were out of this researcher's control, limitations could be reduced through specific choices made by this researcher to ensure the validity of the data. Two delimitations for this study included the guidelines for participant selection and the small sample size; for the purposes of this study, "Delimitations are factors that affect the study over which the researcher generally does have some degree of control" (Baron, 2008, p. 5). Although the sample size was limited to one educational institution, several methods of data collection were used to ensure credibility among the data gathered. This study used triangulation, prolonged engagement in the field, member checking, and thick, rich description to create credibility in the study. A richer description was also created by ensuring invited participants had the most information to share during the data gathering process. For this specific reason, this researcher selected participants only from the senior or junior class due to their time spent participating in liberal arts activities.

Significance of the Study

This study was designed to research how public high school students perceive their involvement in liberal arts classes and activities and how these activities affect academic success and future choices. The results of this study may provide liberal arts teachers with information

to help advocate for their programs. Administrators and community members look for connections beyond the obvious. Liberal arts classes and activities benefit students by helping them gain important college and career readiness skills, which include, among others, cognitive skills, self-efficacy, self-regulation, and self-concept (Costa-Giomi, 2015; McPherson & McCormick, 2004; Nielsen, 2004; Zimmerman, 2002). It is hypothesized by this researcher that the data and analysis will show that students gain confidence from these skills, transfer these skills to other academic areas, and improve their educational success in other academic areas (Catterall, Chapleau, & Iwanaga, 1999; Eisner, 2004).

Teachers need to create connections to academic success and leadership skills to illustrate how important liberal arts participation is to a "well-rounded" education (Darrow, 2016). Even though ESSA supports the need for students to have access to classes beyond basic core classes, it still "preserves most of the unproductive structures and reforms that NCLB prescribed" (Mathis & Trujillo, 2016, p. 26). It is up to those who teach and sponsor liberal arts classes and activities to reinforce, remind, and request that ESSA policies are implemented in their school districts (Darrow, 2016). This study hopes to add to the literature on the benefits of liberal arts participation.

Summary

This chapter has given a summary of the recent obstacles facing liberal arts education for high school students. It is important that liberal arts teachers understand the outside benefits students gain from participation in liberal arts classes and activities and how they may transfer to other significant areas, such as academic success and leadership. This researcher will use a descriptive case study to research how participants perceive their participation in liberal arts activities, their relation to academic success, and the relation of these activities to decisions about

the future. The tools of observation and interview will be used to gather data and create a rich description of the results of this study.

The following chapters provide an in-depth look at the role that liberal arts classes and activities have had in education during the past century and how liberal arts participation benefits students in the areas of leadership, academic success, and future choices. Chapter 2 delves deeper into the effects of NCLB policies on the United States education system and the similarities and differences of ESSA to NCLB. A clearer definition will be provided of the skills students gain through participation in liberal arts activities, such as self-efficacy, cognitive skills, and self-regulation. Through a review of the literature, this study will show how these skills benefit students in other academic areas, such as the classroom and leadership activities. Finally, an assessment of the methodology from previous studies will guide the decision for the need for further research.

Chapter 3 will set up the use of a descriptive case study design to investigate how public high school students perceive their participation in liberal arts activities and how this affects their academic success and future decisions. The technique of observation will enable this researcher to determine how liberal arts participants take part in their leadership activities. Each participant will be interviewed twice. The first interview will allow the researcher to gain insight into the participant's perceptions, as well as answer any questions created by the first observation. The second interview will enable this researcher to verify vis-à-vis the interviewee whether or not the information gathered during the first interview is an accurate reflection of what was said. Finally, chapter 3 will set up the research process and the way information will be gained and assessed.

Chapter 4 will present the process through which the data was analyzed and the results of research. Themes that emerged from the data gathering process will be presented and discussed with regards to how they relate to the participants interview question answers and this researcher's observations. A description of the participant gathering process will be presented as well as further discussion of how the interview and observation processes took place.

Chapter 5 will further explore the themes. Themes will be discussed according to how they relate to the research questions, as well as previous research.   Implications of the results will examine the need for a variety of liberal arts programs to be provided for students and the need to advocate for these programs. Finally, recommendations for future practice and research will be considered.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Support for liberal arts education in the United States ebbed and flowed during the 20th century. Over the decades, many raised questions as to the efficacy and legitimacy of liberal arts education. At the turn of the 20th century, the liberal arts were believed to provide experiences that helped students grow to become creative and critical thinkers (Heilig et al., 2010). However, the Great Depression and its aftermath changed the way funding was given to schools, and subjects seen as nonessential were often cut. While the arts saw a reemergence of importance several times throughout the 20th century, other events such as the Race for Space and policies created in reaction to *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) overshadowed the known benefits of liberal arts education as policymakers and schools put more and more focus on core subjects, including science and math (Heilig et al., 2010). The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2001) created policies that stressed high-stakes testing in every state, further pushing liberal arts curricula into the background as schools focused on increasing test scores in core subject areas (Greenberg et. al., 2003). However, NBLC (2001) also set the precedent for basing educational decisions on scientifically based practices. The most recent change to America's education system came with the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) which was signed by President Barack Obama on December 10, 2015. ESSA reduces the control of the federal government, placing more responsibility on state governments to determine testing procedures and intervention protocols (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2016; Darrow, 2016; Fránquiz & Ortiz, 2016).

The introduction of the NBLC in 2001 demanded that schools increase test scores in core areas such as English and math. This pressure resulted in schools focusing more on areas that would be subject to testing, consequently decreasing time spent on other areas of academics not

included in state testing protocols (Greenberg et. al., 2003; Heilig et al., 2010; Ruppert, 2006). Since the inception of NCLB in 2001, school systems started to suffer the effects of concentrating mainly on core subjects alone. In order to avoid failing test scores, schools usually increased instructional time on state-tested subjects, which left less time to develop liberal arts classes. Even as instruction time was taken away from liberal arts, physical education, and social studies classes, teachers of these subjects were asked to include standards from English and math in their curricula (Gerrity, 2009; Pederson, 2007). Resources to keep liberal arts programs in the schools have also decreased. Funds once used to support successful liberal arts programs were diverted to meet the accountability demands of state tests (Gerrity, 2009).

ESSA, introduced in 2015, addressed the need for students to attain a "well-rounded education," meaning that liberal arts classes once again were considered important to a child's education (Darrow, 2016). Concretely, this means that schools are required to allocate more funds to programs that support college and career readiness, including music and arts (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). ESSA supports music and arts education with more than funds: "The law also refers to time spent teaching music and arts as 'protected time'" (Darrow, 2016, p. 43). While ESSA reaffirmed the importance of liberal arts in education, it is "still a primarily test-based educational regime" (Mathis & Truillo, 2016, p. 6). Schools have lived with the requirements of NCLB for over a decade, with its emphasis on standardized testing to measure school success. It may be difficult for states to transition from a high-stakes testing mentality to incorporating and depending on other accountability measures, such as student growth and English proficiency (Mathis & Trujillo, 2016).

Liberal Arts and Leadership Skills

The enhancement of cognitive skills, self-esteem, and self-efficacy are the main focus of this descriptive case study. While a limitation, attempting to focus on all of the benefits of liberal arts activities would not allow for in-depth inquiry and understanding. Self-regulation and self-efficacy focus on how students learn and the steps they take to learn more, while cognitive skills are skills students can learn and improve to help them succeed in other areas. Leaders are always learning, so they can stay knowledgeable about their practices. Leaders need to have the ability to understand what skills they possess (self-efficacy), set goals for improving those skills (self-regulation), and increase skills needed (cognitive skills) to stay effective as a leader (Adler, 2006; Mumford et al., 2007).

ESSA "encourages states to consider including measures of performance to evaluate abilities such as critical thinking, inquiry, communication, and collaboration, which are part of the new standards most states have adopted and essential for student success . . ." (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016, p. 7). Liberal arts classes and activities help students gain more college and career readiness skills (Bahls, 2013). Leadership and college readiness proponents contend that future success in these areas requires students to gain strong oral and writing skills, interpersonal skills, the ability to think outside of the box to solve problems, and scientific thinking skills necessary for finding new solutions to old problems (Adler, 2006; Conley, 2008; Franklin, 2011; Mumford et al., 2007). Through focusing on students who choose to participate in liberal arts and leadership activities at the high school level, this study seeks to understand how students perceive the skills they have gained from these activities. This study will explore the benefits of a liberal arts education and how it enhances other areas of student learning, including student leadership.

This literature review will focus on the effect of participating in liberal arts classes and activities at the high school level. Liberal arts education benefits students in many ways, including increasing academic performance and enhancing the development of cognitive skills, especially in the areas of math and reading (Bugai & Brenner, 2011; Costa-Giomi, 2015; Nutley, Darki, & Klingberg, 2014; Sittiprapaporn, 2010). Further, liberal arts education is credited with helping students build a stronger sense of self-esteem (Culp, 2016; Severs, 2016), the ability to self-regulate educational time, and a higher sense of self-efficacy to achieve goals (Kindekens et al., 2013; Ritchie & Williamon, 2007). Finally, liberal arts education is also tied to the development of good written, oral, and critical thinking skills, and more tolerance for diversity, whether cultural or political (Bahls, 2013; Conley, 2008; Ruppert, 2006; Stapleton, 2011).

The review of literature begins with a definition and deeper explanation of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and cognitive skills in order to understand why they are important for students. The next step in the review helps define leadership and success at the high school level, including student choices after graduation, such as going to college or working to become future leaders in their jobs. The literature is then used to explore what skills are necessary for students to achieve success in high school. Finally, the skills gained from liberal arts participation are compared with the skills needed for student success to assess similarities.

The second part of this literature review defines student success and how liberal arts activities help contribute to the skills needed for students to be successful. High schools measure success in several ways: academics, student leadership, graduation rates, state test scores, and college attendance rates. Students need competent cognitive skills to complete tasks, self-esteem to help them believe they can complete tasks successfully, and self-efficacy to assess their own skill level for completing those tasks (Adler, 2006; Conley, 2008; Franklin, 2011; Mumford et

al., 2007). The literature both defines student success and compares the skills needed for success with the skills gained through the liberal arts.

A great deal of research exists on the efficacy of liberal arts education at the college level; however, research involving liberal arts education at the high school level is sparse, and the definition of liberal arts becomes vague. Terms commonly used when classifying include core subjects, sports, and the arts. The majority of research studies focused on the benefits of liberal arts education at the high school level center around one or two liberal arts activities, such as instrumental music, and one benefit instead of liberal arts education in general (Hendricks, 2016; Schellenberg, 2006; Shin, 2011). Research studies that focus on the effect of one activity or one skill usually yield more concrete, and therefore more accurate, conclusions. More research in the area of the liberal arts is needed to continue to study the effects of participation on students.

Conceptual Framework

As of 2015, the top ten CEOs, including those of Starbucks, Hewlett-Packard, and the Walt Disney Company, all had earned liberal arts degrees at the university level (Linshi, 2015). Socially, a liberal arts degree often comes with the stigma that the liberal arts are a worthless pursuit and will make the learner less employable (Bahls, 2013; Linshi, 2015; Stapelton, 2011). Yet the evidence starkly refutes this idea. As defined by Thomas (n.d.): "the liberal arts curriculum assists . . . students in acquiring the skills necessary to become life-long, self-motivated learners who can flourish in and even transform an ever-changing world" (para. 3). A liberal arts education offers students a variety of experiences that develop employable skills, including critical questioning and problem-solving skills, cooperative working skills, and multicultural awareness (Bahls 2013; Pascarella, Palmer, Moye, & Pierson, 2001). Much of the

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research on liberal arts education focuses on the college level (Bahls, 2013; Severs, 2016; Stapelton, 2011). This dearth of research on liberal arts curricula at the high school level leads one to conclude that the liberal arts do not have a place at the high school level. The arts are seen as something extra, a luxury that can be taken away if more time is needed to increase state testing scores (Eisner, 2004; Gerrity, 2009).

A liberal arts education at the college level is structured to provide an overall, holistic education, requiring students to take a variety of classes including core classes, the arts, and physical education. This structure allows students to gain good written and oral skills, critical thinking skills, the ability to analyze and synthesize information, and to gain an overall appreciation for diversity in the world, instead of simply focusing on one area of interest (Bahls, 2013; Conley, 2008; Ruppert, 2006; Stapleton, 2011). Nearly every college or university, even those focused largely on technical or professional degrees, require their students to take a certain number of courses grounded in the liberal arts. Courses include, among others, English, humanities, history, lab sciences, fine arts, etc. At the high school level, students are required to take core classes that include science, math, English, and social studies that help them gain these skills. But they are also provided elective classes and extracurricular activities that expand on these skills. For the purpose of this study, the classes and extracurricular activities considered as an expansion of students' liberal arts education include, among others: choir, band, speech, art club, journalism, one-act play, and the spring musical. Using this mix of fine and performing arts, this study will focus on the skills gained from these activities and the possibility of these skills leading to more leadership activities at the high school level.

The Reality of Budget Cuts

Liberal arts curricula are the activities that are often cut first when schools need to reduce their expenditures (Ruppert, 2006). Eisner (2004) states that the primary reason for this prioritization is the ever-increasing importance of the disciplines of science and mathematics in the first quarter of the 20th century. Science provides definite answers, is teachable and testable, whereas the arts are emotional and subjective. Additionally, the rapid industrialization in the United States in the latter half of the 19th century, the labor demands of World War I, and the hardships of the Great Depression led to an increasing focus on technical training. Throughout the 20th century and leading into the 21st century, education in the United States was heavily influenced by the demand of technology and human labor needs (Eisner, 2004). This, combined with the increased pressure to raise test scores under NCLB, has led to arts instruction diminishing in schools (Eisner, 2004; Ruppert, 2006). Gerrity (2009) has summed up this development: "Fearful of the sanctions that accompany failing test scores, many school officials have been pressured to marginalize the curricular position of the arts in an effort to ensure student success in reading and mathematics" (p. 80). In order to pass state tests, some school administrators slated funds for the liberal arts to English and math instruction, effectively increasing time spent in tested subjects while reducing time spent on liberal arts subjects, and decreasing time in liberal arts subjects by asking teachers to focus on English and math standards during their own class time (Gerrity, 2009). Overall, this makes it hard for students to gain the benefits of participation in liberal arts activities.

Personal Narrative

As this researcher knows from her own experience as a fine arts teacher, there is a constant need to prove the worth of my program to school administrators and the community.

Sports have remained a priority in the community. Many members of the public consider the fine arts only as they are related to sports. The pep band and National Anthem singers represent the arts at home sporting events. Other activities, such as honor choirs and competitions, are challenged. Often administrators ask how they directly benefit students, only considering them as college recruitment activities instead of academic opportunities. In a school system where money is tight, these extra activities are commonly seen as frivolous expenses, a way for students to bolster their college applications by showing such extracurricular activities on their transcripts instead of important learning experiences. Knowing the tangible benefit of these extra activities, however, decreases the chance of these experiences being taken away from students who could truly benefit from them. Research in the field of fine and performing arts has demonstrated that the arts provide a strong influence on student's self-esteem (Culp, 2016; Gooy, 2010; Rickard et al., 2012; Severs, 2016; Shin, 2011), cognitive skills and academic performance (Bugai & Brenner, 2011; Costa-Giomi, 2015; Nutley et al., 2014; Sittiprapaporn, 2010; Trainor, Shahin, & Roberts, 2009), and self-efficacy and self-regulation (Kindekens et al., 2013; McCormick & McPherson, 2003; McPherson & McCormick, 2004; Nielsen, 2004; Ritchie & Williamon, 2007).

Liberal Arts Influence

The volume of studies regarding the benefits of a robust liberal arts curriculum has demonstrated that there is both a strong causation and correlation between the liberal arts and the skills gained by students (Brand 2007; Costa-Giomi, 2004; Hendricks, 2016; House, 2000). However, administrators who are looking to trim budgets need to state specific, tangible reasons for retaining liberal arts programs (Husain, Thompson, & Schellenberg, 2002; Norton, Winner, Cronin, Overy, Lee, & Schlaug, 2005; Rauscher & Hinton, 2011). Even though ESSA requires

schools to allocate funds to programs that support a well-rounded education, there are no specific requirements as to which specific programs must be offered in a particular school (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). ESSA does not provide detailed recommendations, as it is meant to give states and local school boards more flexibility and autonomy in decision making. A music program that is constituted by a band, choir, and orchestra might be reduced to include just a band as the single component of a music program. Knowing how liberal arts activities can benefit students and how these benefits transfer to other areas of education keeps the need for liberal arts activities in the forefront of administrators minds when they are looking to cut programs. Higher levels of self-efficacy, self-regulation, and cognitive/academic skills are associated with leadership as well as college preparedness (Conley, 2008; Draves, 2008; Mumford et al., 2007; Zimmerman, 2002). Hendricks (2016) asserted that self-efficacy is a habitual character trait which liberal arts teachers have the ability to help students develop over time. This results in students gaining a feeling of control over their own learning.

Mumford et al. (2007) listed cognitive skills and interpersonal relations as crucial elements for holding a leadership position. Even the lowest leadership positions involve the use of cognitive skills in order to communicate information effectively, whether orally or written, and the ability to learn continually and adapt to new situations (Mumford et al., 2007). Involvement in liberal arts activities enhances students' cognitive and academic abilities in reading, math, and spatial awareness (Catterall et al., 1999; Costa-Giomi, 2015; Schellenberg, 2006). Increasing students' ability in the classroom also increases their self-efficacy and self-esteem, giving them more confidence to learn and adapt (Culp, 2016; Draves, 2008; Severs, 2016). Students become able to assess their own abilities in order to learn how to adapt and increase their skills.

Mumford et al. (2007) also listed several skills involved in the interpersonal realm of leadership: social perceptiveness, coordination of actions, negotiation skills, and persuasion skills. Eisner (2004) asserted that the arts can teach these lessons. Education in the arts requires students to create qualitative relationships in order to satisfy some purpose, form aims and goals to help guide projects, and practice interpreting meaning from different contents (Eisner, 2004). These skills help students in liberal arts classes and activities learn to work together and to communicate their meaning clearly.

Social Cognitive Theory

Albert Bandura's (1993) social cognitive theory highlights the importance of an individual's beliefs regarding self-efficacy and how they affect cognitive development and functioning. Social Cognitive Theory focuses on four major processes that are influenced by a person's perceived self-efficacy: cognitive, motivational, affective, and selection processes. At the cognitive level, students either perceived ability as a skill to acquire or as an inherent ability (Bandura, 1993; Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). Students who perceived their ability as a skill to acquire set goals to gain those skills. For example, a student who wants to be a good piano player would set goals to take piano lessons, practice every day, and increase the difficulty of music they play to help them improve. Those who believed skills are inherent sought situations that allowed them to minimize failure. A student who feels successful at playing basketball would choose to be on the basketball team but may not push himself or herself to become better in areas where they struggle. These two separate beliefs affect how people set goals and motivate themselves. The belief in one's ability motivates that person to either reach for their goals or step back to reduce the risk of failure (Bandura, 1993). Affective processes involve a person's emotional state in connection with their self-efficacy beliefs; therefore,

someone whose perceived efficacy includes the idea that he or she cannot manage threats to success often experiences high anxiety (Bandura 1993). The final process in Bandura's (1993) Social Cognitive Theory deals with environment. Bandura (1993) stated that people are partly a product of their environment. Based on perceived efficacy, people use selection processes to choose activities and environments where they feel they will be successful. Zimmerman et al.'s study (1992) found that perceived efficacy had an influence on student achievement. Students with high levels of self-efficacy usually set higher goals for themselves and were more motivated to achieve those goals.

Creating students who are capable of setting goals and motivating themselves to reach their goals is one reason the liberal arts are important to schools. Helping administrators understand the connections between student involvement in liberal arts activities and student involvement in leadership activities is one way liberal arts teachers can help advocate for their classes and activities (Morrison, 1994). This connects reciprocally to how liberal arts activities at the high school level impact students' leadership and future leadership choices. Because this study will be conducted in a rural community, the school is small enough that students who choose to be in extracurricular activities tend to be involved in several activities. Figure 1 shows the options of liberal arts activities for students, the skills they develop in those activities, and the leadership activity choices they might make in the school.
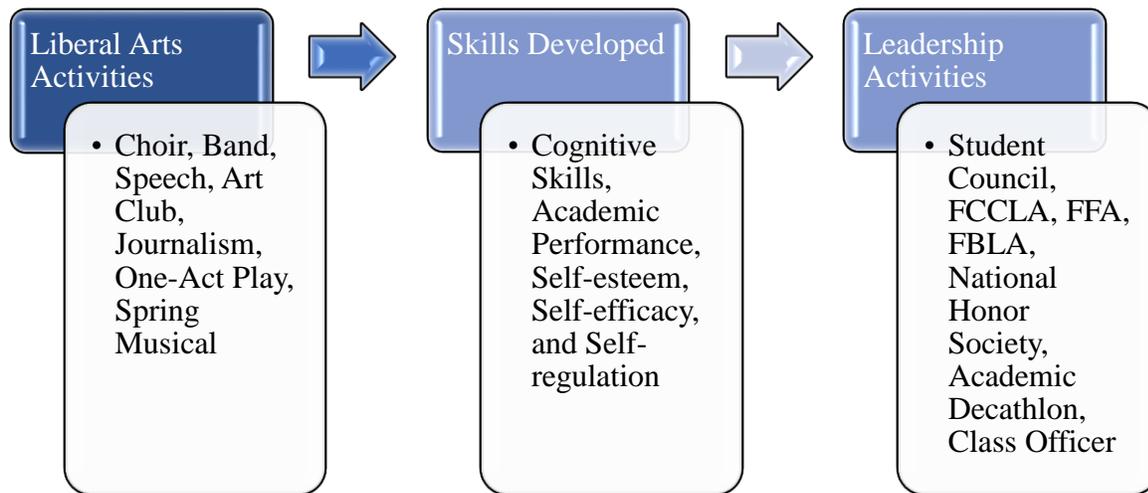
Figure 1. Liberal Arts activities and leadership possibilities.

The first step in this flow chart outlines the various liberal arts activities available to students, either through an elective class or an extracurricular activity. As discussed earlier, these activities produce the skills listed in the second column of the flow chart. The final step in the flow chart lists various leadership activities offered at this rural high school. Activities such as Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) and Future Farmers of America (FFA) provide various opportunities for students to develop and practice leadership skills. Student Council and Class Officer positions present students with the leadership opportunities in their own school environment. Finally, National Honor Society (NHS) and Academic Decathlon recognize students' leadership skills and allow them to practice and develop them further.

Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature

The literature concerning liberal arts education at any level focuses on two main types of benefits students gain from participation in the liberal arts: self-esteem and cognitive skills.

According to Michel and Farrell (1973), "self-esteem is the judgmental evaluation an individual makes of himself and is related not only to early home environment but also to achievement, including skill development" (p. 80). The literature states that students involved in the arts have shown an increase in their levels of self-esteem (Costa-Giomi, 2004; Gooy, 2010; Rickard et al., 2012). A student's level of self-esteem increases when they are successful at a task, such as during a solo performance. Increasing a student's level of self-esteem in one academic area increases the possibility of that student gaining confidence in other areas of life. However, there are discrepancies in the research on self-esteem and its connection to the liberal arts. Shin (2011) stated that the type of liberal arts experience also affects whether students' self-esteem levels increase. For example, students gain more self-esteem from participating in a group setting than performing a solo. Students experience safety when they perform in groups. Experiencing failure or embarrassment during a solo performance instead causes damage to a student's self-esteem (Shin, 2011).

Self-Efficacy, Self-Regulation, and Self-Concept

Closely connected to self-esteem are self-efficacy, self-regulation, and self-concept. Nielsen (2004) defined self-efficacy as "people's judgement [*sic*] of their capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (p. 419). As students proceed through their education, it is important for them to learn how to accomplish tasks on their own. Those involved in the liberal arts are expected to practice on their own in order to improve their skills. Mumford et al. (2007) list various skills that one needs to become a successful leader; self-efficacy plays an important role. Self-efficacy is based on belief in one's abilities (Nielsen, 2004). Having a strong sense of self-efficacy allows a person to assess their

own skills and apply those skills in different situations. A person with strong self-efficacy skills is also able to assess what skills need to be improved.

Many teachers of liberal arts activities have only one practice time per week dedicated to helping individual students. Speech team members and vocal and instrumental students must learn to practice on their own time outside of weekly lessons and practices. Musical and one-act play students must memorize their lines outside of group practice. Journalism students and art club members complete projects on their own before consulting their faculty sponsor. This lack of classroom time means that students must be aware of what skills they need to address on their own during their daily practice times and develop self-regulation skills that allow them to judge their own skill level and practice needs (Kindekens et al., 2013; McPherson & McCormick, 2004; Nielsen, 2004). While self-efficacy deals with students' assessment of their own skill level, self-regulation deals with their ability to create thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that direct them toward attaining short and long-term goals (Zimmerman, 2002). Students with good self-regulation skills are shown to perform higher on performance tests in the arts (McCormick & McPherson, 2003; Nielsen, 2004; Ritchie & Williamon, 2007). Zimmerman (2002) asserted the importance of learning self-regulation skills for educational purposes. Following graduation, young adults are expected to learn many work skills through observation and then practice those skills on their own.

When discussing self-concept, the research refers to academic self-concept, which deals with students' beliefs, feelings, and attitudes toward their own academic success (House, 2000; Shin, 2011). Students' belief in their abilities to perform well in academic areas is used as a predictor of their actual academic performance (House, 2000; Shin, 2011). Improving students' self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-regulation skills, and academic self-concept helps them become

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better performers in liberal arts activities. These concepts have also been shown to help students achieve in other academic areas (Kruse, 2012; Shin, 2011).

Cognitive Skills

The second benefit of participating in liberal arts activities highlighted in the applicable literature deals with the realm of cognitive skills, and these are the skills associated with "improvements in intelligence, spatial abilities, phonological awareness, verbal memory, processing of prosody, academic achievement, processing of sound, and neurological development" (Costa-Giomi, 2015, p. 20). The literature focuses on specific cognitive skills, such as spatial task performance, temporal reasoning, spatial-temporal reasoning, mathematics proficiency, reading proficiency, and overall academic achievement and IQ (Bugai & Brenner, 2011; Catterall et al., 1999; Gouzouasis, Guhn, & Kishor, 2007; Schellenberg, 2006; Sittiprapaporn, 2010).

The benefits to students who participate in the liberal arts varies with regard to cognitive skills. Costa-Giomi (2015) stated that studies show improved cognitive skills in the short-term; however, long-term effects are more inconclusive. Amer, Kalender, Hasher, Trehub, & Wong's (2013) study, which focused on older professional musicians, did show that the musicians outperformed the non-musician group in certain cognitive skill areas. Even though there is conflicting evidence in the literature, much of the literature does show a positive increase, however slight, in cognitive skills gained through liberal arts participation.

Cognitive skills gained from liberal arts often transfer into other areas of academic and personal life. These skills provide students with the ability to understand how to use relationships to solve problems and create innovative solutions. On the surface, cognitive skills help increase written and oral communication and spatial awareness in those who continue to

practice the arts (Catterall et al., 1999; Costa-Giomi, 2015; Schellenberg, 2006). Self-esteem and self-efficacy also play an important role in student success in the arts (Culp, 2016; Draves, 2008; Severs, 2016). Students with higher self-esteem and self-efficacy learned from the arts benefit from the same qualities in other academic areas (Catterall et al., 1999; Eisner, 2004).

The research that expresses the benefits of liberal arts activities on student success focuses primarily on academic success. The emphasis on standardized testing, classroom grades, and test scores have become the main measure of student success in schools. Students involved in the liberal arts tend to test higher in academic areas (Costa-Giomi, 2015; Morrison, 1994; Schellenberg, 2005). Ruppert (2006) highlighted the conclusions from a longitudinal study that focused on tracking and studying more than 25,000 middle and high school students. The research showed that students who were involved frequently in the arts tended to perform better on standardized tests. Ruppert (2006) cited the 2005 results that correlated SAT scores with arts participation. The conclusion showed that students who had participated in the arts for four years typically outscored their peers by 58 points on the college readiness exam.

From Student Success to Business Success

According to Mumford et al. (2007), the most entry-level leadership positions require skills in collecting, processing, and disseminating information. Additionally, leaders must have the skills in the following areas: oral communication, active listening, writing and reading comprehension skills, and critical thinking skills. These skills are studied in liberal arts literature as well. For example, music instruction is often associated with the enhancement of spatial-temporal reasoning. According to Rauscher and Hinton (2011), "spatial-temporal reasoning is the ability to visualize spatial patterns and transform them mentally over time in the absence of a physical model" (p. 215). The ability to mentally process and disseminate information and to

think critically about various solutions helps leaders solve problems and develop creative solutions.

Adler (2006) wrote, "Twenty-first century society yearns for a leadership of possibility, a leadership based more on hope, aspiration, and innovation than on the replication of historical patterns of constrained pragmatism" (p. 188). Companies look for leaders who are able to be creative and who are willing to try innovative solutions to problems, old and new (Adler, 2006; Bahls, 2013). Where and how do students gain the skills needed to become future creative leaders? Skills gained from liberal arts activity participation helps students gain some of the skills needed to be successful leaders within the school environment and with future leadership roles.

College readiness is an area used to measure school success. Students attending college are expected to enroll with the ability to interpret information, solve problems, analyze, and think critically (Bahls, 2013; Conley, 2007). The literature shows liberal arts activities help students gain the academic self-concept to obtain these skills (House, 2000). Students must be able to interpret and assess their own skills to become better performers, improving their analytical and critical skills, as well as their ability to solve problems with their own practices (McCormick & McPherson, 2003; Nielsen, 2004; Zimmerman, 2002).

Sports also remain a main focus of outside benefits to students. Participation in sports is shown to increase students' academic performance, as well as self-esteem in successful athletes (Broh, 2002; Camiré, 2014). Students involved in high school sports often develop higher self-esteem and positive self-image compared to students who do not participate in extracurricular activities (Camiré, 2014; Eime, Young, Harvey, Charity, & Payne, 2013). Sports allow students the opportunity to build positive relationships with teammates and other adults, increase social

status, and motivate them to want to perform well in school (Camiré, 2014). Broh's (2002) study on extracurricular activities showed participation in activities beyond liberal arts and sports, such as cheerleading, student council, and yearbook, also showed slight increases in social developments; however, the other activities studied were not as effective in developing these ancillary skills as participation in music and sports (p. 84). House (2000) stated there is a correlation between participation in extracurricular activities in general and higher academic self-concept in students.

Methodological Issues

It is important to understand the methodology and methods used to understand liberal arts activities so that a researcher can determine what part of the research is significant. When researching the literature on liberal arts activities and their benefits, there are a few areas of study that occur frequently: cognitive skills such as reading and math (Amer et al., 2013; Bugai & Brenner, 2011; Nutley et al., 2014; Schellenberg, 2005; Shin, 2011;), general academic success (Gouzouasis et al., 2007; Morrison, 1994), self-regulation (Kindekens et al., 2013; Morrison, 1994), self-efficacy (Hendricks, 2016; McCormick & McPherson, 2003; Ritchie & Williamon, 2007), and self-esteem (Brand, 2007; Costa-Giomi, 2004; Draves, 2008; Kruse, 2012). More recent research has focused on these areas because these skills are also needed to be successful in the traditional "core" subjects, which are tested by each state. ESSA also encourages schools to measure growth mindset, self-efficacy, self-management, and social awareness as they have been found to be measurable predictors of student success (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2016).

One type of study found in the research deals with those that utilize longitudinal sources. Two of the more important ones include: National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS:88), a panel study which followed more than 25,000 students in American secondary schools for 10

years (Broh, 2002; Catterall et al., 1999); and Morrison (1994) who used information from the

U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Statistics, which gathered information from

more than 18,000 sophomores across the U.S. in 1990. These studies allowed for larger sample

sizes but presented no control over how the information was gathered. The majority of the

literature reveals many studies with significantly smaller sample sizes: from 11 to 690. Often,

these studies utilized convenience samples and were conducted as on-site institutional research.

While small samples cannot represent every variation of research subject, such as those from

large and small communities, each study adds more knowledge to the field of liberal arts and

how participation in such activities can benefit other areas of life.

Much of the literature deals with correlational studies: how involvement in the liberal arts

affects a certain skill or area of life (Amer et al., 2013; Ritchie & Williamon, 2007; Schellenberg,

2006) or self-assessment inventories (Brand, 2007; Choi, Soo Lee, & Lee, 2008; Rickard et al.,

2012). These tools are helpful in gathering information from larger numbers of participants but

may also be influenced by the personal attitudes or status of the person taking the survey. The

literature reveals that all the studies strived for reliability of their information gathering tools, but

there is always the chance the participants do not answer the question fully and/or honestly.

There are other types of research dealing with the benefits of liberal arts activities: empirical

reviews (Catterall et al., 1999; Hallam, 2010; Morrison, 1994); systematic reviews (Broh, 2002);

theoretical reviews (Kindekens et al., 2013); however, these types of methods are not as

prevalent as the correlational studies.

Another area of concern with the body of literature is the limited amount of qualitative

and mixed methods designs used in the research. Much of the literature is built on the results

from quantitative analytical tools (e.g. surveys, questionnaires, inventories, or other measuring

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tools), but these studies rarely include a form of qualitative research. There are a few exceptions. Shin (2011) included interviews with the 18 participants of his study along with a student questionnaire and parent surveys. Drave's (2008) study incorporated weekly student journals from the twenty student participants. The liberal arts are notoriously subjective; there is no true "right or wrong" evaluation of a student's performance or creativity. In this, liberal arts courses differ dramatically from other subjects such as math. As a result, finding concrete answers to research questions is more difficult.

The research literature highlighted in this chapter is timely and up to date. Only a few studies are included that were published before 2000 (i.e., Michel & Farrell, 1973; Morrison, 1994). Data and findings from the studies in the research literature are gained with permission from the participants or their parents. When dealing with minors, most studies sought permission through the schools involved in the research study. Some required parents to return permission slips and others required parents to respond only if they did not want their child to participate. Both methods offer parents the opportunity to respond to the researchers' participation request. Either method is subject to parental involvement and understanding.

The descriptive case study utilized in this dissertation will investigate how students in both liberal arts and leadership activities perceive their involvement in both activities. According to Yin (1994), case studies help answer "how" and "why" questions, allow for study in real-life context and are used when the researcher has little or no possibility to control the behavior of the participants. Interviewing students who choose to be in both liberal arts and leadership activities allows the research to happen in real time without altering the behavior of these students. The case study method will also provide a way to develop an understanding of

why these students choose both activities and how they perceive their involvement in these chosen pursuits.

Synthesis of Research Findings

The history of liberal arts in the United States education system during the 20th century illustrates a struggle to keep the liberal arts in education (Heilig et al., 2010). According to Heilig et al. (2010), the liberal arts have fallen in and out of popularity in schools over the past century, depending on factors such as economic poverty or specific educational interests. Historical events such as the Great Depression and the Great Space Race caused a dip in the educational emphasis on the arts, only to have the arts gain favor again as part of a well-rounded education. This vacillation happens as accepted pedagogy norms and practices adopt more holistic notions of what students need to learn in order to be productive citizens (Heilig et al., 2010). The "Goals 2000: Educate America Act" was the first federal policy to identify the arts as part of the core curriculum, which carried over to the NCLB Act in 2001 (Gerrity, 2009; Ruppert, 2006).

According to Ruppert (2006), the NCLB Act gives arts equal billing with core subjects. However, as Heilig et al. (2010) contend, while NCLB does give the arts equal billing, the focus on standardized testing and accountability in practice forced schools to decrease time and money to arts programs. As a result, research into the arts has increased and continued to focus on the benefits of students being involved in the arts at all stages of life. Researchers study concepts that are important to other areas of academics, such as self-esteem, self-regulation, and cognitive skills, to help emphasize how the arts can help schools improve what the government finds important in education.

NCLB lists liberal arts classes as a necessary part of education; however, as standardized testing became an important measure of a school system's success, liberal arts classes began being cut (Gerrity, 2009). The ESSA signed in 2015 has once again brought arts into the equation of a well-rounded education (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016; Darrow, 2016; Fránquiz & Ortiz, 2016). However, with state standardized tests' emphasis on English and math, areas such as the liberal arts have suffered from lack of time and focus. The NCLB Act required schools to meet Adequate Yearly Progress in tested areas (Gerrity, 2009; Heilig et al., 2010; Ruppert, 2006). The arts have had to struggle for their place in education as well as for funding; this in turn has sparked an interest in researching the benefits of the liberal arts. Although the standards and measures regarding how schools are assessed is changing currently with the ESSA, there continues to be an outsized focus on standardized tests as an indicator of success (Mathis & Trujillo, 2016).

John Dewey, a popular theorist who conducted educational research at the beginning of the 20th century, theorized that children needed an environment that allowed them to be creative in order to develop critical thinking skills. His definition included learning to express their thoughts and appreciate the thoughts of others. Dewey's influence led to the first student-centered, studio-based learning environments to be integrated into U.S. high schools (Heilig et al., 2010). Dewey's studies on creativity in the educational environment have aided in self-esteem and academics remaining consistently linked with liberal arts research (Catterall et al., 1999; Michel & Farrell, 1973; Morrison, 1994; Warner, 1999).

The research, however, provides a variety of results. Some studies provide inconclusive findings and show only a slight increase in the areas of self-esteem and academic achievement in students who are involved in liberal arts activities. Generally, these studies have small sample

sizes and are not longitudinal in nature. However, longitudinal studies, including that conducted by Ruppert (2006), found that students who are highly involved in arts activities performed better on standardized tests.

Critique of Previous Research

As stated previously, results of the current research into the effects of liberal arts activities have often shown inconclusive results. Some studies have found either weak links or no positive effect of liberal arts involvement on students' academic success (Costa-Giomi, 2004; House, 2000; Sala & Gobet, 2017). In contrast, others report a definite, positive difference in achievement scores between students involved in the arts with those not involved in the arts (Gouzouasis et al., 2006; Ruppert, 2006; Schellenberg, 2005). While academic success studies have varying results, the research into the direct connections between liberal arts curricula and increased self-esteem have shown more significant effects on participants. Participants involved in studies dealing with self-esteem displayed a higher level of self-esteem at the end of each study than participants who did not take part in liberal arts activities (Choi et al., 2008; Costa-Giomi, 2004; Rickard et al., 2012).

One reason for the diverse results is the various sample sizes used in each study. Studies using large sample sizes, such as the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics 1990 gathering of information from more than 18,000 sophomores across the U.S. (Morrison, 1994), found more favorable results on the benefits from students who are involved in liberal arts activities. Longevity of the study also played a role in the outcome of the study. Researchers who used the National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS:88) found more significant results supporting the benefits of liberal arts involvement (Broh, 2002; Catterall et al., 1999). However, not all research studies have the same rigor and reliability.

Schellenberg's (2005) study of 144 six-year-olds who were split into four "lesson" groups (e.g., piano, vocal, drama, or no lessons) faced a significant limitation of time. This proved a significant factor in how many participants could be involved in the study. Sample sizes in most studies were also limited to the area of interest the researcher wished to study. Schellenberg's (2005) study was limited by the number of parents willing to participate and the commitment of the parents to take their children to piano, vocal, and drama lessons.

A researcher's subject interest affects the choice of a study's focus. The majority of the literature focuses specifically on one benefit of liberal arts—i.e., one cognitive skill, academic achievement in core areas, increase in self-esteem, or how self-regulation skills affected a student's music performance. Few studies explored beyond these areas. Some of the qualitative inquiries discussed how a liberal arts education helps create leaders (Bahls, 2013; Stapelton, 2011). Both Bahls (2013) and Stapelton (2011) emphasized how the liberal arts focus on skills sought by employers, e.g., critical thinking, problem-solving skills and the confidence to become a civic leader.

No matter the results of each study, most studies ended with a call for further research. More research into the effects of liberal arts on other areas of student life will help add to the literature encouraging schools to keep liberal arts classes and activities as a significant and meaningful part of education. Studying the benefits of liberal arts activities and their connection to student success will help further the message of the importance of the liberal arts.

Conclusion

The liberal arts provide specific areas of influence for students, including self-esteem, self-efficacy, and cognitive skills which are important to success in other areas of student life. Unfortunately, liberal arts activities are still among the first to suffer cuts when schools need to

reduce spending (Ruppert, 2006). The No Child Left Behind Act also had an influence on the push for standardized testing. This in turn caused schools to increase time spent on subjects which are tested, further decreasing liberal arts activities (Eisner, 2004; Ruppert, 2006). ESSA reiterates the importance of liberal arts in education; however, it still includes a strong test based system (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016; Mathis & Trujillo, 2016).

Many studies focus on the academic and self-efficacy benefits of student participation in the liberal arts. However, schools measure student success through other factors as well, including student leadership and student plans after graduation. There is scant literature focused in this direction. Exploring the perception of students who choose to be involved in liberal arts activities as well as student leadership will add to the research on the benefits of liberal arts participation. Based on this review of the literature, which collectively develops a unique conceptual framework using self-esteem, self-efficacy, and cognitive skills, there is sufficient reason to examine and investigate further the impact of liberal arts on student leadership. This researcher therefore concludes that the literature review has provided strong support for pursuing a research project to answer the following research questions: How do public high school students describe their involvement in both liberal arts and leadership activities? How do public high school students perceive participation in liberal arts and leadership activities with relation to academic success? How do students perceive participation in liberal arts and leadership activities with relation to decisions about their future?

Chapter 3: Methodology

High school is a time when students explore options and make decisions about their futures (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). Students have four years to become ready for either college or entrance into working society. During the era of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), where standardized testing of English and math became the main gauge to measure school effectiveness, policymakers learned that high standardized test scores translated into an increased ability to take tests; however, these scores did not necessarily indicate that students had gained the relevant skills needed to successfully maneuver real-world situations (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016). The literature referring to the benefits of student participation in liberal arts classes and activities shows that students gain skills needed to be successful in college or at work after graduation. The *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) has once again placed emphasis on the need for schools to increase time in subjects like music and art in order help students gain these relevant skills (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016). Liberal arts classes help students gain skills, such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, and certain cognitive skills (Adler, 2006; Conley, 2008; Franklin, 2011; Mumford et al., 2007).

Maxwell (2008) stated that it is necessary to set goals in order to guide research design and justify the need for a study. The main goal of this research was to explain how the participants understood the place of liberal arts activities in their academic and leadership choices. Maxwell (2008) labeled a goal as "focused on understanding something, gaining some insight into what is going on and why this is happening" (p. 220). As a result, this descriptive case study investigated why students chose to be involved in these types of activities, how they perceived these activities in their current life, and how they perceived these activities influencing their future decisions. For the purpose of this study, liberal arts are defined as the classes beyond

the basic core classes of science, math, English, and social studies, as well as physical education; they include choir, band, speech, art club, one-act play, spring musical, and journalism.

Research Questions

According to Baxter and Jack (2008), one way to achieve trustworthiness in case study research is to have a clearly written research question. Along with a clearly written research question, it is also important to make sure the question is suitable for a case study and that the question reflects the goals of the study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Maxwell, 2008). The research questions for this case study reflected the main goal of explaining how the participants understand the place of liberal arts activities in their academic and leadership choices. As stated in chapter 1, the research questions for this study were as follows:

RQ$_1$: How do public high school students describe their involvement in both liberal arts and leadership activities?

- How do public high school students perceive participation in liberal arts and leadership activities with relation to academic success?
- How do public high school students perceive participation in liberal arts and leadership activities with relation to decisions about their future?

Design

The design of this research was a descriptive case study. According to Baxter and Jack (2008), a case study approach is used when:

(a) the focus of the study is to answer "how" and "why" questions; (b) you cannot manipulate the behaviour 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. (p. 545)

The contextual conditions of student involvement in both liberal arts activities and leadership activities lend themselves to the case study approach as schools still tend to cut resources to and time spent on liberal arts activities (Gerrity, 2009; Ruppert, 2006). A descriptive case study creates an end product with a rich description as it includes many variables to generate a picture of the data being studied (Merriam, 1998). This researcher was able to observe participants in leadership roles through observation and to use probing questions during the semi-structured interview process to inquire about the meaning behind participants' actions and their perceptions about their activities.

Research Population and Sampling Method

The method of participant selection for this study was purposeful sampling. Maxwell (2008) described purposeful sampling as a method of participant selection that allows the researcher to select settings and participants deliberately to obtain important information that could not have been secured elsewhere (Maxwell, 2008). Furthermore, Maxwell (2008) listed four reasons for using purposeful sampling, but the two that most pertain to this study include: "to achieve representativeness or typicality of the settings, individuals, or activities selected" and "to capture adequately the heterogeneity in the population" (p. 235). Purposefully choosing high school students involved in both liberal arts and leadership activities enabled this researcher to understand more precisely how public high school students perceive their involvement in both liberal arts and leadership activities.

The first step in finding participants for this study was to secure district and site permission. The superintendent of schools for the study site was contacted through e-mail and asked to grant permission for the study to take place in the high school building. The superintendent provided this researcher a letter granting permission for the study to take place.

The high school principal was also contacted let him know the study was taking place in his building. Once permission was granted from both administrators, this researcher started the process of finding study participants.

It was anticipated that all participants would be under the age of 18. Parents or guardians were given a consent form and participants signed an assent form to participate in the study. In order to identify the students participating in both liberal arts and leadership activities, two methods were used. First, the school district and the specific school site where the research was conducted utilizes a student management program known as Power School. This tool documents attendance, records grades, and assesses eligibility for activities. Access to this software was obtained through the study site's administration office and permission was given to use this software. However, not all activities were available in the Power School system at the time of sample selection. For example, musical participants are not entered into the system until April of each school year, and participant lists were needed in March. To mitigate potential problems caused by missing data sets, the faculty sponsors from non-entered activities were asked to provide rosters of participants. Faculty sponsors are teachers and community members; they serve as the adult leaders of extracurricular activities sponsored by the school. Potential participants were then cross-referenced to find which ones fit the guidelines for inclusion in the study. Comparing participant lists from different activities showed which students from each grade were involved in both types of activities. From there, the list of students who met the guidelines of the study, seniors and juniors involved in both a liberal arts activity and a leadership activity, were included on the possible participant list and received an invitation to join the study through the school e-mail system.

Marshall (1996) explained the advantages of a purposeful sample as one that helps provide a broad range of subjects and allows the researcher to pick participants who will have the most information to share. With a purposeful sample, the researcher chooses a sample from which the most insight about the study can be gained (Merriam, 1998). To create maximum variation in the data, this study selected participants from a variety of different activities. Participants were seniors and juniors in high school participating in both a liberal arts activity and a leadership activity. The original sample size needed was between eight and twelve participants in order to achieve data saturation. Eight participants ended up joining the study.

An appropriate sample size is one that answers the research question (Marshall, 1996). It is important to be flexible with the sample size. The sample size required for this study was established once new data stopped emerging from the participant interviews, a process known as data saturation (Francis et al., 2010; Fusch & Ness, 2015; Marshall, 1996). This study consisted of eight participants. The interviewing process became complete once data saturation was reached. It is important to limit researcher bias and conflict of interest in this study. Any students involved in activities sponsored by this researcher were *not* included in the participant sample; this includes the liberal arts activities of choir, spring musical, and speech, as well as the leadership activity FCCLA. As a result, the activities of band, journalism, one-act play, and art club were allowed for inclusion in the study. Once the potential participant group was identified, invitations to participate were sent both by e-mail and paper copy to those who fit the participant guidelines of the study.

Once the sample was selected, potential participants were contacted via school e-mail. While all the potential participants have access to school e-mail, those who did not reply to the initial invitation e-mail within two weeks were asked to pick up a paper copy invitation packet

containing the same documents as the e-mail. This is a common method of communicating with students and parents at the chosen research site. The e-mail and the paper copy packet contained an explanation of the study, why they were chosen to participate, a letter of assent to participate, and a consent form to be signed by their parent or guardian. Once all consent forms were completed and returned to this researcher, the participant and this researcher set up times to observe the participant's leadership activity in which the student was involved and a time for the first interview.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

Creswell and Miller (2000) list several ways a qualitative researcher may establish validity within a qualitative study: triangulation, member checking, the audit trail, disconfirming evidence, prolonged engagement in the field, researcher reflexivity, collaboration, peer debriefing, and thick, rich description. This researcher deployed many of these methods of validity in this study. Prolonged engagement in the field is determined by the researcher (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This researcher determined prolonged engagement for this study would be during the spring semester; at its most basic meaning, it is defined as whatever time is sufficient to gather the information. Engagement in the field for this study took place during the spring semester. According to Creswell and Miller (2000), prolonged engagement in the field allows the researcher to build trust and establish rapport with the participants, helping the researcher gain information that may otherwise have not been given. With thick, rich description, Creswell and Miller (2000) contend that a researcher needs to provide as much detail as possible, such as participant feelings, interactions, or specific situations. Fusch and Ness (2015) differentiated between the meaning of thick and rich by equating *rich* with quality and *thick* with quantity. "Thick data is a lot of data; rich data is many-layered, intricate, detailed,

nuanced, and more" (Fusch & Ness, 2015, p. 1409). To add to the many layers of data, the setting is also described in detail to give the reader a deeper understanding of where the participants live and the challenges they face.

Member checking is a process in which the researcher takes "data and interpretations back to the participants in the study so that they can confirm the credibility of the information and narrative account" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). Member checking took place during the second interview to help confirm the validity of the findings in this study. Finally, "triangulation is a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes of categories in a study" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 126). Information in this study was triangulated through the use of activity rosters, the initial interview and observation, the member checking interview, and the second observation. The instruments used in this study are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Once permission was granted by the school district to conduct research and site permission was gained to collect data from the school district's Power School program, the first instrument was used to collect data from the activity rosters, which listed the students involved in the activity and provided a comparison of students who are involved in both liberal arts and a leadership activity. Activity rosters were obtained either through the Power School website or from faculty sponsors. This researcher, following the communication strategy outlined above, selected sample students from those who were involved in both a liberal arts and a leadership activity on the activity rosters. This instrument allowed for a purposeful sample to be chosen and provided information on the percentage of students involved in liberal arts activities, leadership activities, and both liberal arts and leadership activities. In addition to providing

information helpful for selecting a sample, the activity rosters provided another element of description in the study.

Observational Protocol

The instrument of observation was used twice. Observing the participant's involvement in their leadership activity before the first interview allowed this researcher to better understand the participant's level of interaction with the group. It also allowed time to ask any specific questions about the activity during the interview. Once again after the interview, this researcher observed the participant during a leadership activity meeting to increase understanding of the participant's involvement. Both observations helped create a thick, rich description. This sort of narrative helps readers visualize and experience the situation; in this way they see the information as more credible (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Observations allowed this researcher to obtain data through a first-hand encounter instead of relying only on participants' perceptions (Merriam, 1998). Determining what to observe depended on what information this researcher wanted to gain from the observation. Merriam (1998) suggested paying attention to the physical settings, participants, activities, interactions, and conversations. For this study, this researcher observed the participants and how they participated during their chosen leadership activity. Notes were taken on how frequently study participants took an active part in (or added to) the meeting, how many interactions occurred before, during, and after the meeting, and what roles the participants played in the group, such as whether the participant was an officer or just a member. It is also important to record "the researcher's feelings, reactions, hunches, initial interpretations, and working hypotheses" (Merriam, 1998, p. 106). A column on the left side of the notes was left open to allow space to include personal thoughts, reactions, and questions.

In order to capture as much information as possible, observation notes may include a map of the meeting layout and the placement of the meeting participants, a chronological account of the actions and what is said, and the researcher's impressions and feelings during the observation (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Lofland and Lofland (1995) listed two guiding rules for writing observation notes: "(1) Be concrete, and (2) distinguish verbatim accounts from those that are paraphrased or based on general recall" (p. 93). Within the observation notes, direct quotes were marked with quotation marks, paraphrasing with apostrophes, and general recall with an asterisk.

Observations took place in the leadership activity's designated meeting space, such as the high school library where class officers meet during the lunch period. When observing these meetings, this researcher took notes by hand in order to provide the least amount of distraction during the observation. This also allowed this researcher to review and become more familiar with the notes as they were typed into a document. Lofland and Lofland (1995) suggested that completion of observation notes be done within a 24-hour period following the actual observation. This researcher followed this suggestion and typed up observation notes within the appropriate timeframe.

Interview Protocol

The interview process enabled this researcher to develop a further understanding of why these students have chosen to be involved in both types of activities; if they felt these activities influenced one another; and if or how these activities have influenced their decisions about the future. An individual interview with each participant chosen to join the study allowed this researcher to ask more descriptive, probing questions. It also allowed the flexibility to add questions during the interview to reach a deeper understanding of why participants were involved in both activities and to provide explanations for terminology the participants did not

understand. A general set of questions were asked of each participant as well as any specific

questions to clarify behaviors from the first observation. Participants were also asked to bring an

artifact from one of their activities. Participants could choose to bring a medal, a journal entry,

newspaper article, an instrument, or any object they were proud to have or they felt explained

why they are involved in their chosen activity. Discussing the artifact and the meaning behind it

toward the beginning of the interview allowed the participant to feel more relaxed and ready for

the other interview questions.

Interviews were semi-structured in nature and allowed this researcher to gain the same

information from each participant. Harrell and Bradley (2009) noted: "In semi-structured

interviewing, a guide is used, with questions and topics that must be covered" (p. 27). By using

a semi-structured interview process to create a map of topics and themes, this researcher ensured

there was consistency throughout the data collection process (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). The

interviews were conducted either before school, during first period if the participant was free,

after school, or during the evening when activity practice times were done. Interviews did not

interrupt the participants' regularly scheduled school day or extracurricular practices. Each

interview was scheduled to take approximately 60 minutes. Interviews were recorded using the

program Garage Band, provided on this researcher's computer and then downloaded into an mp3

format and transferred to iTunes for easier listening and transcription. This researcher

transcribed each interview by hand, using Microsoft Word, to become more familiar with the

answers. Listening to the interviews again helped this researcher gain insight into the

interviewee's answers from the tone and emphasis of the speaking voice. Once the initial

interviews were transcribed, this researcher asked each participant when they would like to

schedule a follow-up interview to review the transcripts, a process known as member checking

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(Creswell & Miller, 2000). The use of activity rosters, observations, interviews, and member checking helped with the triangulation process, increasing the validity of the study.

Identification of Attributes

Every study has characteristics that make it unique. The attributes of this study show characteristics that combine to make the chosen site distinctive from other sites. The site chosen for this study was a town of approximately 10,000 in the middle of western Nebraska. As reported in the 2014 census, this town has a population of approximately 8,000 residents; nearly 80% of the population is white, and the Hispanic, Native American, Asian, and African American populations make up the remaining 20% of the residents (City-Data, 2017).

The most common industry in the area is transportation and warehousing (City-Data, 2017). The railroad industry affects the town greatly. When the railroad is hiring, new employees relocate to town. However, when there is a downturn, the population decreases rapidly. As a result, town and school population decrease every time the railroad reduces employees. Concomitantly, this creates a decrease in government funding to the schools, causing them to cut back on teachers and programs. This researcher has witnessed the local public-school system cut several teacher positions through attrition, including reducing the English, science, math, and social studies departments from five to four teachers, the industrial technology from four to two teachers and the total loss of the technology department. This researcher's own position has been reduced from a full-time high school position to a half-time position at the high school level with the other half of the school day spent teaching at one of the elementary schools.

Agriculture is another industry that employs many of the people within the county. The influence of agriculture creates strong youth programs dealing with the agricultural industry in

town and at the local schools. Future Farmers of America (FFA) has a strong program at the local high school. When comparing FFA to the other leadership groups within the school, it has a larger member base than FCCLA and FBLA. The students are well recognized within the school and several of the local businesses support and help with the group's endeavors. The county 4-H program is also strong within the local community. While it is not directly connected to the school, it does have several participants in the livestock and industrial arts project areas due to the influence of the agricultural industry.

There are three school systems in town: the elementary Catholic and Lutheran schools and the public school system. All students filter into the public high school starting in 9th grade. The high school enrolls approximately 500 students and is considered a class B school size in the state of Nebraska.

Combined, these attributes create the picture of a rural population that can provide many opportunities for its students. The school system is large enough to support several extra-curricular activities, including sports, music, speech, drama, art, FFA, FCCLA, FBLA, and journalism. While all of these opportunities exist, at the same time the school system is small enough that students are commonly enrolled in several activities. Faculty sponsors are more willing to share students in order to increase the number of members in their activity, whereas in a larger school system students would have to choose where to devote their time. The rural population, employed mainly by the railroad and agriculture, also have an influence on the types of activities offered in the school system, such as FFA, which supports participants future agricultural endeavors.

Data Analysis Procedures

The analysis method for this study was constant comparison analysis, also known as

coding (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Constant comparison analysis is used "when a

researcher is interested in utilizing an entire dataset to identify underlying themes presented

through the data" (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007, p. 565). For this descriptive case study, codes

were gathered inductively, meaning codes emerged from observation notes and interview

transcripts as data was gathered (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Saldaña (2009) stated that the

type of coding is "based on the methodological needs of the study" (p. 57). The use of

participant perspectives to gain insight fits the method of In Vivo coding. In Vivo coding is used

with interview transcripts to help the researcher attune to participant language and views

(Saldaña, 2009). Descriptive coding was also used to create more inventory of the contents of

the observation notes (Saldaña, 2009).

There are electronic methods of finding codes in qualitative research, such as the program

NVivo. NVivo helped this researcher manage data, manage ideas, query data, model data

visually, and create reports (Al Yahmady & Alabri, 2013). This type of analysis tool helped with

the multiple interview data, as there were eight interview transcripts to analyze. The student

version of NVivo was purchased and used to help find codes from the multiple interview and

observation transcripts. According to Al Yahmady and Alabri (2013) codes are "tags or labels

for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a

study" (p. 181). From these codes, themes emerge which can be used in the thick, rich

description of the case study.

Themes that emerged from data gathered in the first interview guided questions asked

during the second interview to complete the member checking process, so that common themes

and codes could be confirmed by the participants. Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007) confirmed

that "one way of using the codes is to go back out into the field and undertake member checking

(Merriam, 1998) with the participants by asking if themes, arguments, or assertions developed

from the codes are accurately describing their statements" (p. 565). Participants had a chance to

confirm or clarify the interpretation of previous responses.

Limitations of the Research Design

Choosing a descriptive case study design meant the study faced limitations that cannot be

avoided: "Limitations are matters and occurrences that arise in a study which are out of the

researcher's control" (Simon & Goes, 2013, para. 2). For example, one limitation of qualitative

research is the ability to replicate studies because of the natural setting in which the initial

research takes place (Simon & Goes, 2013). It is up to the researcher to determine what

variables cannot be controlled in the study and what limitations or delimitations can be

acknowledged and reduced to provide a valid study.

The choice of a case study design meant that causal inferences could not be made. While

the findings of this study may suggest similar results from comparable institutions, more research

is required to determine whether the findings are generalizable elsewhere (Baron, 2008; Simon &

Goes, 2013). This study includes a small sample taken from one population. A further

limitation was the attempt to reduce bias by limiting the activities from which participants were

chosen. As this researcher teaches the liberal arts activity of choir and sponsors spring musical,

speech, and FCCLA, no potential participants were engaged in these courses so that a conflict of

interest was avoided. The elimination of these classes does limit the study. The point of view

was narrowed as the liberal arts activities of choir, musical, and speech are not represented in this

study.

Delimitations

Elements of the study in which the researcher can exert some control are known as delimitations (Baron, 2008). The sample size was a possible delimitation for this study. Even though the sample size was limited to one educational institution, several methods of data collection were used to ensure credibility among the data gathered. This study used triangulation through interview transcripts and observation notes to find and create themes from the data. Prolonged engagement in the field allowed time to create a deeper understanding from participants. Member checking was used during the second interview with each participant to confirm the credibility of the information gathered from the first interview and observations. Finally, a thick, rich description allowed the narrative account of the study to provide as much information to the reader as possible (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Another delimitation of the research was the guidelines for participant selection. The research questions for this study focused on how participants felt about their choice of activities and how those choices may affect their future. Limiting participation to seniors and juniors allowed for a richer and deeper analysis of the data. Seniors and juniors have had to navigate the world of high school, taking time to explore activities they enjoy and where those activities help them academically, while at the same time discerning which activities will benefit their future educational and career choices. Participants of these age groups usually have a clearer understanding of their decisions and how their current decisions will affect future choices.

Validation

In order for any type of research to have an effect, it needs to ring true to the intended audience (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Merriam, 1998). This researcher needed to provide methods of credibility and dependability to support the study findings. Several methods were used to

provide validation of the research findings in this study, including triangulation, thick, rich

description, prolonged engagement in the field, and member checking.

Credibility

To increase the credibility of the study, multiple sources were used to gather data:

observation and interviews: "Studies that use only one method [of data gathering] are more

vulnerable to errors linked to that particular method than are studies that use multiple methods in

which different types of data provide cross-data validity checks" (Patton, 1999, p. 1192). The use

of different sources to provide validity to a study is known as triangulation. According to

Creswell and Miller (2000), triangulation is a popular practice used by qualitative researchers

because it allows the researcher to gather multiple forms of evidence, creating higher validity in

the data gathered. The more valid the data is the more credible the study becomes.

Offering a thick and rich description is another procedure used to establish credibility:

"the purpose of a thick description is that it creates verisimilitude, statements that produce for the

readers the feeling that they have experienced, or could experience, the events being described in

the study" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, pp. 128–129). Thick, rich description was used in this

study to provide as much detail of the setting and participants as possible, helping readers to

understand the credibility of the study and apply the study to other contexts (Creswell & Miller,

2000).

When establishing credibility, it is also important to include information about the

researcher, as the researcher is considered one of the instruments of qualitative study (Patton,

1999). This researcher has been a music teacher for fifteen years, has taught general and vocal

music at the kindergarten through high school level and was personally involved in choir, speech

team, drama club, FCCLA, and National Honor Society during high school and college. As a

current high school choir teacher, this researcher teaches choir, directs the spring musical, is assistant speech coach, and is currently in charge of FCCLA. Because of this, this researcher has noticed a significant number of students involved in choir, speech, and spring musical choose to be involved in a leadership activity as well.

The organization in which the research took place is this researcher's place of employment. Therefore, in order to increase the credibility of the study, none of this researcher's current students were allowed to participate in this study. This was done to help reduce both bias and feelings of coercion. To reduce bias further, the researcher is employed at the research site only part time. This helped reduce the feeling of coercion, as most students do not know the researcher unless they are involved in choir, musical, or speech, and therefore felt no obligation to join the study to appease the researcher.

Dependability

To establish dependability of the data, two processes were used: prolonged engagement in the field and member checking. Prolonged engagement in the field allows the researcher to double-check data consistencies and member checking gives participants a chance to confirm the researcher's interpretation of their answers (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This study took place during the spring semester. During this time, two interviews took place with each participant and two observations were made of the participant's chosen leadership activity. Interviews were recorded for accuracy and this researcher transcribed the interview, which helped this researcher review the data and gain new insights. The second interview with each participant included a review of this researcher's interpretation of the first interview to double-check participant's intentions.

Expected Findings

The focus of the study was to discover how students perceive their participation in both liberal arts and leadership activities. This researcher expected that this relationship was not something participants would have thought about previously. Participants may have observed similarities in how they function in both activities but may not have an understanding of how these activities are connected or how they may influence each other or other areas of their lives. This researcher expected that through the interview process, participants would start to explore how these two types of activities affect them. By the second interview, participants would be more aware of how liberal arts activities influence their academic lives and future choices and be able to better describe how they perceive liberal arts and leadership activities. The results of this study created a deeper understanding of how these activities affect those who participate in them.

Ethical Issues in the Study

All studies of human subjects raise ethical issues. The fact that "the in-depth, unstructured nature of qualitative research and the fact that it raises issues that are not always anticipated . . ." means this researcher needs to stay aware of possible violations (Ritchie et al., 2013, p. 66). It was inherent for this researcher to ensure participant confidentiality, gain informed consent, and protect participants, as well as herself, from harm through where they conduct research and by allowing opt-out for uncomfortable situations and questions. Ethical issues in this study deal with participant confidentiality. It was up to this researcher to maintain confidentiality and inform participants how their privacy would be protected (American Psychological Association, 2017). Assent forms signed by the participants and consent forms signed by their parents or guardians included information on privacy. Participants are not directly identified in the research and no information was shared with other teachers, activity

sponsors, or administrators in the district. The use of pseudonyms helped protect participants'

identity, but also helped explain and humanize the data.

This study also required the recordings of interviews. Both consent from parents/legal

guardians and assent from participants (all under the age of 18) was gained before these

recordings were started during the interview process (American Psychological Association,

2017). This information was disclosed to possible participants in their invitation, as well as

stated on the assent forms. The participants were informed once again of the recording process

before each interview began. Recordings were deleted immediately after transcription of the

interview was complete. All other study documents were stored on this researcher's password

secured computer. Documents were stored for three years from completion of the study, and

then destroyed This information was also disclosed to the participants in the invitation, on the

consent and assent forms, and before the interview.

Conflict of Interest Assessment

There were no conflicts of interest that can be assessed at this time. However, there was

potential for the feeling of a power imbalance between the researcher and participants since the

researcher is known in the role of teacher to some possible participants. To minimize this

imbalance, students taking classes from or involved in an activity sponsored by this researcher

were not invited to participate in the study. This eliminated the pressure to participate with the

assumption of gaining a better grade or from the assumption that nonparticipation would result in

lower class grades. Students were invited based on information gained from activity rosters.

Once the student was invited to participate, there was no extra pressure to join the study.

Participants needed to contact this researcher, through either the provided e-mail or phone

number, and join the study of their own free will. Participants were notified that they could

refuse to answer any question or leave the study at any time, without fear of repercussion.

Researcher's Position

For this study, this researcher took a couple of different roles in order to gain multiple

perspectives, which helped answer the research questions. First, this researcher took the position

of the interviewer during interviews. Even though the participants were not part of this

researcher's classes or activities, there was potential for the participant to be wary of this

researcher's status as a teacher. To reduce this stress and gain more honest answers from the

participants, this researcher informed participants about the procedures of the study and how

their privacy would be protected. The invitation to participate stated how participants identity

would be kept confidential and information provided would not be shared with anyone not

involved in the scope of this study. Before the first interview, the same information was

reviewed with each participant to ensure they understood and had the opportunity to ask

questions. It was especially important to ensure each participant that their answers would not be

shared with other teachers, activity sponsors, or school administrators.

This researcher also took the role of observer. According to Patton (1999), the presence

of an observer can cause a change in the setting under observation, for better or for worse.

Participants may act differently, participating more than usual or choosing to refrain from

participation in the activity while this researcher was present. It was up to this researcher to

mitigate these potential problems. Observations took place during meetings. This researcher

found a place to sit with the least distraction. Most activity meetings take place in a casual

setting, so it was safe to interact with students before the meetings started and answer questions

pertaining to the presence of this researcher. This helped tame the curiosity of participants and allowed them to direct their focus back to the meeting.

Summary

The purpose of this descriptive case study was to examine why students have chosen to be involved in both liberal arts and leadership activities and how these activities influence their academic lives. While the ESSA reinforces the need for students to have access to liberal arts classes and activities as part of a well-rounded education, it is still a test-based regime (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016; Mathis & rujillo, 2016). It will take time for policymakers to change their mindset about the educational practices that became commonplace during the NCLB era. This study sought to add to the literature supporting the benefits of student participation in liberal arts classes and activities.

This study used a descriptive case study design. Using a case study design permitted this researcher to study participants in natural settings and gain information from their point of view. A descriptive case study creates an end product with a rich description as it includes many variables to generate a picture of the data being studied (Merriam, 1998). Through the use of interviews and observations, data was gathered to create a multi-layered description of this case. Participants were informed about the procedures of gaining information, how information would be kept safe, and destruction of information at the completion of research. Triangulation, prolonged engagement in the field, member checking, and thick, rich description were used to provide validity to the information gathered in this case study.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

The purpose of this descriptive case study is to determine how public high school students perceive the value of participating in liberal arts activities and how they believe these activities have influenced their academic success and choices of major and activities post-graduation. This researcher used individual interviews, observations, and activity rosters to ascertain student perceptions. The research questions asked for this study were as follows:

RQ$_1$:   How do public high school students describe their involvement in both liberal arts and leadership activities?

   o   How do public high school students perceive participation in liberal arts and leadership activities with relation to academic success?

   o   How do public high school students perceive participation in liberal arts and leadership activities with relation to decisions about their future?

The first step in the research process was to gather the activity rosters and find possible participants. Once possible participants were found, invitations to join the study were sent to those who qualified for participation. The process of participant selection will be discussed further in the description of the sample. To qualify for the study, potential participants needed to be involved in a liberal arts activity and a leadership activity at the research site. Liberal arts activities offered at the research site at the time of this study included choir, band, speech, art club, journalism, one-act play, and spring musical. Leadership activities at the time of this study included Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA), Future Farmers of America (FFA), Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA), National Honor Society (NHS), Student Council, and Class Officer. For this study, members involved in the activities of choir,

speech, musical, and FCCLA were excluded to reduce bias, as these were the activities

sponsored by this researcher.

Once participants agreed to join the study and turned in their assent form and their parent

or guardian's consent form, interview and observation times were set. This researcher and the

participants worked together to find a convenient time to conduct interviews that would not

impede their participation in other activities and/or class times. All interviews took place

directly before or after school. Interviews were recorded in Garage Band on the researcher's

computer and transferred to iTunes for easier listening. This researcher then transcribed the

interviews before loading them into NVivo, so they could be coded. The interview and

observation process will be discussed in further detail in the next sections. This case study was

conducted during the spring semester of 2018.

Description of the Sample

The sample for this study was gathered from a single public high school in rural, western

Nebraska. This researcher conducted the study at the public high school where this researcher

was employed. Approximately 500 students in the 9th–12th grades were enrolled at the

institution at the time of this study. Using the activity rosters gathered from faculty sponsors and

the school's student management program, Power School, 192 total students were shown to

participate in either a liberal arts activity or a leadership activity. The table lists students by

number followed by their grade in school. An X is placed to indicate every activity in which

they participated during the 2017–2018 school year. Students considered for the study are

highlighted. From the overall group of 192 students, 32 students in grades 9–12 chose to

participate in both a liberal arts activity and a leadership activity. This researcher narrowed the

group further to include only juniors and seniors, leaving 19 candidates who were then asked to

participate in the study. A table of the possible study participants can be found in Appendix B at the end of this dissertation.

Out of this group, eight possible participants chose to join this study. All eight participants completed the first interview, and the researcher was able to set up two observations of their leadership activities. However, only seven completed the second interview. Since the research was conducted during the spring semester of the school year, some of the participants were graduating. The eighth participant found it difficult to find time to schedule the second interview between work and end of the year activities. This researcher e-mailed the interview transcripts to this participant but received no response.

Participants in this study were required to be involved in a liberal arts activity and a leadership activity, and be enrolled as either a junior or senior in high school. Juniors and seniors were chosen as suitable participants because it was assumed they would have more experiential knowledge of the activities in which they participated. All participants were able to articulate how they were contributing to their groups and the leadership skills they were learning by participating. Potential participants were invited through school e-mail. Those who did not respond within two weeks were also given a packet with the same information from the school office. Those who chose not to participate in the study were just as involved in liberal arts and leadership activities as the study participants; however, most cited lack of time as the reason for not joining the study. Many of these potential participants were observed participating in the same leadership activities as the study participants. Table 1 displays the eight participants who agreed to join the study, their grade level, and what activities they were involved in during the time in which the research study was conducted. Pseudonyms have been used on this table to provide anonymity for the student participants.

Table 1

Demographics

Participant (pseudonyms)	Grade	Activities
Jennifer	Junior	Band, FBLA, NHS
Vance	Senior	Band, FFA
Olivia	Senior	Band, NHS
Jaime	Senior	Band, FFA
Hayden	Junior	Band, Journalism, NHS
Lindsey	Junior	Band, Art Club, FBLA, NHS
Megan	Junior	Band, One-Act, NHS
Andrea	Junior	One-Act, FBLA

Gathering data from the participants consisted of two individual interviews and observations of participants' leadership activities. Conducting individual interviews with a semi-structured interview process allowed the researcher to ask for clarification, emphasis, and more depth of information from the participants (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). During the first interview, this researcher used the same set of interview questions to gather the same information from each participant. For example, all participants were asked, "Why did you choose to be involved in liberal arts and leadership activities?" Probing questions were then used to help students delve deeper into the information they were providing and make sure that all participants provided the same information. Probing questions that went along with the above example include, "How do these activities make you feel?" and "What part of your participation makes you the proudest to be a member?" A copy of the interview questions along with their corresponding probing questions can be found in Appendix A. Furthermore, participants were asked to bring artifacts that they felt represented their activities. Some brought instruments while others brought their graduation cords and activity pins. One participant even brought a necklace that reminded her of her parent's support and to keep doing her best in everything she chooses to do. All participants were very attached to their artifact. Table 2 lists the participants and their artifacts.

Table 2

Artifacts

Participant (pseudonyms)	Artifact
Jennifer	Band Instrument
Vance	Activity Emblem Key
Olivia	Cord for NHS
Jaime	Music Letter
Hayden	Gold Locket
Lindsey	Band Instrument
Megan	Music Letter
Andrea	Activity Logo Sweatshirt

Artifacts will be discussed further at the end of chapter 4. Second interviews were used to complete the member checking process, allowing participants to check and confirm their answers from the first interview.

Observations were also conducted during the data gathering process. This researcher conducted observations of participants' leadership activities. The observations allowed this researcher to obtain data through a first-hand encounter instead of relying only on the study participants' perceptions (Merriam, 1998). This researcher was able to witness participants' level of involvement in their leadership activities. All of the participants in this study were involved heavily in their leadership activity. Six out the eight were officers, two ran for officer positions for the next school year, and all of the participants took part in discussion and making decisions during their leadership meetings. During the observations, this researcher noticed that several other leaders in these groups were also involved in liberal arts activities. These students included those who chose not to participant in the study or were part of the freshman and sophomore class.

Research Methods

As stated in chapter 3, the main goal of this descriptive case study was to describe how the participants understood the place of liberal arts activities in their academic and leadership choices. For this reason, this researcher chose to use the interview process to gain insight from the participants. This researcher also used the tool of observation to observe participants' participation habits in their leadership activities.

Interviews

A semi-structured interview format was used with six primary interview questions that allowed this researcher to enquire about the participants' involvement with both their liberal arts and leadership activities, their family influences, academic success, and future decisions. The first two questions were asked to gain demographic information from the participants. Study participants were asked to describe why they chose to be involved in their current activities and how their family influenced those choices. The next two questions asked the participants to speak about the artifacts they brought with them and their feelings regarding how their activities influence each other. After gaining more information on the participants' involvement and feelings about their activities, these questions helped this researcher delve deeper into perceptions about the importance of these activities to the participants. The next question dealt with each participant's perception of the influence their liberal arts activities had on their academic success. Students were asked if they noticed any similarities between liberal arts and their other classes as well as any lessons they learned in their liberal arts activity that helped them achieve in other classes. The final question of the interview asked about each participant's future plans for college and beyond.

Probing questions were used to encourage participants to expand on their answers during the interview. In this way this researcher created a map of topics and themes to ensure consistency through each participant's interview (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). This researcher had certain topics to ask each participant, including demographic information, a description of their activity involvement, their academic success, and their plans after high school pertaining to college major or job and future liberal arts and leadership involvement plans. Using probing questions, this researcher could encourage participants to expand on responses or gain information participants did not cover in their initial answer. An outline of the first interview questions and probes is provided in Appendix A.

A second interview was sought with each participant in order to undergo the member checking process. The member checking process allowed this researcher to confirm the various participants' responses, which helps reinforce the validity of the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The transcripts from each participant's first interview were given to them to read so that they could confirm the credibility of their narrative (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Participants were asked to read their narrative account and confirm their responses to the interview questions. Participants were then given the chance to change or add to their responses. Seven out of the eight participants returned for the second interview. Of the seven participants who returned for the second interview, all confirmed their responses, with one adding to her initial response. Participants were also asked to respond to a few additional questions, which are listed as follows:

1. One of the themes that is appearing to be common among all the participants is that these activities have provided the opportunity to serve as leaders. Would you agree or disagree with that statement? Why?

2. Tell me about what specific leadership skills you feel your activities have helped you gain and how you feel they will help you in the future.

3. Tell me about yourself as a leader.

Observations

The instrument of observation was used in this study to gain further information on how participants participated in their leadership activities. Through these observations, this researcher was able to assess how involved participants were in their leadership activities. After setting an observation time with each participant, this researcher also consulted with the leadership organization's faculty sponsor to gain approval for the observation. During the observations, this researcher took notes on what role participants played in the organization, how the participants contributed to the meeting, and any insights or thoughts this researcher had during the observation. Most participants held offices in their leadership activity, such as secretary or vice president. This placed those participants being observed in front of their leadership group, which made it easier to keep track of what participants were doing during the meeting, as they were seated in a place of high visibility instead of among the rest of the group. Lindsey summed up why most participants took on leadership roles in these organizations: "Well, I think that the people you have chosen are probably super-involved people in their activities and so they want to do them to the best of their ability." Another benefit of the observation tool was that it allowed this researcher to gain insight into how many other officers and leaders in the organization were also involved in liberal arts activities.

Data Analysis

The first step in analyzing the data for this study was to understand when data saturation had been reached. With the limited number of possible participants, there was a chance that

there would not be enough participants to reach data saturation. However, as the interviews began and continued, several of the participants echoed the answers of other participants and new data stopped emerging (Francis et al., 2010; Fusch & Ness, 2015; Marshall, 1996). Once new data had stopped emerging from the interviews, data saturation was reached.

Codes from the data were gathered inductively. This researcher let the codes emerge as data was gathered from observation notes and transcripts (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). The student version of NVivo was purchased to help organize interview transcripts and observation notes and find emerging codes. Once all documents were loaded into NVivo, three main categories were assigned based on this study's research questions: involvement, academic success, and future decisions. This researcher chose these categories based on the research questions, as well as the main topics from the first interview process. As this researcher reread through interview transcripts, the emerging codes were separated under the appropriate categories. Codes were gathered inductively, meaning codes emerged as data was gathered (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Two rounds of coding took place. The initial read-through discovered which category codes belonged and the second read-through deciding how to further divide the codes. Codes that emerged under involvement include communication skills, creating leaders/leadership opportunities, friendships, sense of self/self-confidence, and skills. Academic success codes included drive to achieve/do your best, inquiry/practice, and working with others. Finally, the category of future decisions was split into those who will participate in liberal arts activities and those who will participate in leadership activities.

Summary of the Findings

Once codes were assigned, this researcher was able to use NVivo to complete a

frequency analysis of the codes that emerged and evaluate how these codes support each other.

Table 3 shows the frequency of references for each emerging code:

Table 3

Coding Frequency

Names	Files	References
Academic Success	9	27
Drive to achieve/do your best	7	11
Inquiry-practice	6	8
Working with others	4	5
Future decisions	8	27
Will participate in leadership	4	7
Will participate in liberal arts	6	13
Involvement	9	68
Communication skills	4	8
Creating leaders/leadership opportunities	7	29
Friendships	3	4
Sense of self/self-confidence	6	15
Skills	4	5

These codes were then analyzed one more time for similarities in order to assess the themes

found in the data. Themes emerging from the data are shown in Table 4:

Table 4

Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Subthemes
Leadership development	Access and opportunity.
Enhanced self-confidence	Growth of roles as the student, leader, and participant.
	Enhancement of self-identity.
Increased self-efficacy	Drive to achieve.
	Sense of Accomplishment.
Interpersonal communication skills	Teamwork.
	Time Management.

Much of the literature dealing with the benefits of the liberal arts focuses on correlational studies (Amer et al., 2013; Ritchie & Williamon, 2007; Schellenberg, 2006). Although other studies used mixed methods when including qualitative research, such as Draves (2008) including weekly student journals as part of his study or Shin (2011) including interviews along with student questionnaires and parent surveys, few purely qualitative studies were found throughout the literature. As a result, this study adds to the qualitative research in the field of liberal arts. The natural setting of the research in this study means that it may be hard to replicate (Simon & Goes, 2013). However, this descriptive case study contributes to the study of the liberal arts as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) contends that there is a need for programs that support college and career readiness, such as those provided by liberal arts activities.

Presentation of Data and Results

Table 4 represents the themes and subthemes that emerged from the data provided by the participants. These themes and subthemes represent the perceptions of the participants in relation to their liberal arts and leadership activities. The description of the themes and subthemes follow.

Theme #1: Leadership Development

Participants in the study felt they were given access to opportunities that allowed them to develop leadership skills. Three participants discussed how their activities provided the opportunity for leadership. To them, this meant they could help make their activity better. It was important for them to be able to help the program that they dedicated themselves to. When asked what part of her participation in her activities made her the proudest, Olivia responded, "The leadership part of band, where I get to help make decisions about how the band is going to

function in the years to come, what we're gonna do to go forward, how we're gonna run the band like when [the director is] gone." Five of the participants expressed that the opportunity for leadership meant having a bigger voice. Hayden stated that "the leadership aspect [of band], I just kind of wanted to see us succeed, and you know, to do whatever it was necessary to achieve that goal, was what really drove me, and leadership allowed me to fulfill that." The opportunity to take on a leadership role allowed the participants to do their activity to the best of their ability. They felt they were more motivated to improve their skills, because they were role models for others.

Six of the participants also commented on the leadership skills they were gaining in their activities. They understood that there were different kinds of leadership; they did not have to be president of an organization to help it succeed, and these skills helped them gain access to other leadership areas of school. Hayden confirmed, "Yeah, if I wasn't in band, I probably wouldn't have as much leadership skills as I do, so I probably wouldn't be in National Honor Society." Megan stated, "I think that my activities have taught me how to be a constructive leader and not a destructive one. They've definitely helped me bring up the new kids and help them find their way through this crazy life called high school." Out of the six, four of the participants realized that the leadership skills they were gaining were related directly to the opportunities provided in the liberal arts programming. These skills then transferred to other areas such as National Honor Society, which uses leadership as one of its criteria for induction.

Subtheme 1: Access and opportunity. During the study, the researcher observed the leadership activities of Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA), Future Farmers of America (FFA), and National Honor Society (NHS). When observing these leadership activities in which the eight study participants were members, this researcher noticed that each leadership activity

observed had at least two officers who were involved in a liberal arts activity as well. Not all officers were study participants. Some were involved in the liberal arts activities of choir, speech, and musical performances which were sponsored by this researcher. As for the liberal arts activities of the study participants, six out of the seven band members were involved in the band leadership group, which learns about leadership and helps make decision for how the band is run.

The study participants all noted that they wanted to be part of the leadership of their groups and take advantage of the access to leadership positions and opportunities for leadership that were provided by their activities. Vance summed up his experience: "Being an officer . . . just taking the responsibility and the initiative to step up, to answer the call and with it make sure everything runs smoothly. I would rather be the ten percent that did rather than the ninety percent that didn't." Participants were articulate about their leadership roles, as most had spent time in their activities discussing what it meant to be a leader and the different types of leadership. Those in band had the opportunity to join their band leadership group and were proud to help make decisions in the band. Olivia said: ". . . I always am able to have a voice in it. If I'm in leadership, you get a voice." Those who joined the study were excited to discuss their roles as leaders and found these roles to be an important part of their high school experience.

Access to leadership opportunities also allowed the participants the ability to explore what type of leader they were becoming. Jennifer stated: "Both [of my activities] really ramp up my social anxiety. I have a leadership role in both, so I get the practice in leading others in both experiences. I also get to branch out more from what I know and grow." Understanding these opportunities as a growing experience, Jennifer is able to articulate what type of leader she is: "I

would say I lead more by example instead of say, a dictatorship, and I prefer helping others to do their best instead of being just like, 'Yo, you need to do x, x, and x by tomorrow. Good luck.'"

Andrea stated: "Well, I'm not good at leading because I tend to lead people in the wrong direction I guess because I like messing around. But I think people look up to me. I'm spunky. I have a spunky leadership." Andrea understood that even though she may not be considered a typical leader, she was still able to inspire people. Looking at the need to be a good leader in the future, Lindsey said the following:

> Well, I think, being a woman, it's like sometimes kind of difficult to take control of situations, just because of like . . . a lot of people have the mindset that men are better and like you know. So, I feel like getting to be a leader now will show me, specifically, how to be a leader later in situations where I have to deal with irritating individuals.

Megan, who also understood the importance of developing leadership skills for the future, summarized her style:

> I think that they'll just help me be a better person and help like . . . because when people say leader sometimes they're like "Oo, king of bossy." But I think that the leadership skills I have are like "Oh, well you know you could try this, and it will help you with this." I think that they'll help me be a better good person and be a better leader.

Each participant is developing a different type of leadership, one that suits their individual personality and style. Participants are using the opportunities given to them to develop their leadership style and grow into good leaders in the future.

Theme #2: Enhanced self-confidence

The next theme to emerge from the data was that of enhanced self-confidence. Half of the participants admitted they were not confident when they entered high school. They used the terms such as "shy," "kept to myself," and "introverted," to describe themselves entering high school. At the same time, they discussed that they did not like group work and were uneasy interacting with other students. Three students capture these feelings poignantly.

Megan summed up this feeling by stating the following:

Yeah, when I first got into high school I was very, very shy and definitely . . . working as a team made me more outgoing in all my classes. When they said like group work, like "Oh . . . I don't want to do a group project," but it helped me become more of a leader and a teammate and all that kind of stuff.

Jaime stated likewise:

Before I chose to do band, I was really silent. I wouldn't talk to anyone. I was like very introverted, I didn't like anybody. I'd stick to myself. But, after joining band I've become a more open person. I'm more willing to help others, go up to others who are alone and be like, "Hey, how are you?"

Jennifer expressed a similar set of emotions:

The leadership activities make me feel a bit on edge due to the fact that I have social anxiety, but also kind of gives a sense of pride. The liberal arts allow me to express myself in ways that I normally couldn't.

These participants expressed how liberal arts provided them the opportunity to work with other students while giving them the opportunity to grow at their own pace. To be successful in liberal arts activities, the whole group has to work together to achieve the final product, such as the performance of a song. Participants were able to gain confidence in their liberal arts classes

because they had to learn to work with others, which gave them the confidence to work in groups in other classes.

Subtheme 1: Growth of roles as the student, leader, and participant. As discussed in chapter 2, Bandura's (1993) Social Cognitive Theory examined how students either perceive their ability as a skill to acquire or as an inherent ability (Bandura, 1993; Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). Participants in Bandura's (1993) study who perceived their ability as a skill to acquire, meaning they could improve their skills through practice, set goals to gain those skills. Participants in this descriptive case study understood their roles in their activities and the need to keep practicing in order to grow in their roles as student, leader, and participant. Jennifer said: "I learned with my trombone that you don't get better overnight. You have to keep trying and you have to keep having at it." Andrea summed up her feelings by stating, "You have to put in effort . . . what you put in is what you get out of it." Half of the participants discussed how this skill has transferred into their other classes. Olivia felt similarly:

> You have to be persistent. If you're struggling with a rhythm in band or notes in band you just got to keep trying and if you can't figure out something in English or math, you just, you can use more resources for that, but you've got to just keep trying and keep going and eventually you'll figure it out and get it.

Participants learned how to get the most out of their roles as a student, leader, and participant because they understood the need to grow in their liberal arts activity. Andrea described the advantage of her activity participation by simply stating, "They help create leaders, because they give them a bigger role than what they can get at school." The participants became more self-confident and self-aware by taking advantage of the opportunities provided by their activities,

while at the same time learning how to transfer those same goal reaching concepts in other classes.

        Subtheme 2: Enhancement of self-identity. Participants also expressed how they found their place in their liberal arts activities and built friendships, increasing their self-identity within and out of these groups. Vance stated: ". . . It really helps you develop good bonds and friendships; a group of individuals you can trust. So that is always very nice to have and that's not just band, but all groups." Lindsey discussed how her liberal arts activity went from something everyone was doing to something she does for herself:

> Well, when I first started in middle school, there was the option for band and I think that, like I think it sounded cool and I was like a lot of kids were doing it and I think it was very interesting and it wound up being something that I'm super passionate about and that I love doing. And so, because I love it and I want to do it to the best of my ability, I decided that I would become a part of the [band] leadership group that we have, and so now I get to teach people how to do good.

These opportunities helped the participants feel they had a place where they belonged. While the literature discusses self-concept within the context of a student's beliefs, feelings, and attitudes toward his/her own academic success (House, 2000; Shin, 2011), becoming more self-confident as a person and gaining a strong self-identity would help students succeed in other areas of academics. When asked about specific leadership skills gained from her activities, Hayden responded that she had developed "a sense of identity and just being able to step up when no one else does . . . to say I can do this; I can lead when no one else can." Gaining knowledge about themselves as students and leaders has helped the participants know what they are capable of

doing. Their self-identity has been enhanced, and they use it to step up and be leaders in their activities as well as the classroom.

Theme #3: Increased Self-Efficacy

One of the most prominent themes from the literature was increased self-efficacy among liberal arts participants. As Hendricks (2016) asserted, self-efficacy is a habit that liberal arts teachers use to help students develop over time and help students gain a feeling of control over their own learning. It also fits with Bandura's (1993) Social Cognitive Theory, as stated above, and is associated with good leaders and students who are well prepared for college (Conley, 2008; Draves, 2008; Mumford et al., 2007; Zimmerman, 2002). All participants mentioned how their activities motivate them to do better in school. Some simply mentioned it in the context of participation, such as Olivia:

> Well, you definitely have to keep your grades up if you want to participate in things through band or choir, it doesn't matter. District music or any competition the schools can pull you out of the competition if you're not eligible. So that's definitely an external motivation to keep grades up, especially when band is your life.

Megan reiterated this point: "[My activities] definitely push me to keep my grades up and push me to stay eligible and to not get incompletes and to do my best in all my classes because you don't want to be ineligible and to miss anything." However, others were able to articulate beyond the simple need to participate. Vance said:

> I feel like the lessons I've learned from the band and FFA have helped me in my academic classes because they both require good grades to able to participate and so I do make sure to meet that, but, as well as it instills per say a fire within oneself to push themselves to be better and to desire higher and better results.

This desire helped participants figure out internally what tasks they needed to accomplish in order to maintain their grades, instead of the constant push from outside sources, such as teachers and parents. Vance continued: "Liberal arts has improved my academics over the last seven or eight years in band. It has helped me improve as a student and to better myself and my study habits, as well as my grades." Jennifer learned what tasks she needed to be successful: "Liberal arts have given me the confidence to ask questions in my academic life. I know I don't have to be perfect the first time, so I can improve from asking questions and not getting it right the first time." The participants' increased self-efficacy supports the literature; however, what was surprising about the participants' perceptions was that they were very aware of how the liberal arts had helped them become more focused on doing better in other areas of leadership and academics.

Subtheme 1: Drive to achieve. A subtheme of increased self-efficacy among the participants was a drive to achieve. Seven out of the eight participants spoke about wanting to do better in other classes. A few were in the context of getting to perform with their groups during competitions and other out-of-school performances, but four of the participants expanded on their drive to achieve. Lindsey summed up her feelings:

> One of the biggest lessons I've learned in [band] is that you have got to practice to be
> good at what you're doing. Everything takes time and you're not going to be great at it
> the first time you do it. . . . And when you put your time into the things that you want to
> get better at you're going to get better and I think that applies to literally everything. It
> takes time, you've got to be willing to put in time and the effort to make yourself better.

Jennifer stated a similar sense of accomplishment:

I would say the drive to achieve is always there because that's kind of an omnipresent

thing. Of course, playing a trombone and doing complicated math equations are not quite

the same thing. But the same motivation to accomplish something is always there.

The participants have clearly chosen their activities, and they want to do them well. Hayden

explained:

I kind of see myself being more of that leadership figure in other classes. I am going to be

doing, I'm in journalism and I'm the junior website editor, so next year I'll take over the

website. And so that kind of was a good force to say "Hey, you can do this, you can be a

good leadership position."

Most of them have also found the desire to transfer this feeling to other classes and activities.

Their drive to achieve has increased because they have found success in their liberal arts activity.

They have gained confidence in themselves and push themselves to achieve higher results in

other classes.

Subtheme 2: Sense of accomplishment. Along with their drive to achieve, all

participants expressed a sense of accomplishment tied to their liberal arts activity. Participants

are passionate about their choices to be involved, and this sparks their need to be better in their

activities. Lindsey summed up the sentiment:

Well, I feel that since I've been involved in band and stuff it has really given me more of

a, like I do good at that and I'm passionate about that, so I feel like that translates into

other things that I do. So, I feel that the quality that I get there is reflected through grades

and things like that.

Jennifer concurs:

I think there's a combination of things that make me feel proud. Of course, getting

awards [in my activities], superior, makes you feel good about what you've done, but it's

also the day to day where you see progress in yourself and everyone else around you.

That's what it's like to be a leader.

Participants have gained a sense of pride from their involvement in liberal arts activities. They

know how good it feels to accomplish a task. They are able to understand how far they have

come since they first started and that they can repeat that feeling in other activities and classes.

Even though she expressed some frustration with other activity members' lack of commitment,

Olivia stated: "Most of the time band makes me happy . . . it's a lot of fun. It makes me happy

overall and I'm glad to say that I've been in it for all four years of high school." Participants

were able to understand their individual accomplishments separately from the group effort.

Other participants expressed their sense of accomplishment as more of a team effort

instead of individual accomplishments. Andrea stated, "When we go to state [competition], or

when we do something in class together it's really fun and we all feel proud of it." Hayden

reiterated this thought: "In band I'd say when we go to state or go to district music and you see

all the 1's up on the board. It just kind of makes you feel proud that 'oh, I did something.'"

Contributing to the group and accomplishing goals together allowed the participants to build

stronger relationships with their fellow activity participants. Jaime stated: "I'm proud to be in

band because it's something I've stuck with since I was younger and because I've made a lot of

friends. More than friends, like brothers and sisters, pretty much. I can talk to anyone in the

band pretty much about anything." This sense of accomplishment and comradery among the

participants adds to their increased self-efficacy. They want to continue to repeat these feelings

and they recognize where the sense of accomplishment stemmed from, their liberal arts activity.

Theme #4: Interpersonal Communication Skills

The final theme that emerged from the data was the development of interpersonal communication skills. The literature repeatedly refers to interpersonal communication skills when dealing with leadership and college preparedness (Adler, 2006; Conley, 2008; Franklin, 2011; Mumford et al., 2007). Eisner (2004) stated that students in the arts needed to create qualitative relationships in order to form aims and goals to help guide projects and practice interpreting meaning from different contents, which helps students learn to work together. All participants mentioned some form of communication skills they had developed through participation in the liberal arts: coming together as a group and performing, becoming more comfortable working on group projects in class, taking on leadership roles in their activities, or simple social skills outside of the classroom.

Jennifer expressed this idea:

They've definitely helped with my communication skills, because when I first entered high school, I was a very shy freshman and would not talk in front of a room and now I am very, well not very comfortable, [but] I am comfortable doing that.

Jaime stated similarly:

Yeah. FFA has taught me to focus more on how I interact with people. And then, band has taught me how to connect with myself and how I can show people what I'm about.

Andrea expressed the importance of communication for her future:

I think these skills will help me in the future because it's good to have confidence and as you go into the world you're going to be talking to more people and you're probably going to have to public speak someday, so it's good not to be scared of it.

The participants in this study have gained the ability to communicate better with their classmates and have transferred these skills to their roles as team members and leaders. They had a need in their liberal arts classes and activities to work together to create a final product, and this need for teamwork in their liberal arts classes and activities has taught them how to communicate with each other to create successful performances. The interpersonal skills the participants have gained has helped them in other classes and activities to learn to express themselves and be helpful members of any team in which they take part.

Subtheme 1: Teamwork. Half of the participants recognized the need to work with others on teams to be successful in their liberal arts activities, as well as their other classes and activities. Andrea stated, "I have to work with other people and . . . probably that you have to be confident in everything you do or you're not going to succeed as well." Mumford et al. (2007) listed interpersonal relations as a crucial element for holding a leadership position. In order to be more competent leaders, participants need to be able to work on teams to succeed in several of their classes and activities. The participants in this study feel they have increased these skills through their activity choices. Jaime referred both to her liberal arts and leadership activities:

> They both involve teamwork. You can't just have yourself play an instrument and say you're a whole band, or in FFA, you can't say "Oh, I'm an FFA member, I do it all by myself." No, we all work together to do different tasks and everything.

Sometimes even the participants were surprised by how much their groups' ability to work together affected their performances. When referring to the current group of students in her liberal arts activity, Megan stated: "What makes me proud is, surprisingly, how well we work together. . . . It kind of surprised me with all the new people. We actually somewhat worked together, and it was good . . ." Becoming part of a liberal arts activity has given the participants

an example of what good teamwork looks like and what it can accomplish. When asked about the skills she learned in her liberal arts activity, Andrea simply summed up her thoughts: "I think it's helped me be able to work with others better." Participants in this study were aware of the need for good teamwork skills and how those skills can be transferred to other areas of their lives.

       Subtheme 2: Time management. Another skill participants learned through their liberal arts activity participation was time management. Three of the participants expressed how their activity choices have helped them gain a sense of organization and taught them how to use their time effectively. Jaime said: "At first, when I first started both [my liberal arts and leadership activity] I kind of felt stressed, because I felt like I was doing so much, because of work and everything. But now, I've learned to put certain time towards certain things, and then work it out." Hayden stated, "[My activities] teach me to stay on top of things and always make sure you're in on time and doing the things you need to do to be successful." Time management skills help participants balance the load of homework, practice for activities, performances, and social time. Learning this skill helps participants become more independent individuals, leading to students who are more prepared to deal with the demands of college and the job market (Bahls, 2013). Vance summed up learning this skill:

       Along with the leadership skills we learned, we also learned skills to be strong, independent individuals, once we're ready for the next step in life. Not to mention, through those organizations you learn to accurately plan and manage time as well as the financial side of things. And so, that's really where I bring the independent side of things from, is they really do prepare you for the next step of life, which is adulthood.

Participants in this study have gained important skills that they will need to help them in and out of school. Time management skills will help them continue to be successful in their current and future activities.

Artifacts

During the first interview participants were asked to present artifacts that they felt represented their activity. Discussion concerning the participants' artifacts contributed to the themes presented in this chapter. However, the specific inclusion of artifacts in the interview process warrants their further discussion in this section. As stated earlier, participants were very attached to their artifacts. When referring to the "letters" she was rewarded for her high achievement in band for the past four years, Jamie stated, "They are something I'm most proud of, out of everything in high school, I'm most proud of my letters because that means I put time and effort into something to earn something." Participants showed strong emotion toward these objects that represented their activities, reinforcing their dedication to their activities. Vance's artifact covered his past, present, and future dedication to his leadership activity:

> Because to me it represents everything that I have had that has helped me to develop the
>
> opportunities, the experiences. It also represents the potential that has been developed,
>
> but also the rest of the potential that is still in this program after I leave this year.

When referring to her instrument, Jennifer said, "This horn got me through my 8th grade solo. . . . It's been kind of a constant in my life." Olivia brought the cord she earned for gaining entrance into her leadership activity: "This to me just shows that I've succeeded. . . . I'm still at the top part of our [class academically]." All of these artifacts were with the students as they were growing in their roles as student, participant, and leader. As students were gaining self-efficacy and self-identity, these objects gave them a physical memory and they gave expression

to their dedication to and fondness for the activities they felt gave them so much. Jaime summed up these feelings when referring to lettering in band: "They show that I'm committed to it. Not just going and coming home and going. It's more like going there to celebrate, mostly. Like be able to become yourself, instead of something bigger than yourself." The artifacts the students brought to the interview represent their hard work and growth as participants in their activities.

For the participants the artifacts also represent their dedication to continuing in their involvement in these activities as they move on to college and/or the job market. Lindsey plans to continue her involvement in band: "This object is something that I was able to save up for . . . and I'm hoping for a lot of scholarship opportunities, too. Because I want to go on and play collegiately." Andrea's sweatshirt will allow her to support her activity beyond her high school years: "I chose this object, so I could support my organization, cause I'm actually proud of it." All of the participants mentioned supporting their chosen activities in some way, either through participation, volunteering, or as a future employee.

Future Decisions

During the interview process, students were asked questions regarding their future decisions, including whether they plan to continue participation in liberal arts activities during college and beyond. Six of the participants knew they would definitely participate in liberal arts activities if given the option, while the other two were not sure they would be able to fit liberal arts activities into their schedule given their choice of major. When discussing college, Jennifer stated:

> I don't know about the liberal arts [participation] part of course, . . I will be a bit busy for that. And honestly, I have not given that much thought. I haven't thought too much about my life after college right now, I'm focusing on college.

Vance said: "I don't think I plan on doing [band]. I think it would be fun. I will miss band, but I also feel like band is something I should leave as part of my high school career." Even though Jennifer and Vance do not plan to participate in their liberal arts activities, there is still a possibility they may change their mind.

Three of the participants plan on majoring in liberal arts-based careers. Hayden said, "I plan on going to [state] University and studying journalism." Megan stated: ". . . I want to go into education. I want to major in theater and music education and then minor in psychology. And then, I hope to get a job somewhere and teach all that good stuff." Lindsey said:

> I have decided that when I graduate I'm going to major in art and business, because art is
> another thing I'm very passionate about and I think I'm very good at. It's something I
> want to do for the rest of my life, so I think I'm going to major in that.

Participating in liberal arts activities helped these participants find what they liked to do, resulting in a future career involving the liberal arts.

The other three participants who said they would definitely continue to participate in liberal arts activities planned to go into business, medicine, and social services. When asked about participating in liberal arts activities beyond high school, Andrea stated, "Yeah, I'd join a community [group] or something." Jaime said, "Yes, I still plan on playing band in college." Having a little more complicated situation, Olivia explained: "Where I'm going to be in school . . . they don't have a band program . . . but [I'm] thinking either by semester or by the end of the year [I'm] going to . . . transfer and I might get involved with band there." Even though these three participants will not be continuing in jobs that involve the liberal arts, they still want the liberal arts to be part of their lives. They enjoy being part of these groups and plan to continue that feeling.

A couple of the participants also understood that there may not be the possibility of continuing to participate themselves, but they hoped their children would participate in liberal arts activities in school. Olivia said:

I mean, I'd like to stay in band type things or any music type or have my kids in it at least so I can help them or something. But I'm not going to force it on my kids. I mean, I'd love to stay in a music-oriented group or something.

Jaime stated:

I still plan on making sure that when I have children they play band because it teaches you more than just playing an instrument. It teaches you about how to treat others with respect, how to treat yourself with respect, to show that you're worth more than just a person.

Olivia and Jaime recognize what they gained from being involved in the liberal arts and want their children to gain the same benefits.

Three of the participants also plan to continue participating in leadership activities during their college career and beyond. Jennifer stated: "I do plan to continue [being a leader] in college. I'm going to apply for the . . . school of business [at the college I'm attending], that's a huge thing and that's a pretty big leadership position." Olivia said:

[I would be part of] an organization to help. I would definitely be a student advisor, or whatever they call them at their school, where you help freshmen come in and get used to it down there or help them find their classes or just help them through things. I would definitely to that.

When referring to college, Vance stated: "I do plan to participate in the collegiate FFA . . . and I do plan to participate in possibly student government or just various other clubs of interest." Thinking further into the future, Vance continued:

> As an adult, I plan to participate [in FFA], although I know my role will have changed from the one doing the activities, to the one helping those who are doing the activities. And so, I do look forward to being able to, in return, give help to the younger ones as they then try and figure out how those activities are run and help them see the opportunity within everything.

Their position as a leader in their activity was important to the participants and these three participants plan to continue improving themselves as leaders, as well as help create future leaders.

The participants' decisions to continue participation in liberal arts and leadership activities through college and into adulthood reflected their perceptions about their chosen activities. Students who take part in liberal arts activities develop skills to become "life-long, self-motivated learners." (Thomas, n.d., para. 3). The participants understood the benefits they gained from taking part in liberal arts activities. They want to continue to gain those skills and pass those skills along to others as they grow older.

Summary

The goal of this descriptive case study was to explain how students understood the place of liberal arts in their academic and leadership choices. The themes, gathered inductively, that emerged from the data identify how the participants felt their liberal arts activities contributed to their choices, including providing opportunities for leadership, increased self-confidence, self-identity, and self-efficacy, and the development of interpersonal skills. Main themes were

further supported with the use of subthemes. Subthemes explored participants' perceptions towards access to and opportunity for leadership opportunities, their roles in their chosen activities and in their academic lives, the drive to achieve, sense of accomplishment, and teamwork and time management skills. This researcher discussed these themes as they related to the literature. Chapter 5 will further discuss the results and how this study contributes to the research on liberal arts participation.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

This descriptive case study has explored how public high school students in a western Nebraska high school perceive the value of participating in liberal arts activities and how these activities influence their academic success, choice of major, and activities post-graduation. A descriptive case study helps answer "how" and "why" questions yet allows for a real-life contextual study. It is a technique used when the researcher has little/no possibility to control the behavior of the participants (Yin, 1994). Within this study, this researcher used the tools of individual interviews and observation to gain insight into the participants' perceptions of why they chose to be involved in liberal arts classes and activities, how they perceived these types of activities in their current life, and how these influenced their leadership roles and their future decisions regarding college and career. Participants were also asked to bring an artifact from one of their activities to the first interview. Eight participants, who participated in both a liberal arts activity and a leadership activity at the research site, chose to be involved in this descriptive case study. The small sample size in this study means it is difficult to generalize the results to the general population. However, in spite of the small sample size, several forms of validity as well as data saturation were used in this study to ensure the conclusions in this study still add to the academic literature on the benefits of liberal arts participation for high school age students. The research questions that guided this case study were:

RQ$_1$: How do public high school students describe their involvement in both liberal arts and leadership activities?

o How do public high school students perceive participation in liberal arts and leadership activities with relation to academic success?

o How do public high school students perceive participation in liberal arts and leadership activities with relation to decisions about their future?

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Liberal Arts Benefits

In December of 2015, educators and policy makers had to adjust to new educational policies set by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (Darrow, 2016; Fránquiz & Oritz, 2016). ESSA required schools to include a variety of programs that support college and career readiness (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). While ESSA encourages including music and arts in schools as programs that help prepare students with college and career readiness skills, it does not specify which programs or how many should be included, leaving schools to decide how many programs are necessary to meet the demands of ESSA (Mathis & Trujillo, 2016). Schools could include a variety of music and arts classes, such as band, visual art, choir, and drama, or create a music and arts program that features only band. Hence, even with the support of the ESSA, it is important for researchers to continue to study the benefits of liberal arts classes and activities for students in order to encourage schools to maintain the liberal arts programs that currently exist in their schools and add more liberal arts opportunities for their students.

The literature stated that in order to gain future success in the areas of leadership and college readiness, students need to develop strong oral and written skills, interpersonal skills, the ability to find new and creative solutions to problems, and possess scientific thinking skills (Adler, 2006; Conley, 2008; Franklin, 2011; Mumford et al., 2007). Furthermore, liberal arts classes and activities benefit students by helping increase academic performance, enhance their development of cognitive skills (Bugai & Brenner, 2011; Costa-Giomi, 2015; Nutley et al., 2014; Sittiprapaporn, 2010), build a stronger sense of self-esteem (Culp, 2016; Severs, 2016), increase their ability to self-regulate educational time, develop a higher sense of self-efficacy to achieve goals (Kindekens et al., 2013; Ritchie & Williamon, 2007), and augment their development of good written, oral, and critical thinking skills, along with acquiring more tolerance for diversity,

whether cultural or political (Bahls, 2013; Conley, 2008; Ruppert, 2006; Stapleton, 2011).

However, the literature review revealed a paucity of qualitative studies to support these findings.

While this researcher found many quantitative studies focused on the benefits of liberal arts

classes and activities, only a few studies included both quantitative and qualitative research

methods. As a result, the decision was made to explore this topic from the perspective of the

lived experience of high school students and employ only qualitative methods to conduct

research into the benefits of liberal arts classes and activities.

The findings in this study support the conclusions found in the literature on the benefits

of participation in liberal arts classes and activities, including an increase in self-esteem, self-

efficacy, self-concept, and increased cognitive skills. Participants' perceptions of the benefits of

their liberal arts involvement indicate a stronger sense of self-esteem, self-identity, and

leadership, a drive to achieve academically, as well as a sense of accomplishment. Moreover,

there was a demonstrated increase in interpersonal communication skills, including the ability to

work in teams and time management skills. As indicated by the academic literature provided

throughout this dissertation, these skills help students gain future success in leadership roles and

college preparedness. The results of this paper and how this study related to the literature

referred to in this dissertation will be discussed in the next sections, including the implication of

the results and recommendations for future practice.

Summary of the Results

As stated earlier, this descriptive case study explored how public high school students

perceived the value of participating in liberal arts activities. Chapter 4 discussed the emergent

themes and findings of the research. A review of the themes discussed in chapter 4 can be found

in Table 5.

Table 5

Themes and Subthemes Review

Theme	Subthemes
Leadership development	Access and opportunity.
Enhanced self-confidence	Growth of roles as the student, leader, and participant.
	Enhancement of self-identity.
Increased self-efficacy	Drive to achieve.
	Sense of Accomplishment.
Interpersonal communication skills	Teamwork.
	Time Management.

The summary of the results is broken down in the following sections as they relate to the research questions in this study. Themes and subthemes are discussed in the section(s) in which they most relate. The research questions for this study focus on participants' perceptions of their involvement in both liberal arts and leadership activities, and how these activities affect their academics and future decisions.

RQ1: Involvement in Both Liberal Arts and Leadership Activities

Participants in this study were juniors and seniors who participated in both a liberal arts activity and a leadership activity at the research site. Participants took part in two individual interviews and were observed twice in their leadership activities. Participants' perceptions about their involvement in their liberal arts and leadership activities were the main topic discussed during the interview process. Participants were asked to discuss why they chose their activities, how their activities made them feel, their family influence on their activities, the artifact they brought with them to represent their activity, and how they felt their liberal arts activity and their leadership activity influenced each other. A copy of the first interview questions can be found in Appendix A. All the participants in this study felt that their involvement in these activities gave them an opportunity to develop important leadership skills.

Participants from this study expressed an increase in self-confidence from their involvement in liberal arts activities. Because participants could perceive and describe their increase in confidence and note their own improvement, individually and as a group, they could transfer those feelings to other classes and activities. Jennifer stated: "I think I learn leadership skills in one that can kind of transfer over to the other. Not always directly, of course, but they do benefit each other." The participants in this study were able to articulate what skills they gained from their liberal arts participation and how they transferred to other classes and activities. Andrea stated, "These activities have helped me gain public speaking skills, communication skills, and just better confidence skills." Andrea expanded the benefit of gaining these skills by stating, "I think these skills will help me in the future because it's good to have confidence and as you go into the world you're going to be talking to more people . . . so it's good not to be scared of it." The participants increase in self-confidence and self-identity contributed to their desire to pursue participation in other activities and leadership roles.

Participants in this study also saw themselves as leaders in their chosen activities. When asked about the common theme that started to appear in the first interviews dealing with the opportunity for liberal arts participants to be leaders in their activity, Megan stated, "I think it's very true that most of us are pretty good leaders." Participation in liberal arts activities allowed participants to observe good leaders. As participants became more engaged in their activity, they also started to want to become the leaders they saw when they were underclassmen. Lindsey stated, "[W]hen I entered high school, I was not super confident in myself and my ability. . . . And so, getting surrounded by a group of leaders like before me . . . show[ed] me specifically how to lead in a way that's effective." Hayden took her confidence in her leadership beyond liberal arts, stating, "When you do a project at work . . . and no one else wants to step up and do

it you can say, 'Well I know I can do it. I know I can lead this project.'" Participants looked at leadership as the next step to contributing to their activity, which in turn increased their confidence in their leadership skills even more.

RQ2: Academic Success

Another aspect of the participants' involvement in liberal arts and leadership activities was their need to be focused academically. Participants needed to stay on top of their grades in order to participate in their activities. All participants wanted to be part of their group's performances, meetings, and travel opportunities, so they used the need to stay eligible as one way to motivate themselves to perform better in other classes academically. Hayden said, "[My liberal arts classed have] kind of always been there to say 'Hey, you need to keep your grades up or you can't [participate]', so it's kind of kept me pushing forward." Participants saw a clear relation between staying eligible and being able to participate in their chosen activities.

The need to stay eligible for participation in conferences and contests combined with the participants' desire to take part in their activities' special events helped some participants increase their engagement in school. As participants became more aware of how important their liberal arts classes and activities were to them, they learned that other aspects of school can be just as rewarding. Jaime said, "I feel like [my liberal arts activity] made me want to be more involved in school, because if it weren't for band, I probably wouldn't want to come to school." Megan took a slightly different approach on engagement in school, stating, "I think that [my liberal arts classes] . . . show me school can be fun and . . . like this lesson can be fun if we do stuff with it . . . It shows me to have fun in school and stuff." Even though participants sought engagement in their academic classes in different ways, all participants learned the importance of being engaged in their other classes in order to stay eligible.

Although all participants mentioned the external relationship of eligibility and participation, most also discussed an internal sense of motivation that led them to desire to do well in their activity as well as other classes. When asked about striving to do well in other classes, as she had done in band, Lindsey responded, "Yes, I feel that the quality that I get there is reflected through grades and things like that." Through their experiences in liberal arts classes, participants became more self-aware of the tasks they needed to accomplish in order to be successful in all their academic pursuits. Participants learned to manage their time appropriately in order to find balance with their homework, practice time, and social lives. They learned to work with others to prepare performance pieces as large groups as well as finish tasks such as group work in their regular classes. Participants even understood the need to set goals for themselves to accomplish the tasks needed for them to succeed. By learning these skills, participants were able to feel a sense of accomplishment that led them to desire to achieve more. This increased their drive to achieve in all areas of their academic lives.

RQ3: Focusing on Their Future

During the interview process participants were asked about their future plans concerning their activities, both in college and beyond. ESSA encourages schools to include ways to evaluate college readiness skills that are gained by students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016). One way to measure increase in college readiness skills is through investigating how students understand these skills and how they perceive their effect on their academic lives, including their plans after high school. Most participants were planning to continue their participation in their liberal arts activities, either in college or later as an adult. Those who did not plan to pursue participation in liberal arts activities in college or beyond expressed how much they would miss the presence of these sorts of activities in their lives, but they felt there would not be enough time

with their chosen future majors and careers to fit liberal arts participation in their daily schedules.

Participants felt they would be able to pursue leadership roles in the future as well, whether as

part of their job or as extra commitment to their job and community. Most planned on pursuing

jobs that required the skills they expressed learning through their activities: self-confidence, self-

efficacy, teamwork, time management, and a strong sense of self.

Participation in liberal arts helped all of the participants realize the need to become

prepared for their future and to begin the process of gaining skills and experiences that could be

used for a successful future. Bahls (2013) contended that liberal arts classes and activities help

students gain the skills and experiences needed to be ready for college or a career after high

school. Jennifer stated, "I wanted a wide variety of experiences that I could use in my future

because I am a high school student and not quite sure what I want to do in my future. . . ."

Through their activities the participants gained knowledge about the skills they learned during

high school and how those skills will help them in their future lives. Participants understood

what skills were gained from their activities, which included skills that led to them step into

leadership roles in their liberal arts classroom and other academic areas. The participants also

used this knowledge to help make decisions about what major would suit them best in college

and where they would be the most successful in the future.

Discussion of the Results

The results of this descriptive case study implicate that participating in liberal arts during

high school has benefits that stretch beyond benefiting liberal arts classes and activities.

Participants in this study participated in a variety of liberal arts and leadership activities,

including band, art club, journalism, one-act play, Future Farmers of America (FFA), Future

Business Leaders of America (FBLA), and National Honor Society (NHS). All participants were

able to discuss these activities, the skills they learned from their activities, and how other areas of their lives were affected by these activities. As evidenced by the articulate responses to interview questions, the participants had benefited from the skills they had learned as members of liberal arts classes and activities and were able to recognize the skills they had gained and how those skills surfaced in other places. Participants understood the importance of being able to work in groups, of the need to manage their time accordingly, and their responsibility to the group to improve themselves in order to be a successful member of their liberal arts class or activity. Participants also gained important knowledge about what it takes to be a leader, the language needed to describe what type of leader they had become, and how their leadership skills transferred to other classes and activities.

The results of this study also show that participation in the liberal arts is for everybody. Participants in this study discussed different amounts of parental support, expressed different levels of confidence at the start of their journey, were of different genders, and were involved in activities different from each other. All of the participants benefited from their participation in their chosen activities regardless of their gender, background, or personality type. The liberal arts offered to everyone the opportunity to gain skills and become leaders.

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Academic Literature

The results of this study support the academic literature, which tallies the benefits of liberal arts participation. The literature stated that liberal arts classes and activities help students gain cognitive skills (Costa-Giomi, 2015), self-esteem (Severs, 2016), self-regulation, and self-efficacy (Kindekens et al., 2013). These skills benefit students in the areas of college and career readiness, as well as increase their ability to take on leadership roles while in school and during their future lives (Bahls, 2013; Franklin, 2011; Mumford et al., 2007). Participants in this study

showed an increase in these skills with the discussion of their perceptions of the benefits of liberal arts classes and activities in their lives.

Self-Esteem/Self-Confidence

According to the literature, students involved in the liberal arts show an increase in their level of self-esteem (Costa-Giomi, 2004; Gooy, 2010; Rickard et al., 2012). Self-esteem is the judgment an individual places on him- or herself in relation to early home environment, achievement, and skill development (Michel & Farrell, 1973). When a students are successful at a task, their confidence in themselves and their ability increases, and this in turn increases the student's level of self-esteem. Liberal arts classes and activities, such as band, choir, and art, provide students opportunities that allow them to be successful within a group setting. These same activities also provide opportunities to try individual tasks, such as a solo vocal performance, to increase students' level of confidence. Shin (2011) cautioned that experiencing failure or embarrassment during a solo performance causes damage to a student's self-esteem, but success has the opposite effect.

Participants in this study who indicated that they were not confident in themselves at the beginning of high school expressed how involvement in their liberal arts activities helped increase their confidence. Participants were presented with confidence building opportunities, such as the opportunity to join the band's leadership group and help make decisions pertaining to band, and taught to understand the importance of being a leader to help other members develop the skills needed to ensure their activity worked as a group. They had to learn to work with their liberal arts group in order to have a successful performance. This success increased their self-confidence and self-esteem, allowing them to venture out of their comfort zone in other classes and become more comfortable working with others. Most participants also found themselves

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stepping into leadership roles within their liberal arts classes and activities, their leadership activities, and their academic classes. All participants in the study perceived themselves as leaders in their chosen classes and activities and most of them attributed their role as current leaders to the confidence they gained through their liberal arts activity.

Along with increased self-confidence and self-esteem, participants became stronger advocates of the programs in which they took part, as well as self-advocates. Darrow (2016) encouraged liberal arts teachers to become advocates for their programs; however, teachers need to gather strong supporters who will also advocate for their program. Students who may not respond to an adult inviting them to join a group might become part of that group if they are invited by a peer, especially a friend. Developing student leaders within liberal arts programs, or any program, creates advocates for a lifetime. Interpersonal skills are crucial elements for those holding leadership positions (Mumford et al., 2007). Participants in this study expressed a gain in interpersonal communication skills. As participants gained these skills, they became more confident reaching out to other students. During the observations of participants' leadership activity meetings, many of the participants took the time to interact with underclassmen and answer questions or guide them on proper protocol. During these meetings the researcher also observed participants who advocated for themselves, discussing with the activity sponsor about their role and how they could fulfill the tasks needed for that role. Learning to advocate in the safe environment of their activities taught the participants how to be advocates for themselves and their activities outside of the liberal arts and leadership environment.

Self-Efficacy

As participants began to understand themselves and grow their confidence regarding their abilities, they were also able to increase their self-efficacy. According to Nielsen (2004), self-

efficacy is a person's ability to judge their capability and set goals to organize and execute actions that help them increase this capability. In the liberal arts, students need to be able to assess their skill level and set practice goals in order increase their own skill level. Chapter 2 explored self-efficacy. This section was undergirded by Albert Bandura's (1993) academic analysis of Social Cognitive Theory and how students' perceptions affected their success. Bandura's (1993) theory highlights the importance self-efficacy plays in a person's ability to increase their skill level. Students who perceived their ability as a skill to acquire would set goals to increase their skill level and therefore increase their ability (Bandura, 1993; Zimmerman et al., 1992). The ability to recognize what steps were needed in order to improve one's abilities meant those students were able to increase their skill level more successfully than those who felt that their skills were just inherited.

All participants in this study recognized the need to work hard in order to increase their skill level in their activities, including their leadership skills. Liberal arts teachers have the ability to help students develop a habit of self-efficacy, recognizing what tasks students need to perform in order to increase their abilities and help them gain a sense of control over their own learning (Hendricks, 2016). One of the results of increasing students' ability in the classroom, and hence their self-efficacy, is that they gain the confidence to learn and adapt (Culp, 2016; Draves, 2008; Severs, 2016). Most participants expressed their need to practice and try new techniques in order to increase their skills. They understood how much work it took to improve and were willing to put in time and effort to gain the necessary skills to succeed. Participants also saw the need to become a leader as one way to increase their ability in their activities. Leaders need to be able to learn continually and adapt to new situations (Mumford et al., 2007).

Participants worked to reach their goals of being a leader in their activities and were still working toward their future goals for college and career at the time of this study.

Interpersonal/Cognitive Skills

Much of the research discussing the benefits of liberal arts classes and activities focused primarily on academic success, mainly dealing with an increase in cognitive skills. Cognitive skills are associated with "improvements in intelligence, special abilities, phonological awareness, verbal memory, processing of prosody, academic achievement, processing of sound, and neurological development" (Costa-Giomi, 2015, p. 20). Students who are involved in the liberal arts activities tend to test higher in academic areas (Costa-Giomi, 2015; Morrison, 1994; Schellenberg, 2005). Ruppert (2006) also stated that students in the liberal arts tended to perform better on standardized tests. The research also ties self-esteem and self-efficacy to student success in academics, along with the increase in cognitive skills (Catterall et al., 1999; Eisner, 2004). Students exhibiting higher self-esteem and self-efficacy were more likely to increase their cognitive skills, increasing the benefits of their liberal arts participation.

While this study did not focus on the participants' actual grades or standardized tests scores—which would have required more quantitative methods of gathering information and assessment—the participants did show a drive to achieve in their academics. Participants were involved in their liberal arts classes and activities because they liked being part of that particular group. This meant the participants wanted to perform with their group and needed to stay eligible. However, eligibility was not the only reason students chose to stay eligible. Participants expressed their perceived feelings of accomplishment when it came to their success in their liberal arts classes and activities and they wanted to transfer those feelings to other areas of their academic lives. Participants understood what tasks they needed to complete in order to

be successful and then worked on completing those tasks. The literature confirms the tie between student's academic success, or drive to achieve, and an increased sense of self-efficacy, such as the participants setting goals to complete the tasks that will make them successful (Culp, 2016; Draves, 2008; Severs, 2016).

College and Career Readiness

Students in liberal arts classes and activities gain the academic self-concept expected by colleges to develop the ability to interpret information, solve problems, analyze, and think critically (Bahls, 2013; Conley, 2007; House, 2000). During high school, students need to explore and understand what academic areas suit them best; this in turn helps them discern a college major or career path where they can be successful. ESSA also supports this concept by enforcing the need for schools to include programs that support college and career readiness for students (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). Participants in this study showed they had thought critically and analyzed their future decisions when it came to college and beyond. Participants understood the academic areas where they were successful, which helped them decide where they wanted to go to college as well as which major they should pursue. They articulated their interest in the liberal arts and whether they would have the time or the need to continue participation in liberal arts activities. Increasing student's self-efficacy, self-regulation, and self-concept are important college and career readiness skills (Costa-Giomi, 2015; McPherson & McCormick, 2004; Nielsen, 2004; Zimmerman, 2002). As participants came to understand more thoroughly what skills they possessed and how they could use those skills in the future, they were able to articulate their plans concerning college major and future career choice. They also were able to outline the steps, as well as the activities, needed to be successful as an adult based on these decisions. Further, participants understood what they would need to give up in order to

focus on their future career, demonstrating once again that they, as individuals, had gained a strong sense of self-efficacy, self-regulation, and self-concept, as well as validating the important skills they had gained as leaders.

Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory

This study was designed to explore how public high school students perceived their involvement in liberal arts classes and activities to better understand how these activities affected their academic success and future choices. The implications of this study provide liberal arts teachers with more research to help advocate for their programs and/or advocate for an increase in liberal arts programs in their respective schools.

Implication #1: Schools Need a Variety of Programs

The ESSA enforces the need for schools to include a variety of programs that support college and career readiness, including music and arts, in their curriculum (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). However, ESSA does not dictate how many programs the school should include or any specific liberal arts classes that need to be part of the curriculum. The policies of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) introduced in 2001 also listed liberal arts classes as a necessary part of education (Gerrity, 2009). However, during the time NCLB dictated educational policy, standardized testing became normative and schools started spending less money, and even cut, liberal arts programs in order to focus on the core subjects in which students were tested (Gerrity, 2009; Heilig et al., 2010; Ruppert, 2006). While ESSA encourages more college and career readiness programs, it still focuses on standardized tests as an indicator of success (Mathis & Trujillo, 2016). This has left many schools with the need to decide which liberal arts programs to offer given limited budgets.

The research from this study indicates that the variety of programs provided by the school where the research was conducted has helped several students find the right program for them. The liberal arts activities represented in this study include band, journalism, art club, and one-act play. The school also offers choir and a spring musical performance which are taught by the researcher. Providing only one or two liberal arts programs, such as band and art class, would limit the number of students participating in a liberal arts activity. As discussed in Chapter 4, out of the 192 students who participate in liberal arts activities at the research site, several students are involved in only one activity. If the research site reduced its liberal arts and leadership offerings, several students would lose the benefits of being involved in such activities.

Implication #2: More Advocacy for the Liberal Arts

The second implication of the results in this study is that liberal arts teachers can use this study, along with the supportive academic literature, to advocate for a variety of liberal arts programs and activities to be provided for students at their school. Liberal arts teachers need to be proactive when it comes to gaining new liberal arts programs, as well as maintaining current liberal arts programs (Darrow, 2016). Darrow (2016) also recommends advocating for the protection of educational time spent in liberal arts programs. Liberal arts courses should not be restricted due to the desire to increase test scores in math and English.

The results of this study support the conclusions in the literature about the benefits of participation in the liberal arts. Participants in this study showed an increase in self-identity, self-efficacy, drive to achieve, and interpersonal skills. The literature indicates that students gain self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-regulation, self-concept, and cognitive skills when they participate in liberal arts activities. Liberal arts teachers need to be aware of the benefits of their programs and how those benefits can help other classes and activities in their schools. Using the

information from the literature and this study can help liberal arts teachers become more powerful advocates for their programs and those of their colleagues.

Implication #3: Changes in School Policy

The implications discussed above examine the need for more liberal arts programs in schools as well as increased advocacy for these programs. However, the research site in this study can go one step further by creating policies that reflect the need to add or maintain a variety of liberal arts programs. As teachers begin to advocate for their programs using the knowledge that the liberal arts helps students gain college and career readiness skills, school administrators and policy makers will also increase their understanding of the benefits of the liberal arts. To help maintain current liberal arts programs, and open the door to creating more, administrators and policy makers at the research site need to create policies that support having a variety of programs in the school. Instead of a blanket policy, such as the ESSA's policy to include a "variety" of programs to support college and career readiness, the research site needs to create specific policies that dictate the least number of programs the school can support in order to provide a well-rounded education for the students, policies that show support for the current liberal arts programs and why they exist, and policies that allow for more programs to be created as needed. At a state and national level, policy makers can support the need for a variety of liberal arts programs by dictating the amount of programs schools are expected to offer in order to create college and career ready individuals.

Implication #4: Social Cognitive Theory

Albert Bandura's (1993) Social Cognitive Theory relates to how students perceive their abilities. Students who perceive their ability as a skill to acquire often set goals that help them gain new skills. Participants in this study recognized their need to set goals and work hard to

increase their skills. Through their liberal arts participation they learned the importance of practice, as well as how to practice effectively, in order to increase their skills. Participants demonstrated an increased sense of self-efficacy, which is important when developing leadership skills and creating college and career ready students. Mumford et al. (2007) stated that leaders need to be able to learn continually and adapt to new situations. When students learn to assess their skill level and set goals to increase their abilities they are learning how to continue their education and adjust to new situations. This study supports the research behind Bandura's (1993) Social Cognitive Theory and provides administrators and policy makers with another reason to include a variety of liberal arts programs for students at the high school level. The ESSA (2015) supports the need for students to have access to classes that prepare them for college and career. Through liberal arts classes, students gain higher levels of self-efficacy which allow them to continually assess their skills and increase their abilities.

Recommendations for Future Practice and Research

While there is already much research based on the benefits of liberal arts activities, there is still the need for researchers to continue to conduct liberal arts studies and add to the literature on the benefits of the liberal arts. Much of the literature found to support this study dealt with similar types of studies. In order to create a more complete picture of the benefits of participation in the liberal arts, researchers need to conduct a variety of research. Moving forward, this study recommends increasing collaboration among liberal arts programs at the research site as well as including more qualitative studies to the liberal arts literature, conducting studies similar to this study, and including studies aimed at high school age students, especially when researching programs dealing with college and career readiness.

Recommendation #1: Collaboration

The participants in this study perceived many of the benefits of liberal arts participation as outlined in the academic literature. In accordance with the themes outlined in chapter 4, participants felt they had gained leadership skills, including enhanced self-confidence, increased self-efficacy, interpersonal communication skills, as well as the opportunity to experience leadership through their activities. The participants in this study were aware of the connection between their liberal arts classes and activities and their leadership activities. However, the participants in this study represent a small number of students compared to the population of the school in which they attend. In order to increase awareness among all liberal arts participants of the leadership skills gained through liberal arts participation, the liberal arts teachers at the research site need to conscientiously focus on building leadership knowledge and opportunities among all liberal arts participants.

One way to increase leadership knowledge and opportunities is to create a leadership program connected to all the liberal arts programs at the research site. At the research site, the band program currently has a leadership group which is open to all band students. The leadership group helps organize band events, and the students make decisions on how the band is run in the classroom. Instead of a single group pertaining to one liberal arts class, a comprehensive and inclusive leadership group, including all the liberal arts activities, would benefit the liberal arts program. Shin (2011) stated that students are affected differently by different types of experiences in their liberal arts activities. Creating an overall leadership group of liberal arts students would create the opportunity for students to share their different learning experiences in the liberal arts, expanding the experiences of those participating in the group. A

comprehensive liberal arts leadership group would also increase collaboration among the groups, creating a larger support system within the liberal arts program at the research site.

Collaboration among the liberal arts classes and activities and leadership activities should also be increased. Choosing to collaborate with a leadership activity exposes liberal arts students to the leadership group and helps them understand what the group does and how it can further benefit the student. When students are involved in leadership activities as liberal arts participants, they are exposed to the benefits of those leadership activities. More leadership experience and guidance is introduced into the classroom; exposing liberal arts students to more leadership opportunities.

Recommendation #2: Continued Liberal Arts Research

As evidenced by the lack of qualitative literature concerning the benefits of liberal arts classes and activities, researchers should continue to find ways to add qualitative literature to the field of liberal arts research. Much of the academic literature on the benefits of the liberal arts deals with correlational studies, how involvement in the liberal arts affects a certain skill or area of life (Amer et al., 2013; Ritchie & Williamon, 2007; Schellenberg, 2006) or self-assessment inventories (Brand, 2007; Choi et al., 2008; Rickard et al., 2012). While these types of studies are important in gaining an understanding of the final benefits of liberal arts, such as understanding that liberal arts students typically do well on standardized tests, they do not give insight into how students feel about these benefits or even if students understand what they are gaining from their participation in the liberal arts. There were a few mixed methods studies included in the academic literature, which provided slightly more depth to the research on liberal arts (Draves, 2008; Shin, 2011). The area of liberal arts is by definition a subjective endeavor. What one person might see as a deeply emotional, intuitive painting, another person might see as

simply a dot on the wall. Adding more qualitative research to the field of liberal arts will allow

researchers to create a more complete picture of the benefits of liberal arts participation. Such

studies might also capture the perceptions of those currently participating in the liberal arts.

One way to expand on this study would be to conduct similar studies at different research

sites. The site used in this study was a rural school of about 500 students. Different school sizes

and different geographic areas might result in different study results. To make this study's

results more comparable, a larger variety of school sizes and areas needs to be used. Conducting

more research at high schools of similar size would also add to the research on the benefits of

liberal arts participation, as researchers would be able to begin comparing if students attending

schools of similar size, demographic make-up, and locale would gain more benefits than others.

Further studies could also seek to add the views of teachers and administrators and their opinions

of the worth of liberal arts programs. Conducting research at a site where this researcher does

not teach any of the liberal arts classes or activities would increase the credibility of the study.

In this study, choir, speech team, and the spring musical were not represented by participants in

the study, because this researcher also served simultaneously as the teacher of those courses.

Traveling to a site where this researcher is not employed would decrease possible bias and allow

for all liberal arts activities to be represented.

Another way to expand on this study would be to explore the perceptions of students,

teachers, and administrators regarding higher education and career preparation. Comparing

students actual level of college and career readiness to the perception of their readiness would

allow teachers and administrators to make adjustments to their curriculum. Understanding which

programs are benefiting students in this area will help bolster support for these types of

programs. Understanding the role liberal arts plays in college and career readiness will also help teachers advocate for their programs.

Since most of the literature on liberal arts was focused on college age students and concerned with the classic definition of liberal arts, which includes science, math, history, literature, humanities, international affairs, language, and religion, as well music and fine arts (Bahls, 2013; Severs, 2016; Stapelton, 2011), further study at the high school level is necessary to add research to the benefits of liberal arts classes and activities for high school students. At the research site, classes are divided into core classes and electives. Core classes are those that students must take in order to graduate. Electives are the extra classes that students choose to take. While math, science, history, and literature are classes included as part of a liberal arts education, they are required to be taken by the school. Liberal arts classes in this study were limited to choir, band, speech team, journalism, one-act play, spring musical, and art club. Focusing on the benefits of these classes increases the literature on the benefits of liberal arts programs at the high school level. What students learn in high school sets them up for success in college or a career. Understanding the benefits of these programs to students of this age allows schools to advocate strongly for these programs. Furthering this research would also provide teachers with important information on how to advocate for these types of programs.

Conclusion

The academic literature on the benefits of liberal arts participation has shown that students experience an increase in self-esteem, self-confidence, self-identity, self-efficacy, and cognitive skills. This study supported the literature through studying the participants' perceptions of liberal arts through their involvement, academics, and future choices. Participants showed an increase in self-esteem, self-efficacy, and interpersonal communication skills, as well

as a desire to become leaders in their chosen activities. Participants discussed the importance of serving as leaders in their activity and how being a leader helped them to be better participants in their activities and academic classes. This researcher observed participants advocating for themselves and for their activity during their leadership activity meetings. Implications from this study include the need for schools to include a variety of liberal arts programs in their school. This research adds to the literature for advocacy of liberal arts programs and their benefits. The recommendations for future practice include the need for more qualitative studies in the field of liberal arts research, to conduct studies similar to this one in order to assess similarities between school size and location, and to add more studies to the academic literature focused on how liberal arts classes affect high school–age students. This study adds to the literature on the benefits of liberal arts participation and academically supports the need for students to participate in the liberal arts at the high school level. For this to happen, school administrators and faculty must provide a robust offering of liberal arts courses if high schools are going to produce well-rounded and capable students who will be successful in their future endeavors.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions and Probes

Demographic Information

    1. Why did you choose to be involved in liberal arts and leadership activities?
        Probes: How do these activities make you feel?
            What part of your participation makes you the proudest to be a member?

    2. Tell me about how your family influences your liberal arts and leadership activities.
        Probes: Were either of your parents involved in the same activity?
            Do either of your parents get involved in the organizations' activities?
        (ex. Helping work fundraisers, volunteering as sponsors, etc.)

Describing Involvement

    3. Tell me about the artifact you brought with you.
        Probes: Why did you choose this object?
            How does it represent your activity choice?

    4. Tell me about the similarities between your liberal arts activity and your leadership activity.
        Probes: Do you think they influence each other?

Academic Success

    5. Tell me about the influence liberal arts has in your academic life.
        Probes: Do you notice any similarities between liberal arts and your other classes or activities?
            How do you feel the lessons learned in your liberal arts activity help with your academic classes? (grades, work ethic, interaction with other students)

Future Decisions

    6. Tell me about your plans after graduation from high school.
        Probes: Do you plan to choose to participate in similar activities in college?
            Do you plan to participate in similar activities as an adult?

Appendix B: Possible Study Participant Activity Grid

Student	Grade	FCCLA	FFA	FBLA	NHS	Student Council	Class Officer	Choir	Band	Speech Team	Journalism	One Act	Musical	Art Club
1	JR	X		X	X				X				X	
2	SR	X	X		X			X					X	X
3	JR	X						X						
4	JR			X							X			
5	JR			X	X				X					
6	JR			X	X				X					
7	SR				X		X	X		X		X	X	
8	SR		X						X					
9	JR				X				X					
10	SR		X						X					
11	JR				X				X					
12	JR				X				X					
13	JR				X			X	X			X	X	
14	SR				X				X					
15	JR				X				X					
16	SR		X						X					
17	JR				X				X		X			
18	SR				X						X		X	
19	SR				X		X				X			

Appendix C: 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 (Continued)

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*

Christina Kloch

Digital Signature

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Name (Typed)