SECONDARY TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF FINE ARTS ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

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By

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine secondary teachers’ perceptions of fine arts on academic achievement. The data collected and analyzed from this study helps foster greater awareness of teachers’ perceptions on how fine arts assist with achievement. The qualitative study contained data collected from semi-structured interviews, online questionnaires, and artifacts from core subject and fine arts teachers. The findings acknowledged that core subject and fine arts teachers agreed that fine arts have an effect on achievement. However, there was difference in opinion on the role of fine arts in achievement. The study identified that core subject area teachers perceive fine arts courses as supplementary and as a way to create well-rounded students. The fine arts teachers perceive their role as a support system for students.

Keywords: fine arts, academic, achievement
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Dedication

I dedicate this study to my husband and our wonderful children. I love you.
# Table of Contents

Dissertation Approval Form ............................................................................................................ ii
Copyright ........................................................................................................................................ iii
Permission Statement ................................................................................................................... iv
Abstract .......................................................................................................................................... v
Acknowledgements ....................................................................................................................... vi
Dedication ........................................................................................................................................ vii
List of Tables ................................................................................................................................. ix

**Chapter 1: Introduction** .............................................................................................................. 1

Background of the Study ................................................................................................................. 1

Statement of the Problem ............................................................................................................... 1

Purpose and Significance of the Study ............................................................................................ 2

Theoretical Foundation .................................................................................................................... 3

Research Questions ......................................................................................................................... 4

Limitations ....................................................................................................................................... 4

Definition of Terms .......................................................................................................................... 5

Researcher Positionality Statement ............................................................................................... 5

Summary .......................................................................................................................................... 6

**Chapter 2: Review of the Literature** .......................................................................................... 7

Definition of a Fine Art ..................................................................................................................... 7

Definition of a Core Subject ............................................................................................................. 8

History of Art Education .................................................................................................................. 9

Learning Theories ........................................................................................................................... 11

  Constructivist Theory ................................................................................................................... 11

  Multiple Intelligences .................................................................................................................. 12

Trends in Fine Arts Education ....................................................................................................... 14
Fine Arts Integration ........................................................................................................... 20
Fine Arts and the Whole Child .......................................................................................... 21
Academic Achievement and Fine Arts .............................................................................. 24
Summary ............................................................................................................................ 29

Chapter 3: Methodology ................................................................................................. 31
Qualitative Research ........................................................................................................ 31
Research Approach .......................................................................................................... 32
Research Setting and Participants .................................................................................... 32
Sampling ........................................................................................................................... 33
Data Collection Procedures ............................................................................................. 34
Questionnaire .................................................................................................................... 34
Semi-Structured Interviews ............................................................................................... 35
Artifacts ............................................................................................................................. 35
Data Analysis Procedures ................................................................................................. 36
Ethical Considerations ....................................................................................................... 37
Trustworthiness Techniques .............................................................................................. 38
Summary ............................................................................................................................ 38

Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings ............................................................................... 39
Selection of Participants ................................................................................................... 39
Summary of Questionnaire Prompts and Responses ...................................................... 39

Prompt 1. Fine Arts Courses Assist with Raising Test Scores ........................................ 42
Prompt 2. Fine Arts Courses Assist with Reading ............................................................ 42
Prompt 3. Fine Arts Courses Assist with Writing ............................................................. 43
Prompt 4. Fine Arts Courses Assist with Retention and Memory .................................... 43
Prompt 5. Fine Arts Courses Improve Academic Achievement ....................................... 44
Study Finding ..................................................................................................................... 44
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coding for Core Subject Teachers</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coding for Fine Arts Teachers</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of Core Subject Interview Data</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine Arts Teachers as Experts</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine Arts Supplementing Core Classes</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration with the Fine Arts</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine Arts Create Well-Rounded Students</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of Fine Arts Subject Interview Data</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting Students Through Fine Arts</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration and Professional Development in Fine Arts</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics in Fine Arts</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Time in Fine Arts</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of Artifacts</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5: Presentation of Findings</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of the Study</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question One: Core Subject Teacher Perceptions</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question Two: Fine Arts Teacher Perceptions</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Future Research</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

Tables

Table 4.1 Subject Area Taught by Questionnaire Participants .................................................40
Table 4.2 Grade Levels Taught by Questionnaire Participants .................................................41
Table 4.3 Years of Experience by Questionnaire Participants ..................................................41
Table 4.4 Prompt 1. Fine Arts Courses Assist with Raising Test Scores .................................42
Table 4.5 Prompt 2. Fine Arts Course Assist with Reading ....................................................42
Table 4.6 Prompt 3. Fine Arts Courses Assist with Writing ...................................................43
Table 4.7 Prompt 4. Fine Arts Courses Assist with Retention and Memory ..........................43
Table 4.8 Prompt 5. Fine Arts Courses Improve Academic Achievement .............................44
Table 4.9 Percentages Summary of All Likert Responses .......................................................44
Table 4.10 Data Sorted in Levels of Coding .............................................................................46
Table 4.11 Subject Taught and Years of Experience by Interview Participants .......................48
Table 4.12 Subject Taught and Years of Experience by Interview Participants .......................53
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

With the recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, now termed Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the arts are now included in the definition of a well-rounded education (National Art Education Association, n.d.). ESSA also allows grants to be used when incorporating the arts in science, technology, engineering, and math education (STEM). When the fine arts are incorporated with STEM courses, it may improve the continuing retention of the content information (Rinne, Gregory, Yarmolinskaya, & Hardiman, 2011). The recent trend to include the arts in the basic education of all children prompted the desire to understand how art influences academic achievement. This chapter detailed the research problem, the necessity of the study, and the research questions specific to the relationship between fine arts and academic achievement.

Background of the Study

There are numerous studies that focus on the fine arts and their impact on academic achievement (Gullatt, 2007; Richards, 2003; Ruppert, 2006). These studies analyzed test scores or interviewed students concerning how the arts can benefit students. However, there is a lack of research on the perceptions regarding the effect of the fine arts on academic achievement. The findings from this study will add to the literature pertaining to the fine arts and perceptions on academic achievement.

Statement of the Problem

Accountability from state and national testing has prompted teachers to utilize curriculum that has been proven to produce quality results (Gullatt, 2007). School administrators are de-emphasizing the fine arts and emphasizing tested academic subjects. This emphasis on core academic subjects mitigates the positive effects of the fine arts, such as the development of meaningful relationships between students and offering students real-world-experiences
(Caughlan, 2008). These real-world experiences help keep students competitive in STEM education. When the fine arts is included in STEM, the environment is altered and diversity is increased (Colegrove, 2017). Diversity is a necessity if students are to compete in society and the workforce. Research has also indicated that students who take four years of fine arts coursework increase their SAT scores by an average of 26 points (Ruppert, 2006). The integration of arts into a school’s educational setting assists the students with not only real-world experiences, but can help raise test scores.

Miller and Hopper (2010) noted that students who struggle with reading could use the creative process to illustrate stories or other items they have read. Thus, art educators should use mapping, journaling, and art critiques as methods of enhancing reading and vocabulary. In a 2003 study, Richards determined that gains in experiences studying the basic structure of art sharpen the comprehension of words and the development of reading skills among students in kindergarten and 1st grade.

The fine arts can help advance academic success and test scores by assisting with higher-order thinking and reading comprehension. Higher-order thinking skills and reading comprehension are fundamental to students’ success, both inside and outside the classroom. As educators strive to promote 21st Century learners, fine arts teachers need to use creative thinking and proper student assessment as evidence for achievement (Freedman, 2011).

**Purpose of the Study**

The fine arts help build creativity, motor skills, confidence, and collaboration. The role of the arts in the educational setting, specifically how the arts augment academic achievement, is often questioned. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine teachers’ perceptions of fine arts classes on academic achievement in a secondary school setting. The use of
questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and artifacts allowed the exploration of these perceptions.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study was predicated upon constructivism (Barrouillet, 2015) and Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 2000). Constructivist theory advocates that the learner be responsible for his or her own learning by building on prior knowledge. Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences opines that all students have different intellectual abilities that strongly influence how they learn.

Constructivist theories in education propose that in the classroom, learners are consistently building upon prior knowledge. They are continually using prior experiences to further their knowledge base (Juvova, Chudy, Neumeister, Plischke, & Kvintova, 2015). John Dewey (1999) is often identified as the founder of this method. Dewey rejected the idea that schools should focus on repetitive learning. He believed that education should be based upon experiences. Bruner (1966) proposed the three stages of learning. These stages are a progression from active-based, image-based, and finally language-based. Piaget (1972) believed learning should consist of stages of adjustment to reality. Students should test their own ideas during this process. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized the role of culture and language in cognitive development in an individual. Teachers are not entirely responsible for student learning in a constructivist environment. Student reality varies significantly so that each student will enter the classroom with their own constructs regarding the world.

Gardner (2000) created the Theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI), which stipulates that there are seven types of intelligences – logical-mathematical, linguistic, musical, spatial, body-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Subsequently, naturalist and existential were added.
to the original list of intelligences. MI has prompted expanded practices in the classroom and changing learning opportunities (Widiana & Jampel, 2016). A variety of motivating learning experiences is needed to encourage each student’s unique learning styles. MI theory is attractive to teachers due to its ability to be adapted to all learners (Baroody, 2006). Learners of all levels can be successful when this theory is in place, and both low and high achieving students can reach their learning potential.

**Research Questions**

1. What are the tested core subject teachers’ perceptions of the effect of fine arts on academic achievement?

2. What are fine arts teachers’ perceptions of the effect of fine arts on academic achievement?

**Limitations**

This study was limited to secondary fine arts and core subject teachers in one school district in East Tennessee, thus minimizing the number of interview responses. Also, it was assumed that research participants would answer all questions honestly, but this could not be guaranteed. Finally, it was also feasible that research participants may have been nervous or may have provided answers they believed were the correct answers on the questionnaire or interview. Participants occasionally second-guess their answers based on what they think the researcher desires. This will have an impact on the research findings.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations in this study are the sample population and the selection of schools where the study was conducted. Participants were chosen based on their teaching assignments in specific subject areas of fine arts and tested core subjects. The target population for this study
was chosen based on knowledge of the research district. Secondary schools were selected because of their participation in visual arts courses. Purposeful sampling was used for this study. Purposeful sampling is utilized when the population for the study is selected based on their ability to give pertinent information on the topic (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, & Razavieh, 2010).

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms are defined in this qualitative study concerning perceptions of the fine arts classes and student achievement.

1. *Academic Achievement:* A student’s performance in academic areas such as reading, language arts, math, science and history as measured by achievement tests (Cunningham, 2012).


3. *Tested core subject:* These are the classes in a secondary school that are mandated by the Tennessee Department of Education to have an end-of-course test. The subjects are English, Integrated Math, Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry, Biology I, Chemistry, and U.S. History (Tennessee Department of Children's Services, n.d.).

4. *Fine Arts:* In Tennessee, the visual art, music, dance, and theatre programs shall be based on the state curriculum standards and shall be developmentally appropriate with instruction focusing on activities relating to appreciate and production (Arts Education Partnership, n.d.)

**Researcher Positionality Statement**

The researcher, who holds the Bachelor of Fine Arts and the Master of Arts in Art Education, has 14 years of teaching experience in the art classroom (10 years at the elementary
Experiences at all levels have provided the researcher the opportunity to witness and explore the roles of fine arts teachers. These roles, along with the ability to assist teachers and students with academic achievement, have changed. For the purpose of this study, the researcher utilized survey questionnaires, interviews, and artifact analysis pertaining to fine arts and academic achievement. Previously, the researcher has incorporated cross-curricular lessons that assist with academic achievement.

**Summary**

Improving a student’s academic success is the focus of the educational system. Core classes are driven by conventional standards and standardized tests. Relevant state laws support the fine arts as an area that should be available to all students for a comprehensive education. This qualitative study explored secondary teachers’ perceptions regarding the effect of fine arts and academic achievement.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study is designed to assess secondary teachers’ perceptions of fine arts and academic achievement. Secondary teachers work daily to provide a well-rounded education for students. Their daily instructional decisions impact students long-term. The fine arts classes are not exempt from this decision-making process. Fine arts teachers offer an opportunity to enhance their subject matter as well as curriculum in core classes.

The purpose of this literature review is to analyze the information that is available and provide a foundation of teacher perceptions toward the fine arts and academic achievement. The review of literature scrutinized how fine arts are defined, the historical background of art education, how art assists in several areas of a student’s well-being, and perceptions of fine arts and academic achievement. The positive effects of fine arts on students, both within the classroom and in society, are emphasized. Finally, the perceptions of the fine arts were examined.

Definition of Fine Art

The definition of what constitutes a fine art has changed over the course of time and also varies depending on the context. Plato believed that art was more of a craft and that it required particular skill (James, 2002). This was before contemporary aesthetics became standard. Art was believed to have its place in society with significant consequences for humanity, education, and government. According to National Endowment for the Arts the term art 

“includes but is not limited to, music (instrumental and vocal), dance, drama, folk art, creative writing, architecture and allied fields, painting, sculpture, photography, graphic and craft arts, industrial design, costume and fashion design, motion pictures, television, radio, film, video, tape and sound recording, the arts related to the presentation,
performance, execution, and exhibition of such major art forms, all those traditional arts practiced by the diverse peoples of this country.”

The Tennessee Department of Education stated that visual art, music, dance, and theatre programs are defined as fine arts subjects in education. These courses are based on the state curriculum standards and must be developmentally appropriate with instruction focusing on activities relating to appreciate and production (Arts Education Partnership, n.d.). These definitions are society’s basic understanding of what constitutes a fine art.

Fine art cannot be discussed without the definition of creativity. Creativity can be defined in many ways depending on the circumstance (Milbrandt & Milbrandt, 2011). A sudden inspiration on a topic that led to a breakthrough, an artistic development that created a new field of interest, and the ability to solve problems in various ways can all be considered creativity. Runco and Jaeger (2012) suggested that originality and usefulness are criterion of creativity. For someone or something to be creative, it must be original in the minds of others, but something is useless when there is no value to society. The definition of creativity needs incorporate to both originality and usefulness to create a current definition of such a widely used word.

Definition of Core Subject

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 is linked to all public schools (Hill, 2011). The ESEA defines the following subjects as core subjects; arts, language arts, math, science, and social studies. All science and social studies classes are included in the definition of core subjects. The ESEA was amended in 2001 to assist with academic achievement by improving the overall quality of educators. This was done by requiring both administrators and educators to be highly qualified in the areas they teach. To be highly qualified, the educators
need to hold a bachelor’s degree, have the appropriate state teaching license, and demonstrate proficiency in their subject area.

**Fine Art Historical Background**

Since the beginning of civilization, virtually every culture has been fascinated with art. One only has to look at prehistoric wall drawings to understand the importance of art during this primal time (Conkey, 2010). These images might have been hidden from the majority of society during their creation, but they had a significant impact on the art world.

The importance of fine art classes is often examined in education. Some believe that these classes are needed to help create a well-rounded individual. Some believe that these classes are enjoyable for students, so they should be offered, and others believe that these classes are expendable and the core subjects such as math and science need to be prioritized. Irrespective of the disagreement regarding fine arts in education, it has been proven over time that the fine arts have a purpose in society and continue to have a place in student’s lives.

The fine arts have a history of being used for educational purposes, beginning in 1750 for industrial drawings (Hamblen, 1985). These drawings were used to recreate linear drawings of shapes, nature, and to relate to writing and language arts. It was believed that recreating the drawings helped train for industrial employment. Massachusetts, in 1860, was the first state to adopt art as part of its general education program (Whitford, 1923). According to Soucy and Stankiewicz (1990), An Act Relating to Free Instruction in Drawing was ratified by the Massachusetts legislation in 1870, which authorized that drawing was to be considered one of nine subjects required in public schools. This made Massachusetts the first state to legalize drawing as a primary focus in public education.
Near the beginning of the 20th century John Dewey led a progressive education reform that initiated integrating art into the school curriculum. Dewey believed that the arts were essential to education because they helped with originality, self-expression, and an admiration of the expression of others (Heilig, Cole, & Aguilar, 2010). Dewey believed that a child’s education should permit him/her to prosper mentally, physically, and socially by allowing opportunities to be creative, which subsequently helps critical thinkers expand their perceptions of the world.

After World War II, American society matured culturally. The GI Bill helped 2.5 million veterans obtain a college education, thus the level of cultural awareness was on the rise. Arts were becoming popular in North America and the popularity of jazz was increasing (Berube, 1999). From 1970-1990, artists considered to be full-time by the United States Census Bureau doubled, and reached an all-time high of just over 1.6 million (Larson, 1997). Due to the increase in full-time artists, it seemed outlandish that the fine arts era would end. With the 1983 publication of A Nation at Risk, schools were pressured to improve learning in core subjects (Fowler, 1989). Higher achievement and increased workloads were becoming the norm in math, science, and reading. The loss of the arts precluded younger students the opportunity to contribute to the fine arts movement.

The fine arts were reinstituted into schools after a call for collaboration. In the 1989 publication of the National Education Goals, the arts were not designated as thought-provoking subject matter (Herbert, 2004). Art advocates, including John Frohnmayer, former Arts Endowment Chairman, argued that educational goals are incomplete without the arts. Subsequently, President Bill Clinton signed the Educate America Act in 1984, which included art as one component of a challenging curriculum. Subsequently, this prompted the formation of national art standards.
Since the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001, there has been a shift in instruction time with tested core subjects and the arts (McMurrer, 2008). A 2006-2007 survey of 349 public school districts noted that prior to the implementation of NCLB, art and music instructional time averaged 154 minutes per week in elementary schools. After NCLB was implemented, this instructional time dropped to 100 minutes per week. English and math classes increased their class time to 47% and 37%, respectively. NCLB enhanced the fine arts’ reputation by requiring fine arts, as well as all other subjects, to be taught by highly-qualified educators (U. S. Department of Education, 2009). NCLB act also includes fine arts in its list of core academic subjects, but it allows each state to define what is considered art. Thus, there is an irregularity on what types of fine arts are offered in each state.

The Every Child Achieves Act (ECAA) of 2015 reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (National Art Education Association, n.d.). ECCA defines a well-rounded education. This definition includes art and stipulates that art should be accessed by all students. The current trend in education is that the arts have a place in regular academics and there is value in the class. Schools are now required to allow students to have access to these classes to create a well-rounded education.

**Theoretical Lens**

Research offers multiple theories on how people learn. For this study, the theoretical framework is based on the theory of constructivism (Barrouillet, 2015) and Gardners’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 2000). Both of these approaches give fine arts the support they need to have a role in the educational system.

**Constructivist theory.**

The constructivist theory originates from the numerous other research, including Dewey (1999), Bruner (1966), Piaget (1972), and Vygotsky (1978). Constructivism is defined as
learners using prior knowledge, beliefs, and real-world learning to build meaning (Walker, 2002). In education, this means that one takes knowledge from one area and expands on it in another. The knowledge does not come from other people, but individuals must discover it on their own (Liu & Matthew, 2005). Constructivism emphasizes that the learner is the center of the process. The outside environment is only a catalyst for the development of knowledge.

A constructivist educator is more of a catalyst for the learning than a teacher of the subject (Hesser, 2009). The educator’s job is to lead the students to suitable information and allow these students to find answers to any question they may have. This is a collaborative process where both educator and student work together, but the educator helps the learner go through three capacities of learning (Milbrandt, Felts, Richards, & Abghari, 2004). The students are to be active in the creation of the learning conditions, working creatively to find answers and work through problems, and interacting with others with collaboration.

Constructivism and fine arts connect in that the students learn from prior knowledge and are continually constructing their individual understanding (Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002). The teacher enables the learning to take place in its own time while understanding the outcome. Fine art classrooms are creative because they promote that implore exploration (Simpson, 1996). Students use visual and verbal skills to relate their personal environment to the arts. They also relate these connections formed in fine arts classes to classes outside the art field. When the curriculum is based on the meaning behind fine art, there is a healthy relationship between the learner’s environment and the content of the subject.

Multiple intelligences.

Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligence (MI) evolved from his intensified concern with human intelligence (Gardner & Hatch, 1989). He began examining literature based on human
cognitive capacities, and also examined the cognitive functions of various types of individuals. These individuals were those who were considered average, individuals with diverse learning disabilities, people that were considered gifted, and different cultures. From this literature, the standard cognitive functions that were indicated multiple times became the basis the list of intelligences.

People are naturally diverse in most aspects of their lives. This diversity is manifested in many ways, such as gender, race, and ethnicity. Diversity does not stop at one’s genetic makeup. Rather, the way individuals learn is a continuation of this diversity (Adcock, 2014). Gardner (2000) theory of multiple intelligences (MI) addressed the variety of learning styles. MI denotes eight forms of intelligences (Davis, Christodoulou, Seider, & Gardner, 2011). Linguistic intelligence is the ability to examine written and spoken words, such as books and speeches. Logical-mathematical intelligence allows the individual to solve problems that would be considered abstract in nature and make advanced calculations. Spatial intelligence provides the individual the ability to see objects in space and from different angles. Musical intelligence is defined as the sensitivity to sounds and the ability to make meaning from patterns. Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence is having control over one’s body in ways that can solve problems and handle objects expertly. Naturalistic intelligence is defined by understanding biology and the natural world. Interpersonal intelligence provides an individual the ability to relate and be sensitive to other people’s moods, feeling, and needs. Intrapersonal intelligence is the ability to self-reflect.

Gardner created the theory of multiple intelligences as an alternative way in which students learn. This is similar to the constructivist theory because it emphasizes and individual approach to learning (Adcock, 2014). All individuals have these intelligences, but a person only
masters one or two of them. When educators understand the multiple intelligences of each student, these educators can focus instruction to help these students learn more efficiently (Armstrong, 2009). Students can be successful with more than one intelligence. The teachers can assist with student’s success by focusing on all of the intelligences that a student prefers. MI theory suggests that a teacher can focus on all of the student’s intelligences by expanding their teaching strategies and materials that they use in the classroom. The teacher uses his/her own teaching style while incorporating the lesson into each of the intelligences.

Gardner’s MI theory has been criticized often. One criticism stipulates that Gardner’s use of the word intelligence fosters confusion when discussing the real definition of intelligence (Hyland, 2000). There have also been accusations that MI is not based on scientific evidence. It is questioned if the theory was created for a cultural purpose. Waterhouse (2006) cited that there has been no published evidence for the legitimacy of MI. Although MI is based on cognitive research, no cognitive research has been conducted on MI. Since MI is not supported by empirical evidence, it is recommended that its use in the classroom be reconsidered until more evidence can be provided.

The use of MI in the classroom may have its critics, but the benefits of teaching to diverse learners is addressed with MI (Adcock, 2014). Developing a greater understanding of how students learn and how to efficiently teach to different types of learners enhances the quality of education. MI allows focus in the process, not just the product.

**Fine Arts Education Trends**

**Educational funding.**

Public school systems work daily on finding ways to supplement the income that is needed for routine operations. In 2012-2013, to keep both public elementary and secondary schools running in the United States, a $620 billion expenditure was necessary (U.S. Department
Most educational revenue is collected from sales tax, property tax, and income tax.

Federal revenue comprises the lowest percentage of total funding for public schools. Money from federal sources must be specifically earmarked. These funds are created to supplement funding for areas such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, National School Lunch Program, and Title I (Checkley, 2008). Federal funding helps the schools with funding for areas in need, but this is also disadvantageous because monies are also needed in other areas.

Most states use income, sales, and property tax to supplement school costs (Brimley, Verstegen, & Garfield, 2016). Income taxes are state-based, and can generate revenue from both individuals and corporations. Personal income tax is derived from the income that an individual receives during one year. Similar incomes are taxed comparably. Taxes increase as income increases. Corporate taxes vary by state, similar to personal income tax, but are used to help ensure that individuals do not collaborate in order to avoid paying taxes.

**Fine arts education funding.**

Activists for fine arts in public education are concerned with equal fine art education for all grades and populations of all schools (Miksza, 2013). There is also concern that art instructors may not be able to acquire the materials necessary for a successful art program. Funding, certified art educators, and allotted time for students are all needed for a complete art education program to be effective. The major influences on fine art funding impact art education in different ways (Bodilly, Augustine, & Zakaras, 2008). Local city and state governments, along with art groups, assist with funding fine art programs. City organizations help obtain venues for museums and theaters, as well as providing grants for funding purposes. Cultural events and after-school art activities are also subsidized locally. Patronages and private individuals are also
funding sources for fine arts. Local governments rely partly on private individuals to supplement fine arts funding. Private funding began in the 1970s as a way to ensure fine art education for students. Some private donors remain anonymous, but others have embraced significant roles in the permanent establishment of fine arts in society.

Assessment in the fine arts.

Visual art should encompass more than just learning a skill or using the principle and elements of art and design correctly. Every project should lead to a discussion and an experience for the student (Popovich, 2006). Assessment in visual art must change without changing the art classroom. According to Coil (2014), assessment is defined as collecting data by any means available. Every child that attends school in today’s society receives some form of assessment from his/her teacher. The implementation of Common Core State Standards and the ESSA ensures that all students will be taught according to the highest academic standards and there will be yearly assessments to measure students’ growth (U.S Department of Education, n.d.).

The implementation of new laws mandates that assessment must shift from traditional testing to a new form of assessment that measures higher-order thinking (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007). This new form of assessment should be multifaceted to adequately measure what is being learned compared to what is being taught. Students no longer need to simply repeat factual information, but they are expected to work on more open-ended problems. These problems need to be real-life problems that have meaning for the students. The students need to be able to actively demonstrate higher-order thinking and critical thinking (Howell, 2011).

Art assessment has not always been emphasized. It was previously believed that art was not an academic subject, so assessment was not necessary (Gruber, 2008). When educators began to scrutinize data, they learned that students could benefit from knowing what the goals are for
an assignment, knowing where they stand when it comes to achieving this goal, and knowing how to get from the point that they are to that defined goal (Andrade, Hefferen, & Palma, 2014).

Like any subject, the teaching and learning in the art room necessitate the use of assessment to allow teachers to reflect on students’ progress and adjust their instruction to meet students’ needs (Mastrorelli, Harnett, & Zhu, 2014). Without assessment, the students would be missing out on feedback, which allows them to reflect on their own learning. Current research highlights the importance of balanced assessment where both formative and summative assessments are used. This helps with instruction by supporting student learning and increasing student achievement.

Much of the available literature on assessment focuses on the practical component of assessment from the educator’s perspective. Conversely, when research focuses on the student’s experience of assessment, a different viewpoint may be indicated (McKillop, 2006). Although these findings are not quantitative or definable, they are an essential component of the art-making process. The significance of subjective student self-reflection in the total art process cannot be understated. If a student begins to have negative feelings toward assessment, he/she might become more cautious in art, which can affect creativity (Gruber, 2008). Irrespective of the potential negative impact of assessment on art students, 82% of art teachers agreed that there is a need for some form of assessment (Dorn, Madeja, & Sabol, 2004).

**Project-based learning.**

Creativity is usually associated with fine arts, and not the sciences (Munakata & Vaidya, 2015). A goal of a STEM educator is to help students examine new ideas and be creative in the way they explore the subject. Project-based learning assists with linking science with the creativity of the arts. Project-based learning began with John Dewey and his belief that teachers...
should teach in such a way that students can explore and create (Delisle, 1997). Project-based learning is an educational teaching method where real-life projects and questions are provided to students. The students are then afforded an extended period to analyze and think through the question or problems. This is a teaching method where students gain knowledge and skills by working on a problem or question for an extended period (Buck Institute for Education, n.d.). The problem should be a real-world problem that has meaning to the students so that they are fully engaged. The Buck Institute for Education (BIE) is a non-profit organization that is focused on educating others about how to use project-based learning efficiently. The BIE has designed a series of steps to follow to ensure that students and teachers are utilizing project-based learning in its entirety. These steps are:

- **Key Knowledge, Understanding, and Success Skills** - The project is focused on student learning goals, including standards-based content and skills such as critical thinking/problem solving, collaboration, and self-management.
- **Challenging Problem or Question** - The project is framed by a meaningful problem to solve or a question to answer at the appropriate level of challenge.
- **Sustained Inquiry** - Students engage in a rigorous, extended process of asking questions, finding resources, and applying information.
- **Authenticity** - The project features real-world context, tasks and tools, quality standards, or impact – or speaks to students’ personal concerns, interests, and issues in their lives.
- **Student Voice & Choice** - Students make some decisions about the project, including how they work and what they create.
- **Reflection** - Students and teachers reflect on learning, the effectiveness of their inquiry and project activities, the quality of student work, and obstacles and how to overcome
• Critique & Revision - Students give, receive, and use feedback to improve their process and products.
• Public Product - Students make their project work public by explaining, displaying and/or presenting it to people beyond the classroom.

Some proponents stress that project-based learning helps prepare students for collaboration and helps them develop thinking skills that will be essential when they enter their careers (David, 2008). Project-based learning often requires that students work with others in groups to figure out answers to their problem. When the students work together and have to determine how to collaborate successfully; they are learning a life skill that will be necessary as they go into future careers. Project-based learning offers participants the flexibility to make decisions on how to proceed with a problem and develop a solution (Larmer & Mergendoller, 2010). Students will find creating a project more meaningful if they thoroughly examine a topic. These steps can prompt new ideas and future inventions.

The idea of project-based learning is attractive to most, but there are numerous methods of implementation (David, 2008). Several steps of the process are open to interpretation. The questions, goals, and structure are not defined entirely, and each teacher can treat the problems differently. In some instances, teachers do not have proper training or the necessary experience to teach in this manner. If these teachers are unfamiliar with the functions of project-based learning, they may misunderstand the concept.

Time allocated for state-mandated standardized tests also negatively impacts project-based learning. The Council of the Great City Schools researched how many hours students spent taking these tests, and it was determined that students took 113 standardized tests (Hefling,
2015). Some school districts spent as many as 27 days on testing. Problem-based learning dictates that students are to be working on problems or questions for an extended period of time. If these problems or questions do not meet all the state standards or help teach all the required information, this may be problematic for teachers and students.

**Fine art curriculum.**

Bain, Newton, Kuster, and Milbrandt (2010) advocated for implementing the productive curriculum to art education. Over the last 20 years, educational approaches have shifted. Current curriculum in student-based and less singular in educational approaches. First-year art educators were asked to create a curriculum that is meaningful to students and reflect on the needs of the community. Two approaches were identified by the first-year teacher; using an inclusive approach and creating lessons that relate to the student’s life.

**Arts Integration**

Arts integration dictates that art is physically, theoretically, and philosophically connected with other curricular classes in education (Burnaford, Brown, Doherty, & McLaughlin, 2007). Supporters of arts integration often use terms such as “interdisciplinary, integrated, and multidisciplinary” in discussion. Arts integration provided the potential for fine art educators to work with both teachers and students, and also allowed core subject teachers to collaborate with fine art teachers. Educators could then better manage collaborative activities. The idea of art integration is a complicated practice to education that aligns new instructional trends with education’s inevitable renovation (Marshall, 2014).

Education should help promote culture, both locally and globally (Jensen 2001). Classes such as science and history have a background of supporting knowledge of the culture. Fine arts programs also promote cultural differences by teaching social awareness, diversity, freedom of
expression, and tolerance. Smith (2009) examined the idea of including fine arts in the curriculum to address students’ longing to learn. Students can increase academic achievement and social development. Art integration can be used as an instrument for exposing children to culture, literature, and music. Thus, students from advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds would be increasingly exposed to culture, and students from disadvantaged backgrounds could benefit from art integration.

Robelen (2012) examined the benefits of teaching core subject classes with fine arts. Often, arts integration is used only as an extra component of a lesson. Professional development is necessary for educators to remain current on successful practices. These practices need to be based on visual and intellectual activities designed to improve curriculum. The U.S. Department of Education supported a study regarding the value of fine arts education (Parsad, Speigelman, & Coopersmith, 2012). No Child Left Behind established fine arts as core subjects, yet a decade later, fine art is still not fully implemented into schools. This is problematic because of findings that have indicated there is a correlation between core subject, fine arts, and academic success.

**Fine Arts and the Whole Child**

A democratic society expects more than basic workplace training for its citizens. Instead, a democratic society desires that its educated individuals have integrity and that these individuals are concerned with the society around them. It is also important for these individuals to be analytical and conscious of worldwide issues (Soder, Goodlad, & McMannon, 2001). Educators should not break down individual pieces of education and analyze the best way to teach the whole child (Noddings, 2005). Instead, these educators should take all the pieces of information and teach it together to educate the whole child and treat the school as a whole community. Fine
arts assist in educating the whole child in many capacities. Jensen (2001) provided the following list of the benefits of fine arts in educating the whole child.

- The arts reach students not ordinarily reached, in ways not normally used. This minimizes tardies and truancies and reduces the dropout rate.
- Students connect to each other better—greater camaraderie, fewer fights, less racism, and reduced use of hurtful sarcasm.
- It changes the environment to one of discovery. This can re-ignite the love of learning in students tired of being filled up with facts.
- Arts provide challenges for students at all levels, from delayed to gifted. It is a class where all students can automatically find their own level.
- Arts connect learners to the world of real work where theater, music, and products have to appeal to a growing consumer public.
- Students learn to become sustained, self-directed learners, not a repository of facts from direct instruction for the next high-stakes test.
- Students of lower socioeconomic status gain as much or more from arts instruction than those of higher socioeconomic status. This suggests the gifted programs need to expand their target audiences.

Social and emotional development is the focus when educating the whole child. The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) created a team of agencies to come together and identify how fine arts fill education gaps (Menzer, 2015). These gaps were related to the overall health and wellness of an individual. The report reviewed 18 studies on how participation in fine arts assists with childhood development. The findings from the review of these studies indicated showed
that being educated in activities that are tied to the art, such as visual arts, drama, and music helped improve the whole child.

Self-determination is one of the motivations for learning a fine art (King, 1983). If students have the opportunity to make choices about their learning, they will become empowered. Three different communities of schools in California were used as the subjects in King’s study. Sixth-grade classes were selected for the study due to the fact they were the most diverse grouping. An individualized art learning kit designated as ART ATTACK was implemented into these classes. This kit utilizes activity cards which provide instructional information on the necessary art skills. Teachers provide little guidance. Study results indicated that when a student has a personal choice in class, this positively affects achievement and attitudes.

A positive attitude toward education also results from educating the whole child with fine arts (Brock, 2001). Theatre arts or teacher use of theatrics in class engages a student in a learning process that can lead to a positive attitude toward school. According to Portowitz, Lichtensteain, Egorva, and Brand (2009), when music education programs that were created to promote brain functions and esteem are combined with high-risk students, there are benefits. Higher levels of music integration enhance development of the targeted skills. When music education program that were created to promote brain functions and esteem are combined with high-risk students there are benefits. The results showed that the higher level of music integration the higher the targeted skills were developed.
Academic Achievement and Fine Arts

Test scores.

Although multiple studies promote the benefits of fine arts in education, the fine arts one of the first subjects to be eliminated (Gullatt, 2007). Even when funding is low, teachers and theorists claim that the arts improve higher-order thinking skills. However, school leaders are often cautious when funding fine arts programs. When teachers ascertain that fine arts have the capability of assisting with academic achievement, these teachers want to incorporate fine arts in fundamental ways. Sporadic incorporation of the fine arts does not promote achievement, but a more complete implementation fosters academic growth.

Kinney and Forsythe (2005) completed a study on fine arts and academics that specifically examined the Arts IMPACT curriculum. They observed the effects of a comprehensive arts curriculum (Arts IMPACT) in two schools in Columbus, Ohio on 4th-grade proficiency test scores. The Arts IMPACT program stipulates that students receive weekly arts instruction with specialists in art, music, drama, and dance. The team of art teachers collaborate with classroom teachers in planning activities that integrate the arts into the curriculum. Demographic information in this research included levels of free or reduced lunch, school size, racial composition, and the number of students assigned to the school from the neighborhood versus the number selected through a lottery. It was determined that schools who incorporated the Arts IMPACT had higher test scores in both math and science on the 4th grade proficiency test. Among those tested, the students from lower income families had considerable gains in test scores compared to students from a higher income families. Arts IMPACT students scored higher on the writing subtest, irrespective of their socio-economic backgrounds.
Other studies have examined the effects of fine arts on older students and young adults. Catterall (2012) observed the academic achievement and societal behaviors of these students. He focused on lower-income students that had constant backgrounds in the fine art, both in and outside of the educational system. The students that had participated in fine art programs demonstrated positive academic achievement. Numerous academic gains were evident for these students, such as: academic grades were higher, a higher rate of college acceptance, more time spent volunteering and admittance to honor organizations increased. In addition to academic gains, these students had healthier social situations compared to students who did not take fine arts classes on a consistent basis.

Further studies have also indicated what when students participate in musical education, they achieve at higher rates on language arts and math tests (Forgeard, Winner, Norton, & Schlaug, 2008). These students were compared to students who did not take music education courses, and it was determined that family income level and educational background did not influence the study in any manner. Gouzouasis, Guhn, and Kishor (2007) also examined how music participation can predict academic achievement score for students in British Columbia going from 11th grade into 12th grade. The results supported the idea that the time spent on music participation does not detract from academics, but helps students succeed in core subjects.

Gibson and Larson’s (2007) discussed how academic testing in elementary schools has allowed for a decrease in students’ experiences the fine arts. The idea that fine arts detract from essential, core-tested classes, was noted. The role of visual arts in rural California elementary schools was examined. Gibson and Larson’s research examined what kind of role of visual arts had in elementary schools in a rural area of California. Teachers and other school collaborators were surveyed and interviewed. Information was collected to determine whether visual arts were
valued for intrinsic or instrumental contributions. The findings proposed that the visual arts are highly valued by the elementary school community and are well integrated by some teachers.

**Reading and writing achievement with the fine arts.**

The absence of an active arts program can be damaging to student achievement for many reasons (Miller & Hopper, 2010). This is due to the positives that the arts provide. Students that are involved in working creatively in class tend to view their lessons as personal and hands-on, which helps students think about problems in different ways. Art teachers can use their classes to assist the fundamental skill of reading. A student that cannot read will not perform well in any class. If the art teacher uses a variety of strategies in the classroom, then cross-curricular learning is promoted.

Walker, McFadden, Tabone, and Finkelstein (2001) completed a randomized controlled study on the how fine arts influence core educational subjects disadvantaged backgrounds. Theatre arts, language arts, and social studies curriculum were combined with 4th-grade and 5th-grade students. The cognitive and social development was analyzed, and it was found that when fine arts are integrated into language arts and social studies, learning is significantly increased. Correspondingly, art experience was a predictor of success with these lower-income students.

The fine arts have been known to have a positive effect on the whole student. Richards (2003) conducted a study of kindergarten and 1st-grade classrooms in Kentucky with the goal of improving the academic achievement of students in reading with the art literary strategy. This strategy uses the elements and principles of design to assist in both reading and writing. Fine arts assist students by providing them opportunities to learn in various ways and find what intelligence works for them (Gardner, 1993). The ability to use fine art elements and principles
to examine letter and words assisted these students with the capabilities that are needed to read (Richards, 2003).

**Retention and memory.**

Fine arts can also assist with memory and retention of information. Rosier, Locker, and Naufel (2013) studied the connection between art exposure and memory. Two experiments were conducted for this study. The first study was effected to assess the benefits of visual arts versus non-visual arts tasks on memory in adults. There were 80 psychology students who completed one of four different conditional tasks. Three of these tasks were art-based, and upon completion of these tasks, the participant completed a memory test. Participants who completed the drawing test performed better on the memory component compared to the other three tasks. The second experiment varied the four conditional tasks, but similar results were indicated as the visual arts group scored higher on the memory test than the other group.

Rinne et al. (2011) examined research relating to arts and long-term memory, and opined that art integration logically improves retention of information while motivating students. There are eight different influences that have a positive effect on memorization and most of them relate to the arts. These influences are:

1. Activities that can use music in the classroom to practice information given in a fun and interactive way.
2. Combining information from the lesson artistically into a poem or story that can relate to their lives.
3. Assembling information gained from something that was read and creating a drawing around the idea.
4. Acting out a play or materials learned even if it is a small section of a larger story.
5. Saying the information out loud due to the fact that if the information is not spoken the retention is not as high.

6. After the information is provided, the student should attempt to learn new information that relates to the topic; such as analyzing a piece of art.

7. Using emotions to help remember a topic, such as drawing a picture that reflects the emotion elicited from the information.

8. Presenting the information given in the form of a picture.

All of these methods of using art to assist with memory and retention of knowledge leads a student to better academic success.

**Opposing viewpoints in fine arts and academic achievement.**

According to Aprill (2001), multiple studies claim the arts impact other academic subjects. Fine arts should be taught for their own purposes, not just to support other academic areas. For this idea to be successful, the complicated issues of curricular integrity, artistic integrity, and a limited notion of student achievement. The issue of curricular integrity developed from fine arts teachers’ complaints that their subjects are less valued than core subject areas. Fine arts teachers would benefit more from collaborating with all teachers to assist in a current day educational system.

Some researchers noted that minimal studies have been conducted on the relationship between fine arts and academic achievement. Eisner (1999) outlined the process of understanding fine arts and academic achievement, and stipulated that there are not studies that thoroughly analyze fine arts and achievement.

Hetland and Winner (2001) believed that the arts have often been considered insignificant in education. Educators have tried to build a case for the arts by linking the arts to the standard
curriculum, but it is dangerous to assert that the only value in art lies with it being linked to other subjects. A reliable causal link exists in the following areas – listening to music and spatial-temporal reasoning, learning to play music and spatial reasoning, and classroom drama and verbal skills. An equivocal causal link exists in the following two areas – learning to play music and mathematics, and dance and non-verbal reasoning.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the teacher’s perceptions of the fine arts in academic achievement. This review of literature examined the definition of fine art, historical background, a theoretical framework that was used for the study, current education trends, arts integration, and art and the whole child. The review of literature also examined fine arts and academic achievement.

The definition of fine arts is subjective. For the purposes of this study, an educational definition is utilized. The traditional fine arts; music, dance, drama, and visual arts, are the terms that are used and researched in this review of the literature. The historical background of fine art was also studied to understand how the fine arts began in the educational system. Constructivism and multiple intelligences were discussed in the literature. These two theories provided insight on how people learn in various situations. Art educational trends were subsequently discussed. Education funding, fine art educational funding, assessments in fine art classes, and project-based learning were all reviewed. Arts integration and fine arts supporting the whole child were also noted, and the benefits of fine arts on academic achievement were indicated in this review.

The literature provided both support and opposition to various components of the fine arts. The fine arts have assisted with improving test scores, reading, writing, and retention of knowledge (Gullatt, 2007; Kinney & Forsythe, 2005; Catterall, 2012; Miller & Hopper, 2010;
Rosier, Locker, & Naufel, 2013). Multiple studies have been conducted that note the correlation between the fine arts and academic gains (Aprill, 2001). Eisner (1999) stipulated that no study had been completed that completely analyzed the full potential of fine arts and academic achievement.

The amount of literature dedicated to teacher’s perceptions and fine arts was limited. The available research on academic achievement and fine arts was more extensive, but still had limitations. This study will add to the literature on both fine arts and core subject area teacher’s perception of fine arts and academic achievement.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better comprehend the perceptions of both fine arts teachers and core subject teachers regarding student academic achievement. According to Unrath and Mudd (2011), future generations will encounter a different educational environment than the current environment. Accordingly, future students need to be provided opportunities that allow them to connect to the real world as opposed to the standardized testing environment in which they currently function. As a result, the intent of this research was to question and interview fine arts and core subject teachers regarding their perceptions of fine arts effect upon academic achievement.

This research topic was formulated by several factors relating to the field of education and specifically, the fine arts classes. One of these factors is the lack of support of the fine arts due to the perceived notion of their academic value compared to tested subjects (Nderu-Boddington, 2008). Considering the shift in focus on state mandated testing and the inclusion of tested content in all subject areas, the following research questions were developed:

1. What are the tested core subject teachers’ perceptions of the effect of fine arts on academic achievement?
2. What are the fine arts teachers’ perceptions of the effect of fine arts on academic achievement?

This chapter provides the methodological outline for this study, as well as the research approach, participants, data collections procedures, ethical considerations, and data analysis.

Qualitative Research

This qualitative approach was designed to question and interview both fine arts teachers and core subject teachers regarding their perceptions of fine arts and academic achievement.
Qualitative research is based on the premise that to understand a specific event, one must understand what a person involved in the event feels and thinks. The event and the person are interrelated with one another and must be studied together (Ary et al., 2010). This study was conducted by using teacher questionnaires, interviews, and artifacts to gain a better understanding of participant views and perceptions.

Questionnaires and interviews both gather data by asking questions of individuals rather than observing their behavior. These methods help formulate this information into usable data that can then be analyzed (Tuckman & Harper, 2012). Electronic questionnaires are convenient for participants and they allow for quick responses (Ary et al., 2010). Interviews allow more time for thoughtful answers and are more time-consuming. Artifacts also allow researchers to gain valuable information in a qualitative study. Letters, reports, files, and policy information can all be classified as artifacts. Artifacts are to be analyzed in tandem with other research data.

Research Approach

A phenomenological study was utilized to understand the perceptions of fine arts and core subject teachers toward fine arts education and student achievement. Phenomenology does not seek to explain a problem, but uses the information gathered to understand the participants’ points of view. Phenomenological studies attempt to explore participants’ experiences instead of developing a definitive situational statement. (Smith, 2008). Data derived from questionnaires, interviews, and artifacts were analyzed and coded by looking for common themes and patterns.

Research Setting and Participants

Research participants for this qualitative study consisted of teachers from each of the five high schools in an East Tennessee school district. According to the Tennessee Department of Education (2016), there are approximately 14,580 students and 1,085 teachers in the research
district. The research district consists of 29 schools. The majority of students in the research
district (85.7%) are Caucasian, and 33.9% of students in this district are economically
disadvantaged (Tennessee Department of Education, 2016).

Following permission from the school system involved, principals from each of the five
secondary schools were asked to e-mail the questionnaire to all fine arts and core subject
teachers. After these responses were scrutinized, five fine arts teachers and five core teachers
were asked to participate in interviews.

Sampling

A research sample may be specific based on a rare topic, or the topic is broad and the
sampling does not have to be so defined (Smith, 2008). Participants for this study were fine arts
and core subject teachers. They responded to a questionnaire, volunteered to be interviewed, and
allowed artifacts to be collected. All necessary consent was granted prior to research being
conducted and data being collected.

Initially, an e-mail was sent to the principals of the five secondary schools that were
utilized for research to inform the principals of the study and request that the questionnaire be
forwarded to fine arts teachers and core subject teachers in their respective schools. For the
purpose of this study, fine arts teachers are defined as those who teach visual art, theatre, band,
or chorus. Core teachers are those who teach math, sciences, social studies, and English. After
questionnaire responses were completed, a purposeful sampling was used to select five fine arts
teachers and five core subject teachers to be interviewed. Purposive samples are used in
qualitative research because they provide appropriate insights due to participant prior knowledge
of the subject (Ary et al., 2010). This sample included fine arts and core subject teachers in
grades 9-12 who have common knowledge and teaching experiences. These criterion were established to ensure all participants had a background and experiences with the fine arts.

**Data Collection Procedures**

This qualitative study focused on perceptions of fine arts and academic achievement. Approval was sought and granted by the organizations involved, the Carson-Newman IRB and the school system district-level supervisor, before the study began. Data collection is defined as “the process of gathering and measuring information on variables of interest, in an established systematic fashion that enables one to answer stated research questions, test hypotheses, and evaluate outcomes” (Northern Illinois University, n.d., para. 1). Three forms of data were collected and used for this study: questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and artifacts. Questionnaires were utilized as the first component of this research process, followed by semi-structured interviews. These interviews were conducted at times chosen by the participants to accommodate their schedules. Artifacts were collected throughout this process.

**Questionnaire**

Online questionnaires were used to evaluate the relationship between fine arts and academic achievement. The questionnaire also assisted with triangulation of the qualitative study. When multiple research methods are used in combination with each other, there is an assumption that there is validation (Ary et al., 2010). Triangulation also adds to the creditability of the study. The questions were aligned to the review of literature and were research-based. This questionnaire supplied information that was used in the purposeful sampling. Initial demographic questions allowed the researcher to gather data concerning teacher experience. Data was also gathered pertaining to grade-level and subject-area teaching assignments. Subsequent questions pertained to fine arts and academic achievement. This questionnaire used a four-point Likert
scale, within the range of 1 for strongly disagree, 2 for disagree, 3 for agree, and 4 for strongly agree. The questionnaire was administered using a Google Form survey (see Appendix).

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews allow an interview to move in the direction needed when important topics are brought into the discussion (Smith, 2008). The interview can be modified, which may mean the interviewer has less control. However, this may also mean there are fewer constraints associated with the interview. Interviews allow a better understanding of the perceptions and opinions of the small sampling of participants. These semi-structured interviews were scheduled by the participants at times and locations of their choosing. For this study, 10 teachers were interviewed – five fine arts teachers and five core-subject teachers. Interviewing can be difficult due to the conversational style of speaking (Ary et al., 2010). Accordingly, these interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. During data analysis, coding was used to discern common themes and concepts and better understand teacher perceptions.

**Artifacts**

Data collection from many sources helps provide trustworthiness in a qualitative study. This study used artifacts as its third source of information. These artifacts are syllabi, lesson plans, and other pertinent documents gathered from the interviewed participants. After the interviews were completed, the teachers were asked to submit an example of an artifact that showed a link between the subject they taught and how they support academic achievement. These artifacts were either e-mailed or a hard copy was accepted. These artifacts were analyzed with the other data to find common terms and concepts.
Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis began after the collection of surveys, semi-structured interviews, and artifact collection. Most qualitative studies have common procedures the researcher follows to analyze data. The first step is to document the information found in the research and describe the steps taken to obtain this data. The next step is to take the information obtained and place this information in specific categories so that it can be analyzed to determine pertinent relationships and connections (Schutt, 2012).

Questionnaire.

The questionnaire was used to distinguish the perceptions and biographical information of research participants. This provided insight into the teacher’s insights on fine arts and academic achievement. A Google Form, utilizing Likert-scale questions, was used for the electronic survey. Questions focused on teachers’ perceptions of the fine arts and utilized a four-point scale. The scale ranged from 1 for strongly disagree, 2 for disagree, 3 for agree, and 4 for strongly agree. The data obtained from this form was automatically placed into a Google Sheet. The data was then analyzed in the Google Sheet for occurrence and average score of the responses.

Interviews.

The data from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA necessitates that the researcher should be concerned with learning about the participants’ experiences (Smith, 2008). There is a need to understand the context of those experiences, rather than the rate of recurrence. In the initial stage of the data-coding process, the notes and transcripts were read and common themes were noted. This was completed three times to ensure that repeated phrases of the participants were found. These
common themes were then used to create categories. This type of coding helps organize the information because similar characteristics may be evident and a pattern can develop (Saldaña, 2009).

Smith (2008) stated that as themes become more apparent, connections between groups may emerge. Thus, it is necessary to refer to original interviews to verify accuracy. Subsequently, themes and ideas are eliminated or selected due to richness and relevancy to the study.

**Artifacts.**

Collecting artifacts, along with other forms of data, also assists with triangulation. Artifacts are analyzed to contextualize data that was collected during interviews and help uncover meaning to develop a greater understanding of the information (Brown, 2009). Looking for themes, repeated ideas, and connections in the artifact provides information concerning the phenomena that is being examined.

**Ethical Considerations**

Approval for this research was granted by the Carson-Newman University IRB and the appropriate district-level supervisor in the research district. Researcher relationships with the study participants had been created and ethical issues were considered. According to Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, and Ormston (2013), it is important to protect research participants from harm. For this study, participation in the study was voluntary, and participants were not required to provide any identifying information. Thus, participant anonymity was assured. Each participant could review his or her individual transcript for accuracy.
Trustworthiness Techniques

To ensure that the study was trustworthy, triangulation and an audit trail were implemented during the study. Triangulation occurs when the researcher uses several sources of data, observers, or research methods in a study (Ary et al., 2010). An audit trail is evidence regarding how the study was conducted and the steps that were taken during the research. Member checks were instituted upon completion of participant interviews. Member checks allowed the participants to verify the accuracy of the interpretation of the interviews.

Summary

This study was analyzed using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis process to assess the perceptions that teachers have concerning fine arts effect on academic achievement. Fine arts teachers and core subject teachers from secondary schools completed an online Likert-scale questionnaire. Subsequently, a total of 10 teachers were interviewed using a semi-structured approach. Artifacts were also collected from each of these teachers. Ethical considerations were maintained throughout the research process. The results were coded to identify common themes and the overall perceptions of these participants.
CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify secondary teachers’ perceptions of fine arts on academic achievement. This qualitative study was based on three types of data to support triangulation. Semi-structured teacher interviews were conducted to better understand both fine arts teachers and core subject teachers’ perceptions of the effect of fine arts on academic achievement. Subject matter data was collected from online teacher questionnaires, artifacts, and teacher interviews; member checks and peer debriefing were used to enhance credibility and ensure validity. The analysis of the gathered data was utilized to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the tested core subject teachers’ perceptions of the effect of fine arts on academic achievement?

2. What are the fine arts teachers’ perceptions of the effect of fine arts on academic achievement?

The analysis of the results and the findings will be discussed in this chapter.

Selection of Participants

The participants for this study consisted of teachers from secondary schools in East Tennessee. A voluntary online questionnaire was sent to all the fine arts and core subject-area teachers at these secondary schools. From the responses, purposeful sampling was used to select five fine arts and core subject teachers who volunteered to participate in semi-structured interviews.

Summary of Questionnaire Prompts and Responses

The response to the online questionnaire from teachers asked to participate consisted of 73 out of 75, or a 97% return rate. Each respondent answered demographic questions and five
different prompts regarding fine arts and academic achievement. The demographic questions consisted of subject taught, grade level taught, and years of experience. The responses varied among nine different subject areas taught, four different grade levels taught, and four different ranges of years of experience. There were nine subject areas that were represented in the questionnaire: English, science, math, history, visual arts, drama, chorus, band, and music appreciation. Teaching subject-area instructor totals included 21 English, 12 science, 21 math, 10 history, two visual arts, four drama, five chorus, six band, and four music appreciation. There were 85 total responses for subject-area taught: this number was higher than the total number of responses due to some participants teaching across multiple subject areas. Table 4.1 represents the total number of subject areas taught by the questionnaire participants.

Table 4.1
*Subject Areas Taught by Questionnaire Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Area Taught</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Band</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English and Drama</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Arts</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chorus</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drama and Chorus</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chorus and Music Appreciation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English and Math</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band and Music Appreciation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English, Science, Math, and History</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Questionnaire responses resulted in the following grade level taught distribution: 41 9th grade, 47 10th grade, 45 11th grade, and 38 12th grade. As a result of overlapping grade-level teaching, there were 171 responses, compared to the 73 total teacher responder participants.

Table 4.2 represents the total number of grade levels taught by the questionnaire participants.
Table 4.2

*Grade Levels Taught by Questionnaire Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Levels Taught</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>28.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th, 10th, and 11th</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th and 12th</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th and 12th</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th and 10th</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th, 11th, and 12th</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th and 11th</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th and 11th</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The years of experience question for teacher responders were grouped into four categories and resulted in 17 teachers in the 0-5 years of experience category, 27 in the 6-17 years of experience category, 17 in the 16-25 years of experience category, and 12 teachers in the more than 25 years experience category. Table 4.3 represents the total number of years of experience by the questionnaire participants.

Table 4.3

*Years of Experience by Questionnaire Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-15</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-25</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26+</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals (N=73)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The five prompts asked participants’ opinions on fine arts and academic achievement, and participants indicated their agreement or disagreement on a four-point Likert scale.
Prompt 1. *Fine arts courses assist with raising test scores.*

Of the 73 participants who responded to the questionnaire, a higher percentage agreed that fine arts courses assist in raising test scores than disagreed. Choice (3) *Agree* was selected by 52.1% of teachers and (4) *Strongly Agree* was chosen by 42.5% of the participants. Next, 4.1% of teachers selected (2) *Disagree*, while only one response was given for (1) *Strongly Disagree* at 1.3%. Table 4.4 illustrates the data gathered from Prompt 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likert Score</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Agree</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>52.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Strongly Agree</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals (N=73)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prompt 2. *Fine arts courses assist with reading.*

When asked to respond to whether fine arts courses assisted with reading, there were zero participants that stated they (1) *Strongly Disagree*. Choice (2) *Disagree* was selected by 8.2% of teachers and 31.5% chose (4) *Strongly Agree*. The highest number of participants, 60.3%, selected (2) *Agree*. Table 4.5 illustrates the data gathered from Prompt 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likert Score</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Disagree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Agree</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>60.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Strongly Agree</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals (N=73)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Prompt 3. Fine arts courses assist with writing.**

In like manner, 60.3% of respondents, stated that they (3) Agreed fine arts courses assisted with writing. Additionally, 27.4% noted they (4) Strongly Agreed. Conversely, 11% indicated (2) Disagree and 1.3% stipulated (1) Strongly Disagree. Table 4.6 illustrates the data gathered from Prompt 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likert Score</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Disagree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Agree</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>60.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Strongly Agree</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals (N=73)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Prompt 4. Fine arts courses assist with retention and memory.**

All of the 73 teacher respondents either chose (3) Agree or (4) Strongly Disagree when asked about fine arts courses assisting with retention and memory. (4) Strongly Agree had the highest percentages with 67.1% and (3) Agree had the second highest percentage at 32.9%. None of the participants selected (1) Strongly Disagree or (2) Disagree. Table 4.7 illustrates the data gathered from Prompt 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likert Score</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Agree</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>32.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Strongly Agree</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>67.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals (N=73)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Prompt 5. *Fine arts courses improve academic achievement.*

When asked about fine arts courses and improving academic achievement, teachers generally responded in a positive manner. This was evidenced when 53.4% of participants selected (4) *Strongly Agree* and 43.9% chose (3) *Agree* as their response. Conversely, (2) *Disagree* had 2.7% of the responses and (1) *Strongly Disagree* did not have any responses. Table 4.8 illustrates the data gathered from Prompt 5.

Table 4.8

*Prompt 5. Fine Arts Courses Improve Academic Achievement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likert Score</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Agree</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>43.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Strongly Agree</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>53.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals (N=73)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.9 Displays a summary of all Likert responses from the questionnaire.

Table 4.9

*Percentages Summary of All Likert Responses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prompt</th>
<th>(1) SD</th>
<th>(2) D</th>
<th>(3) A</th>
<th>(4) SA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Fine arts courses assist with raising test scores.</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Fine arts courses assist with reading.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Fine arts courses assist with writing.</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>27.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Fine arts courses assist with retention and memory.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>67.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Fine arts courses improve academic achievement.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>43.9</td>
<td>53.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Study Findings**

After finalizing the preliminary phase of data collection, data were sorted through open, axial, and selective coding. From this data, common themes were narrowed to categories which express a clear understanding of secondary teachers’ perceptions of fine arts on academic achievement. Through the initial open and axial coding, themes developed which support the
categories in presenting pertinent information to answer the research questions. Selective coding permitted the data to be separated into two categories which address the two research questions. The study results have been divided into two categories with the themes that justify each. Table 4.10 illustrates the level of coding for the study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Coding</th>
<th>Axial Coding</th>
<th>Selective Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role is the same as any teacher</td>
<td>Fine arts teachers as experts</td>
<td>Core subjects teachers’ perceptions of the effect of fine arts on academic achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on skills in fine art class</td>
<td>Fine arts supplementing core classes</td>
<td>Collaboration with the fine arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stick to their curriculum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach the specific area in which they are an expert</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach content that is specific to their degree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test taking skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing charts and graphs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using technology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking at problems differently</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative thinking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measurement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on analytical thinking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common planning time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborate to understand relation between subjects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create group projects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blend subjects together</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning Communities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections between visual arts and tactical mediums</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlet to excel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-rounded</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different parts of the brain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine arts positive outlet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driven for success</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking creatively</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.10
Data Sorted in Levels of Coding
Open Coding

Assist with focus
Assist with discipline
Better grasp on problem solving
Think logically
Success all around
Motivation
Collaboration
Responsibility
Creative
Confident
Achieve in life
Encouragement

Pulling activities together
Cross-curricular
In-service days
Departmental meetings
Discuss
Communication

History
Social studies
Writing
Math
Science
Research
Basics

Struggling with schedules
Fine arts getting skipped
Dropped from schedule
Hands on experiences
Lack of time
No flexibility
Schedule is precise

Axial Coding

Supporting students through fine arts

Collaboration and professional development in fine arts

Fine arts teachers’ perceptions of the effect of fine arts on academic achievement

Selective Coding

Academics in fine arts

Lack of time in fine arts
Analysis of Core Subject Interview Data

The semi-structured interviews were followed by a seven-question guide that helped acquire knowledge on secondary teachers’ perceptions of fine arts on academic achievement. All five teachers interviewed for this study were core subject-area teachers at the secondary level. The sampling selection began with the questionnaire emailed to all secondary level math, English, science, and history teachers in the research district. Teachers were informed of the study, and could respond on the questionnaire if they were willing to participate in the semi-structured interview process. The population of core subject teachers was minimized via purposeful sampling. The criterion used for the selection was based on having a variety of subject areas taught and years of experience. Table 4.11 illustrates the subject taught and years of experience for each interview participant.

Table 4.11
Subject Taught and Years of Experience by Interview Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Subject Area Taught</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Core Subject Teacher 1</td>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Subject Teacher 2</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>12 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Subject Teacher 3</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>12 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Subject Teacher 4</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Subject Teacher 5</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with five core subject teachers on a one-on-one basis. These interviews took place in a school setting, and the interview questions were reviewed for possible misunderstanding by two secondary teachers that did not participate in the study. From these interviews, four themes became evident about fine arts and academic achievement; fine arts teachers are first experts in their own area, fine arts supplement core subject classes, collaboration among core and fine arts departments are important, and fine arts help create well-rounded students.
Fine arts teachers as experts.

Four of the five core subject teachers stated that fine arts teachers should be experts in their own areas first before assisting other subjects:

Core Subject Teacher 1 stipulated that the role of a fine arts teacher within the school system and academia is “the same as any other teacher.” Core Subject teacher 1 expressed the necessity to focus the necessary skills for their classes before they scrutinize other subjects needs; there was an additional mention that some of the skills used in schools, such as reading and technology, will easily cross over to core subjects without any extra effort.

Core Subject Teacher 2 suggested that all teachers should limit themselves, to some degree, to their own curriculum and specific subject area. Core Subject Teacher 2 stated “that teachers are trained to teach a specific subject area,” and suggested that instructors are an expert in their specific area. Core Subject Teacher 2 also said “that fine arts instruction are not any different compared to core curriculum instruction, and when its relevant, cross-curricular education should happen so long as there is not a change to core curriculum subject requirements in regards to additional subjects.”

Core Subject Teacher 4 said that students who love art do not always love core classes. Core Subject Teacher 4 stipulated “that fine arts teachers should focus on art, while bringing in core subjects if it makes sense, but that a push of core classes during fine art classes may result in a lack of overall school enjoyment.” Core Subject Teacher 4 is concerned for the overall success of students who are not successful in math or English, but love their fine arts classes.

Core Subject Teacher 5 said that “fine arts teachers as instructors, not teaching core subject content, but bringing in ideas and their assistance when appropriate.” One notable example of cross-departmental learning was evidenced when a drama club and English teacher
designed a prop for a play; both drama students and an English department were involved in an event that bridged the gap between departments.

**Fine arts supplementing core classes.**

All of the core subject teachers supported the premise that fine arts courses helped academic achievement. Core subject teachers stated that fine arts courses help with academic achievement by supplementing the core subject classes. Core Subject Teacher 1 stated “that even if the fine art teacher is not proficient in a core subject, they can assist by bringing in skills that help students be successful.” Core subject teachers suggested that working on writing skills, test-taking skills, analyzing charts and graphs, and using technology during fine arts classes can supplement some of the core topic aspects that core subject teachers are not always able to address.

Core Subject Teacher 2 recounted a time when a visual arts teacher helped supplement a math class by discussing measurement; the class learned about drawing in perspective while learning valuable math skills and terms. Another example of cross subject departmental collaboration was in music; “band and chorus classes used math in terms of music notes, and this helped aid in the learning of fractions.”

Core Subject Teacher 3, an English teacher, opined that drama students come to class more prepared than other students. The drama teacher is teaching the vocabulary and background knowledge behind plays, and the knowledge is transferring over into English classes. Core Subject Teacher 3 stated that “affected students are able to make more connections to themes, and these students are bringing gained knowledge into their core subject classes.”

Core Subject Teacher 4 said that fine arts courses assist in academic achievement by helping the students think in other ways. Core Subject Teacher 4 also explained that “fine arts
instructors are teaching the students to look at problems differently, and that allows them to explain classwork to others differently.” Core Subject Teacher 4 said that “fine arts are supplementing a math class by helping to create a student who can think differently,” which is something that she does not have time for in class.

Core Subject Teacher 5 stated that “fine arts education enhances learning and academic achievement by helping students be more creative in their thinking. Fine arts classes add their assistance where needed, and allow the students to be creative; they give support to core subjects that do not always have the flexibly to do the same.”

**Collaboration with the fine arts.**

Three of the core subject teachers suggested that collaboration with the fine arts is a way to support academic achievement. Core Subject Teacher 3 stipulated “that working with the fine arts teachers increases advanced writing success amongst students.” Core Subject Teacher 4 also opined that use of deeper analytical thinking with their students and the completion of a written analysis of a fine art piece would further assist her students learning in both of the classes.

Core Subject Teacher 4 detailed that “collaboration or planning with fine arts teachers is not always possible due to time constraints,” but expressed the belief that students may benefit from cross department relationships. Core Subject Teacher 4 suggested that mini projects constructed and implemented by both fine arts and core departments may help students to see and appreciate the correlation between subjects.

Core Subject Teacher 5 provided an example of a specific successful collaborative with a fine arts department:

“Just yesterday I asked a fine arts teacher to team up with me over our reading of *Beowulf*. I gave her the introduction to *Beowulf*, and her students had to draw their best
depiction of the monster Grendel. She returned the art back to my honors English class, and they got to judge the art and pick their favorite.”

Core Subject Teacher 5 explained that “the blending of two subjects together, for example art and English, may expand students’ learning by presenting a more cohesive educational experience.” While fine arts and core subject departments may not have the opportunity to collaborate during established meeting times, Core Subject Teacher 5 proposed that Processional Learning Community time would present the opportunity for participants to get involved in each others’ classes, and develop new ideas to assist with students’ academic achievement.

**Fine arts create well-rounded students.**

Three of the core subject teachers discussed the belief that fine arts education creates a well-rounded student, and how the addition of fine arts curriculum assists with overall academic achievement.

Core Subject Teacher 2 stated that “students who take fine arts courses tend to make more cohesive connections between visual and tactical mediums and utilize broader concepts while learning.” Core Subject Teacher 2 detailed that “a fine arts education provides an additional outlet where students may excel, and that the use of different functional areas of the brain, compared to core subject thinking, may result in a more well-rounded student.”

Core Subject Teacher 4 deemed that “the addition of fine arts programs promotes thinking in ways that are not always prevalent in core subject classes.” Core Subject Teacher 4 insisted that the implementation of fine arts classes can be a positive addition in the curriculum for students that struggle in subjects to include math; students driven by the fine arts classes can be motivated to do well in all classes in order to continue their fine arts study.
Core Subject Teacher 5 asserted that fine arts education “helps to create well-rounded students by allowing them to be creative in their thinking. The fine arts classes push for creativity in ways that the core subject teacher cannot, due to the stress put on them by state testing schedules.”

**Analysis of Fine Arts Subject Interview Data**

The semi-structured interviews of the fine arts teachers were followed by a seven-question guide that was specific to fine arts teachers. All five teachers that were interviewed for this study taught visual arts, drama, band, chorus, or music appreciation at the secondary level. The sampling selection began with the questionnaire emailed to all secondary level fine arts teachers in the research district. Teachers were informed of the study and could respond on the questionnaire if they were willing to participate in the semi-structured interview process. The fine arts teacher population was minimized utilizing purposeful sampling.

The criterion used for the selection was based on having a variety of both subject areas taught and years of experience. Table 4.12 illustrates the subject taught and years of experience for each interview participant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Subject Area Taught</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fine Art Teacher 1</td>
<td>Chorus</td>
<td>14 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine Art Teacher 2</td>
<td>Band</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine Art Teacher 3</td>
<td>Visual Arts</td>
<td>35 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine Art Teacher 4</td>
<td>Chorus</td>
<td>9 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine Art Teacher 5</td>
<td>Band</td>
<td>17 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with five fine arts teachers on a one-on-one basis. Interviews occurred in a school setting, and the interview questions were reviewed for possible misunderstanding by two secondary teachers that did not participate in the study. From
these interviews, four themes emerged concerning fine arts and academic achievement; supporting students, collaboration and professional development, academics in fine arts, and time.

**Supporting students through fine arts.**

All five of the fine arts participants identified approaches they utilized to support students in their fine arts classes to assist with academic achievement. Each participant itemized different ways that fine arts classes can augment students’ success. Fine Art Teacher 1 attested that they “support academic achievement in their school by way of supporting focus and discipline in their chorus class.”

Fine Art Teacher 2 specified that students in band classes have better success in academics by way of achieving a better grasp on problem-solving and thinking ideas through more logically. Fine Art Teacher 2 subsequently explained that “fine arts support academic achievement in other ways besides traditional means; fine arts classes are there to not only teach and lead, but to be successful all around.”

Students that take fine arts courses appear to achieve at higher levels because fine arts courses help these students to become more well-rounded; these students take more challenging courses, welcome advanced core curriculum classes, are increasingly motivated, and work well in collaborative efforts.

Fine Art Teacher 3, a visual arts teacher, claimed that assistance in overall academic achievement is their responsibility. When asked specifically what role is played in supporting academic achievement, Fine Art Teacher 3 stated:

“I think it’s my responsibility to help the student be creative, and to be unique, but I also
feel that at the same time they draw on their experiences. Which I believe not only encompasses the world of not only being in the fine arts world, but also academics as well. So, I feel like having knowledge in those areas will, in turn, help them be more confident, creative, unique and higher achieving.”

Fine Art Teacher 4 stated that fine arts support academic achievement by linking complex ideas and transferring them across other subjects. Fine Art Teacher 4 contended “that fine arts education assists with building the skill set necessary to achieve academic achievement, such as confidence and teaching skills for future careers.” Fine Art Teacher 4 also said “[I] feel like my role, and the role of the fine arts in general, is more to a general achievement. It’s less of a let, me help you get into college, although that’s there. I think the fine arts are really there to help you achieve in life.”

Fine Arts Teacher 5 attested that “assistance with academic achievement can be achieved by giving encouragement to the students; it is important to support and motivate students with the assurance that success can be achieved with motivation.” Assisting students when they struggle in academic classes and providing constant encouragement is a support method used by Fine Arts Teacher 5.

**Collaboration and professional development in fine arts.**

Three of the fine arts teachers identified collaboration or professional development as a way to assist with academic achievement. When asked about fine arts teachers better supporting academic achievement in core subjects, Fine Arts Teacher 2 said that “collaboration between subjects would work well, and that collaboration helps pull activities together.”

Fine Arts Teacher 3 claimed that creating a cross-curricular environment and a collaboration among departments would aid in academic achievement:
“I feel like a time maybe during in-service days, when departmental meetings occur, that instead of me being my own department as a visual arts teacher that maybe I could be involved in their departmental meetings as well. That way I can actually see things that they cover and things that they discuss and try to feel like where I fit in in that world as a visual arts teacher.”

Fine Arts Teacher 5 maintained that a “collaboration between core subject and fine arts teachers could increase academic achievement by way of congruent lesson planning.”

Communication with core subject teachers about what they are doing in their classrooms, and how fine arts teachers can assist, may benefit achievement in multiple disciplines.

Academics in fine arts.

All five fine art teacher participants reported that they assist with academic achievement by including academic core class related material in the fine arts classroom. Each fine arts participant mentioned different subjects, including history, social studies, writing, math, and science. Fine Arts Teacher 1 completed research on time periods in order to fully understand and implement history and social studies in the curriculum.

Fine Arts Teacher 2 explained that “band and math instruction fit together, as math is used to dissect rhythms.” Students assist in one’s self and peer learning by way of persuasive writing designed to think mechanically and constructively in terms of mathematical equations as they relate to music compilation. An incorporation of the science behind instrument functionality is suggested to further the student’s knowledge and understanding of the science behind music.

Fine Arts Teacher 3 described the need to incorporate as much outside academic subject matter as possible to help with overall academic achievement. Math and English are often utilized in class, such as the inclusion of something as simple as a ruler, which can help both
math and art classes flow in a more effortless manner. Fine Arts Teacher 3 also said that “When we talk about composition, I think that the students automatically think that composition as being something in English but I always try to refer back to what they are doing in the art world, and how to think of the piece of artwork as a composition and maybe to that analogy with things that they learned about in English.” Lastly, Fine Arts Teacher 3 suggested that the visual arts world, as well as other academic subjects, should work together to foster a more cohesive educational experience for the student.

Fine Arts Teacher 4 discussed science, math, and English, and described how science and math are used in chorus. Fine Arts Teacher 4 said that “teaching the physiology of the voice and human anatomy helps both the sciences and fine arts; when teaching the basics of singing, scientific and anatomic terms cross curriculums.” Basic counting and fractions, literature and English, and the use of different languages, poems, short stories, and vocabulary are used in chorus and help students achieve outside the fine arts classroom.

Fine Arts Teacher 5 said that they “incorporate literature, history, and science into their classes to help with academic achievement.” Students studying a poem in English class may translate the poem over to a band piece, or play the poem and discuss how the written poem and the musical piece are influenced by each other. Writing and research are incorporated into the classes, as students research composers and write papers on those composers to better understand the composing process while learning about music.

**Lack of time in fine arts.**

Four of the five fine arts teachers interviewed discussed time as being an issue when it comes to assisting core subject classes. Fine Arts Teacher 2 explained that there is a struggle against the schedules established by the school. Discussion has occurred regarding the issue of
fine arts classes getting skipped or dropped from the schedule to ensure that other school functions can take place. The inclusion of fine arts may be difficult to incorporate when time in class is often shortened by the administration.

Fine Arts Teacher 3 stated that they “try to spend all their class time with hands-on experiences, but more time may be given to core subjects if the fine arts was allocated more time for instruction.” An incorporation of ideas and concepts from the core subject may be utilized if time constraints were not an issue.

Fine Arts Teacher 4 mentioned that they “would incorporate more English and literature into their curriculum if they had more time on their schedule.” Fine Arts Teacher 4 opined that the understanding of music excels when it is mixed with good literature, and music and literature could be used to enhance one another if time allowed.

Fine Arts Teacher 5 advocated that a secondary school’s schedule is precise, and that flexibility is not always feasible. Fine Arts Teacher 5 stated “that if given more time, they would introduce more core subject class material into their classes.”

Analysis of Artifacts

All 10 of the interview participants submitted their course syllabi as artifacts for this study. When analyzing the artifacts for common themes relating to academic achievement, one theme was apparent in all 10 syllabi; all 10 syllabi mentioned academic themes and core subject ideas. The five core subject teachers listed note taking, writing, reading, vocabulary, and research as ways the students will learn in their classes. The five fine arts teachers used similar terms when describing their courses, mentioning reading, history, research, writing, and public speaking. There was a notable difference between the syllabi of fine arts teachers compared to core subject teachers. Fine arts teachers’ syllabi described math in terms of three-dimensional
shapes and measurement of music notes; these concepts were evidenced in both the visual arts and music syllabi. Conversely, core subject artifacts did not specifically detail terms that would be addressed in class.

Summary

Chapter Four provides an analysis of demographic and interview data. The purpose of this study is to examine secondary teachers’ perceptions of fine arts relative to academic achievement. In this study, data was collected from core subject and fine art teachers in an East Tennessee school district. Analysis of the data gathered occurred to assist in answering the following research questions:

1. What are the tested core subject teachers’ perceptions of the effect of fine arts on academic achievement?

2. What are the fine arts teachers’ perceptions of the effect of fine arts on academic achievement?

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and artifacts. The data sources were analyzed, and common themes emerged. There are four themes that appear with each set of teachers. From the core subject teacher interviews, four themes became evident regarding fine arts and academic achievement: fine arts teachers are first experts in their own subject area, fine arts supplement core subject classes, collaboration is important, and fine arts help create well-rounded students. Four themes emerged from the fine arts teacher interviews concerning fine arts and academic achievement: supporting students, collaboration and professional development, academics in fine arts, and time. Chapter 5 details the qualitative research findings, conclusions, and inferences from these data, as well as recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The fifth chapter five is separated into four sections to examine the findings of this qualitative study. The study summary is examined first, followed by an analysis of the findings with discussion of the available literature. The third section details the implications of the study. The concluding section proposes recommendations for future research pertaining to secondary teachers’ perceptions of fine arts and academic achievement.

Summary of the Study

Fine arts, and their influence on academic achievement, have been researched in many studies (Gullatt, 2007; Richards, 2003; Ruppert, 2006). Frequently, related studies on the benefit of fine arts include an investigation of test scores and interviews with students, but there is an absence of research on the perceptions regarding the effect of the fine arts on academic achievement. The arts are now encompassed within the ESSA, and are included in the definition of a well-rounded education (National Art Education Association, n.d.). The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate secondary teachers’ perceptions of fine arts and academic achievement in a secondary school setting. The data collected and examined from this study also suggests ways that fine arts teachers can better support academic achievement in core subjects. The qualitative study is comprised of data from semi-structured teacher interviews. To achieve triangulation, and to inform the examination of the teacher interviews, data were collected from an online questionnaire and artifacts. A total of 73 secondary teachers, teaching either fine arts or a core subject within the research district, responded to the online questionnaire. The questionnaire asked for volunteers willing to be interviewed for the purpose of gaining further information on the perceptions of fine arts and academic achievement.
From the teachers who agreed to be interviewed, five core subject teachers and five fine arts teachers were selected using purposeful sampling. Artifacts were collected from each interviewed teacher to further enrich the study. The analysis of data from this study offers a greater understanding of secondary teachers’ perceptions of fine arts on academic achievement.

This qualitative study was driven by the following research questions:

1. What are the tested core subject teachers’ perceptions of the effect of fine arts on academic achievement?
2. What are the fine arts teachers’ perceptions of the effect of fine arts on academic achievement?

**Findings**

All study participants work in public secondary schools in East Tennessee. A comprehensive analysis of data collected from the online questionnaire, semi-structured teacher interviews, and artifact collection provide answers to the qualitative research questions. The findings of this study are formed on the triangulation of three separate sources: teacher interviews, online questionnaires, and artifact collection. To increase the credibility of the study, triangulation, member checks, and peer debriefing were used during the research process. The following is a summary of the findings related to each individual research question and the themes that developed from transcripts, online questionnaire, and artifacts.

**Research Question One: Core Subject Teacher Perceptions**

All core subject teachers interviewed agreed that fine arts had an effect on academic achievement. Interviewed teachers’ explanations varied on how fine arts assist with achievement, but four distinct themes developed from the data collected on core teachers’ perceptions on fine arts and academic achievement.
These themes are: fine arts teachers are first experts in their own area, fine arts supplement core subject classes, collaboration among core and fine arts departments is important, and fine arts help create well-rounded students.

Fine arts teachers are to be experts in their own area, and have a right to teach in the area in which they are certified. Visual art, music, dance, and theatre programs are defined as fine arts subjects in education by the Tennessee Department of Education; all of these courses are founded on educational state curriculum standards, and must be developmentally suitable for instruction concentrating on activities concerning appreciation and production (Arts Education Partnership, n.d.). Four of the five core subject teachers stated that before the fine arts teachers assist with core subjects, they need to be experts in their own area first. Core Subject Teacher 2 stated that fine arts teacher should “teach the content that is specific to their area first.” All four core subject teachers discussed the importance of art for its own sake, and suggested that fine arts teachers should incorporate core subjects into lessons when possible.

It was also determined that fine arts supplement core subject classes. According to Miller and Hopper (2010), the lack of a dynamic fine arts program is detrimental to academic achievement. Fine arts are positive for students because of the working creativity fostered by using individual hands-on lessons. These types of lessons allow students to think about problems in diverse ways. When fine arts teachers use a variety of strategies, cross-curricular learning is encouraged. All five core subject teachers interviewed supported the idea that fine arts assist with supplementing core classes for academic achievement. Questionnaire responses indicated that 60.3% agreed and 31.5% strongly agreed that fine arts courses assist with reading. In like manner, 60.3% of respondents agreed and 27.4% of respondents strongly agreed that fine arts
use writing to support academic achievement. When artifacts were examined for data, they all revealed that fine arts teachers used academic words and themes to teach across the curriculum.

Data analysis also noted the significance of collaboration. Arts integration fosters collaboration and connections between subjects. This idea states that art is encompassed completely with curricular classes (Burnaford, Brown, Doherty, & McLaughlin, 2007). Arts integration allows the opportunity for core subject and fine arts teachers to collaborate on activities. For this idea to be successful, professional development is essential for educators to be knowledgeable about current practices. Three core subject teachers interviewed suggested collaboration and professional development as a way that fine arts can affect academic achievement. Collaboration was identified as a strategy that could be used to create a cohesive educational experience and further students’ academic success.

Study results also indicated that fine arts create well-rounded students. A well-rounded student will have a better chance at academic success. A child’s education should be evaluated as to how to teach the whole child, and not just scrutinizing separate fragments of their education (Noddings, 2005). If the information from all the fragments are taught together, a positive attitude about education can arise from the student (Brock, 2001). Three of the core subject teachers discussed how the addition of fine arts to a student’s life creates a well-rounded student, and that teaching the whole child assists with academic achievement. The premise that fine arts help students be creative in both the classroom setting and with their thinking helps promote a well-rounded student.

**Research Question Two: Fine Arts Teacher Perceptions**

Fine arts teachers were also asked about their views on fine arts and academic achievement. All fine arts teachers interviewed agreed that fine arts had an effect on academic
achievement, and some of their views were similar to those of the core subject teachers. Four themes emerged from the data collected from fine arts teachers. These themes are: supporting students, collaboration and professional development, academics in fine arts, and time.

All five of the fine arts teachers interviewed said that they support academic achievement by way of supporting the students. Descriptions of student support varied. One teacher said that students are supported when teachers help them draw from real-world experiences and transfer those experience into academics. One fine arts teacher detailed that students are supported academically when teachers provide assistance with problem-solving skills. Research has shown that due to state-mandated assessments, teachers need to shift their teaching strategies to incorporate higher-order thinking (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007). The higher-order thinking strategies need to relate to real-world problems for the students to become invested and to become critical thinkers (Howell, 2011). Questionnaire responses indicated that all participants agreed or strongly agreed that fine arts support academic achievement by aiding in memory and retention.

The theme of collaboration and professional development emerged in both the core subject and fine arts teachers’ data analysis. Studies stipulated that including fine arts with core curriculum assists with students’ longing to learn (Smith, 2009). The inclusion of fine arts will not only lead to increased academic achievement, but also social development. Three of the fine arts teachers discussed ways that collaboration could strengthen all academic subjects; working together links activities to one another and helps students see the need for all subjects.

The findings of this study revealed that fine arts teachers incorporate core subjects into their classes, when appropriate, to assist with academic achievement. Studies have shown that
when students have a constant background of fine arts courses, they have positive academic achievement (Catterall, 2012). When teachers use project-based learning, there becomes a link between core subjects and fine arts. John Dewey fostered the belief that students can be creative, yet can explore real-life problems and questions (Delisle, 1997). Questionnaire results detailed an overwhelming response regarding the benefit of fine arts and academic achievement; 52.1% of respondents agreed and 42.5% of respondents strongly agreed that fine arts helped raise test scores. Similarly, 43.9% of respondents agreed and 53.4% of respondents strongly agreed that fine arts improved overall academic achievement. During the interview process, all five fine arts teachers confirmed that assisted with academic achievement by applying core subject material where appropriate.

Four of the five (80%) fine arts teachers indicated that lack of time was a concern when assisting with academic achievement. Although studies have proven the benefits of fine arts courses, fine arts courses are often the first subjects to be removed in schools (Gullatt, 2007). The incorporation of fine arts needs to be comprehensive, not just intermittent, to support achievement. All of the fine arts teachers noted the lack of flexibility in schedules, but detailed their desire to incorporate more core subjects into their classes.

Implications

The findings in this study noted themes and ideas that secondary teachers hold to be true when discussing fine arts and academic achievement. From these findings, three implications can be formulated: fine arts have a role in academic achievement, collaboration is needed, and teachers need to teach their specific subject first. The participants are unanimous in their belief that fine arts have some role in supporting academic achievement; the roles can vary, but they are still present. All the teachers interviewed stated different ways that fine arts support academic
achievement in and out of the classroom. The study also revealed that both core subject and fine arts teachers would benefit from collaboration. Both groups of teachers recommended collaboration or professional development to assist with achievement. The lack of time during the school day often prevents this, but the teachers fully support the idea. Finally, teachers should be responsible for what they are certified to teach before assisting with other subjects. Core subject and fine arts teachers both stated that teachers are experts in one area, and that should always be the focus. Assisting other academic subjects is appropriate only after each teacher has met his/her individual curriculum standards.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

With the increase of state-mandated tests and teacher accountability, the opportunity for future research is vast. This study focused on secondary teachers’ perceptions of fine arts on academic achievement. Future recommendations would include broadening the region of data collection. This study utilized one school district in East Tennessee; there are a limited number of fine arts teachers in secondary schools, therefore broadening the region would provide a more representative sample from which feedback could be obtained. Another recommendation would be to expand the research to include elementary school grades. Completing research in lower grades will provide the study with a different perspective with both core subject and fine arts teachers. Future studies might also include comparing students who list fine arts as their program of study, along with state-mandated test scores. This comparison could determine if there is heightened achievement in the fine arts.

**Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine secondary teachers’ perception on fine arts and academic achievement. General consensus indicated that fine arts assist in academic achievement. The interview process revealed that 100% of the teachers specified that fine arts
support academic achievement. Similarly, there was 97.3% agreement that fine arts improve academic achievement. When questioned about ways that fine arts can assist in their classrooms, both core subject teachers and fine arts teachers indicated support. Core subject teachers and fine arts teachers both agreed that collaboration would better support students. Participants also detailed that fine arts teachers can supplement core subjects. Additionally, fine arts teachers specified that fine arts support academic achievement by creating well-rounded students.
References


72

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Appendices
Appendix A

Questionnaire
Secondary Teachers’ Perceptions of Fine Arts on Academic Achievement

Teacher Questionnaire (Google Forms)

Subject Area Taught (select all that may apply):

English  Science  Math  History  Visual Arts  Drama  Chorus  Band  Music Appreciation

Grade Level (select all that may apply):

9th grade  10th grade  11th grade  12th grade

Years of Experience:

0-5 years  6-15 years  16-25 years  more than 25 years’ experience

Below are a number of statements regarding attitudes about fine arts and academic achievement.

For this study fine arts courses are defined as visual arts, drama, chorus, band, and general music. For the following statements, teachers will be asked to select one of the following responses: (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree Somewhat, (3) Agree Somewhat, (4) Strongly Agree.

1. Fine arts courses assist with raising test scores.

2. Fine arts courses assist with reading.

3. Fine arts courses assist with writing.

4. Fine arts courses assist with retention and memory.

5. Fine arts courses improve academic achievement.

If you are interested in this topic and have any opinions you would like to share, please leave your email address in the space provided for a confidential, individual interview:

_________________________________
Appendix B

Core Subject Teacher Interview Guide
Secondary Teachers’ Perception of Fine Arts on Academic Achievement

Core Subject Teacher Interview Protocol

Date and Time of Interview:

Location of Interview:

Name of Participant:

Participant Pseudonym:

*To ensure confidentiality remind the participant, he or she has the right to decline questions and/or the right to stop the interview at any time.*

Interview Questions:

1. How long have you been a teacher?

2. What subject area do you teach? How long have you been teaching in that subject area?

3. Do you think fine arts supports academic achievement? Why or why not?

4. Do you know of a time a fine arts teacher incorporated your academic subject into a fine arts class? If so, can you further explain?

5. How do you feel fine arts teachers can better support academic achievement in core subject areas?

6. What do you feel the fine arts teachers’ role is in supporting academic achievement in core subjects?

7. Can you give me an example of how fine arts could be incorporated into an academic subject area to increase academic achievement?
Appendix C

Fine Arts Teacher Interview Guide
Secondary Teachers’ Perception of Fine Arts on Academic Achievement

Fine Arts Teacher Interview Protocol

Date and Time of Interview:

Location of Interview:

Name of Participant:

Participant Pseudonym:

To ensure confidentiality remind the participant, he or she has the right to decline questions and/or the right to stop the interview at any time.

Interview Questions:

1. How long have you been a teacher?

2. What subject area do you teach? How long have you been teaching in that subject area?

3. Do you think fine arts supports academic achievement? Why or why not?

4. Can you tell me about a time you incorporated an academic subject into your fine arts class? What were the results?

5. How do you feel fine arts teachers can better support academic achievement in core subject areas?

6. What do you feel your role is in supporting academic achievement in your classroom?

7. Can you give me an example of how fine arts could be incorporated subject area into their class to increase academic achievement?
Appendix D
Informed Consent
Informed Consent

Title: Secondary Teachers’ Perceptions of Visual Arts on Academic Achievement

Dear Research Participants,

Please read the consent form carefully before deciding to participate in the study. The research has been approved by Carson-Newman’s Institutional Board (IRB).

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine teachers’ perceptions of fine arts classes on academic achievement in a secondary school setting.

What you will be asked to do: You will be asked to participate in an interview centered on perceptions of fine arts and academic achievement.

Time required: 1 hour

Risks and benefits: You will be exposed to minimal to no risk throughout the duration of the research study.

Confidentiality: The interviews will be audio-recorded, and the transcriptions, field notes, recorded interviews, and any other related materials will be secured on a password protected computer and in a locked filing cabinet. The name of the participants and affiliated schools will not be shared. The participant will be given a pseudonym to remain anonymous. Each participant will have full access to the final reports prior to publication.

Participation and Right to Withdraw: Participation in the study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.
Questions about the study: If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher, Ivy Hatfield-Smelcer.

Agreement: I have read and agree to the research procedure described above. I voluntary agree to participate in the research study and have been given a copy of the informed consent form.

Participant (print name): __________________________ Date: __________

Participant signature: ____________________________