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EMPIRICAL ANALYSES OF AN URBAN EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL IN
THE SOUTHEASTERN UNITED STATES

By

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M.A., Spalding University, 2007

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University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

December 2017

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A Capstone Approved on

November 13, 2017

by the following Capstone Committee:

William Kyle Ingle, Chair

Marco Muñoz

Meera Alagaraja

Harrie Buecker

DEDICATIONS

Sherry L. Lawrence

I would like to dedicate this capstone to my husband, family, and friends whom I have practically ignored throughout this three-and-a-half-year journey. While I have missed dinners, birthday celebrations, races, and other milestones, I promise I will re-engage with all of you once this journey is complete. I honestly had no idea what I was signing up for when I applied for this doctoral program. With that said, I could not have made it without your support, words of encouragement, and understanding. Even though I know none of you will read this 500-page capstone, just know you were my inspiration. So, for all of you who have ever asked, “Are you done with your paper yet?” the answer is finally “YES.” But please stop calling it a “paper!” (wink).

Dinah L. Millsaps

Starting this journey on the cusp of turning 60, I often questioned my decision to pursue a doctorate degree, and without the tremendous support and encouragement from friends and family, I could not have possibly completed this endeavor. I lovingly and thankfully dedicate this dissertation to my parents, John and Dorothy Millsaps, who faithfully said, “You can do it.” I cannot count the number of times they called only to hear me say, “I’m fine, but I can’t talk now. I’m writing.” They understood every time. I also dedicate this dissertation to my nieces, Brandi and Devon Millsaps, who are fine academicians in their own right and who encouraged me throughout my doctorate

journey. Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to my dearest and closest friends from back home: Paula Jones, Sophia Metz, Missy Myers, and Jennifer Moore. These former colleagues were not only my cheerleaders, but they also gave me advice when I needed it, read drafts when they had professional tasks of their own to complete, and appreciated my academic journey as if it were their own. In a way, all these dear people own my work, for without them, earning this degree would not have been possible.

Michael S. Newman

I would first like to dedicate this capstone to my wonderful wife, Sienna Newman. While starting my doctorate work was a concern with three young children at home, she encouraged me to begin by saying, “Your boys will have something to look up to when you are finished.” I cannot thank her enough for being there for me and for the boys during the many hours needed to complete this journey. I would also like to dedicate this study to my boys Britton, Andrew, and Nathan: “Boys, please know that if you see a goal that you want to accomplish, do not be afraid to set it as yours. All you need to do is identify the steps it will take to achieve your goal and surround yourself with the people and support systems to help you get it done. In doing so, I know that you can achieve anything you set your mind to.” My final dedication goes to my parents Debbie, Chuck, Steve, Maryann, Pam, Mike, Gary, and Carol. Yes, all of you. Together, each of you provided the support structure needed to allow my journey through this program. From words of encouragement to running the children to sports practices and school events, you each embody the saying, “It takes a village to raise a family.” Together, you have done an amazing job. Thank you.

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I am not a very emotional person, so the dedication and acknowledgement of this capstone has been more difficult to write than my section on phenomenological methodology. However, I am going to give this a sincere shot. I will simply start with the easiest of acknowledgements. I would like to thank my husband, Scott, for his love and support during my odyssey. He has always encouraged me toward excellence and has been far more supportive than I could ever be. He has cooked me dinner, made late night runs to buy ink and highlighters, fixed my morning coffee after late nights of writing, and taken on household chores in compensation of my absence. I appreciate his understanding of the time I have committed to this program, and I promise I am done with school! Well...maybe. Actually, I cannot promise that!

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I would also like to thank my friends (you know who you are) for forcing me out on runs, dinners, or girls-nights when I swore I had too much to do. You helped me find balance, let me vent, pushed me forward, and kept me sane through all of this. I promise I will be a better friend moving forward, the friend you all deserve. Many adventures stand before us, running or otherwise. I cannot wait.

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And finally, though he can't possibly know how much of a help he has been, I'd like to thank Batman (yes, I thanked my cat), who puts the "companion" in "companion animal." Over the last two years of his life, he has slept on everything I have ever read or written. I have countless photos on my iPhone of him sleeping in the most inconvenient of places while I'm trying to work. I think he deserves his own fluffy hat when this is all said and done.

Dinah L. Millsaps

I first acknowledge the One from whom all blessings flow, my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I imagine that no one completes a dissertation without encountering struggles along the way; I certainly had my struggles, but God sustained me through them all.

I wish to acknowledge those who served on my committee: Dr. Kyle Ingle, Dr. Meera Alagaraja, Dr. Marcos Muñoz, and Dr. Harrie Buecker. These amazing professionals guided me through the dissertation process with extraordinary patience and expertise. I particularly wish to thank Dr. Ingle, whose meticulous, straightforward, and sometimes humorous commentary on my work brought out the best in me, and Dr. Alagaraja, whose kindness and complimentary words inspired me to keep marching.

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I owe a heartfelt thank-you to my colleague Annie Williams, who listened to my daily updates, to friend Marci Wilson-Bates, who genuinely cared about my work, and to my participants who so willingly shared their stories with me. As all my former students can attest, my favorite literary line is from Alford, Lord Tennyson’s “Ulysses,” which states, “I am a part of all that I have met.” Now, with great joy, I add more friends and colleagues from the great city of Louisville who have made me who I am and without whom I would not have completed this academic journey. Thank you all.

As the cliché goes, I have saved the best for last. Capstone colleagues Sherry Lawrence and Michael Newman (known only as Newman to his closest friends) are undoubtedly two of the finest friends and professionals with whom I have ever worked. I thank them both for embracing me within the first months of my arrival in this great city and for supporting and pushing me through this doctorate program. I will be forever grateful for these two educators, who make a difference in students’ lives every day and who taught me how to be a part of the Willow family!

Michael S. Newman

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team for carrying the load while I continued this research. No matter what any day called for, you all handled it with skill!

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Above all else, I would like to sincerely thank my capstone members Sherry Lawrence and Dinah “Lisa” Millsaps. Thank you both for joining this venture with me. Your friendship means the world to me. I am glad we are graduating together as co-workers, friends, and doctorates!

ABSTRACT

EMPIRICAL ANALYSES OF AN URBAN EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL IN THE SOUTHEASTERN UNITED STATES

Sherry L. Lawrence, Dinah L. Millsaps, and Michael S. Newman

November 13, 2017

Research shows that too many students are graduating high school ill-prepared for post-secondary success. The purpose of this capstone was to explore early college in relation to student success. We conducted three independent but related studies that incorporated the perspectives of current students, graduates, and quantitative data. The first study investigated how ECHS graduates described their high school experiences, as well as how those experiences contributed to their college readiness and transition to college. The second study, a narrative analysis, sought to understand the lived academic and social experiences of students currently enrolled in an ECHS. The final study took a quantitative approach to determine if students who earned a higher number of dual credit hours were graduating from high school on time and meeting their college and career ready (CCR) benchmarks before graduating. Our collective research objective was to inform policy and practice efforts to improve high school level achievement, college readiness, persistence in college, and degree completion for students traditionally under-represented in higher education.

Findings from these studies pointed to several implications for policy and practice at the local, state, and national levels. While there were multiple implications found within the individual studies, three themes emerged across all of them: alignment of secondary and postsecondary expectations, facilitation of caring relationships among all stakeholders, and inclusion of social and emotional support coupled with non-cognitive skill development.

With the implications and policy recommendations provided in this capstone, stakeholders can begin to design and implement school-based plans supported by sound policy to increase educational outcomes. Future research may consider refining and further clarifying the needed processes for full implementation of the early college model across all high schools of varying demographics.

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PREFACE FOR CAPSTONE

The University of Louisville's Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) program is designed for educational practitioners who seek to be competent in identifying and solving complex problems of practice in education, emphasizing the development of thoughtfulness and reflection. The Ed.D. program seeks to develop and apply knowledge for practice by addressing pressing social justice issues and problems of practice in schools and districts. Through course work and original empirical research, theory and extant research are integrated with practice with an emphasis on application of the research that is produced. All Ed.D. students at the University of Louisville have two options for the production of their research studies: 1.) a standard dissertation authored by a single doctoral student; and 2.) a capstone project that consists of two or three doctoral students answering distinct research question(s) around a theme or topic. The capstone project, such as the one you are reading, consists of a jointly authored introduction, which introduces the broad theme that ties the subsequent two or three individually authored studies together. Each individually authored study consists of its own introduction, literature review, methods, analysis, and discussion. The capstone project concludes with a jointly authored section focusing on implications for practice, policy, and future research.

JOINT INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The 2008 recession reinforced the idea that there is little work in the 21st century for young adults without a high school diploma and limited work for those who lack at least some postsecondary schooling (Balfanz, 2013). According to 2016 state data, high school graduation rates, college enrollment persistence, and degree completions within the state of study are not sufficient to meet educational and economic. Employment projections for 2020 show 57% of the state's jobs will require a career certificate or college degree (Complete College America, 2011; Recovery 2020, 2013). Unfortunately, 2016 trend data confirm that this state is not projected to reach this demand. As a result, the state has embedded college and career readiness as one of the components of school accountability to improve preparedness for postsecondary pursuits.

Education is the primary pathway to adult success, and as a result, policymakers must design education to prepare all students for postsecondary achievement. Even though students in the United States are graduating from high school at a higher rate than ever before, reform efforts designed to improve high school performance and college preparedness still face numerous challenges related to higher education. These challenges include a deficiency in college preparedness among high school graduates (Barnes & Slate, 2010), equity issues related to student success (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012), a decrease in the number of students earning a college degree

(O'Banion, 2011), and a dropout rate that decreases educational success among low-income, minority, and first-generation college-goers (Texas Education Agency, 2011).

Glaring inequalities exist in higher education. While one out of two students from middle- and upper-class families are expected to earn a college degree, only one in ten students from the lowest socioeconomic group will do so (Steinberg & Almeida, 2008). Research reveals first-generation college students face difficulties prior to and during their college experience that makes them vulnerable to lower academic performance (Bui, 2002), problematic transitions (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996), and higher attrition (Thayer, 2000). Research also reveals that minority and low-income students can achieve at high rates when provided with expectations, resources, and opportunities that are commonplace in our nation's top schools. A possible solution to these educational inequalities is the Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI).

Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI)

The ECHSI began in response to the need for better communication between high schools and colleges, as well as to improve the college-going and completion rates of high school students, particularly students from poverty (Muñoz, Fischetti & Prather, 2014). The ECHSI set out to accomplish two goals: (1) improve the secondary experience for high school students, especially for traditionally under-represented students under-represented, and (2) increase the college readiness and subsequent college experience for these students (Berger et al., 2010).

Research on dual enrollment supports positive outcomes for participating students (Bailey, Hughes, & Karp, 2002). Berger et al. (2010) report that students who engage in

college courses while in high school hold a higher likelihood of enrolling in college and are more likely to enroll in a four-year degree program. ECHSs provide students social, emotional, psychological, and financial supports. Through these support structures, first-generation college-goers can learn the background knowledge, problem solving strategies, and other college-going skills associated with Conley's (2007) components of college readiness.

Purpose of the Studies

The purpose of this capstone was to explore early college in relation to student success. We gained insight in this area through a series of three independent but related studies that incorporated the perspectives of current students, graduates, and quantitative data. The first study sought to build on the small number of empirical studies directly exploring the perspectives and experiences of graduates who lived the early college high school (ECHS) experience. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate how ECHS graduates described their high school experiences, as well as how those experiences contributed to their college readiness and transition to college. The second study sought to fill the void in research literature by adding narrative analysis to the small body of qualitative studies of ECHS programs and students. Combined, the first two studies capitalized on ECHS students' and graduates' lived experiences to inform, improve, and involve these stakeholders in conversation regarding goals, practices, and policy to create better pathways to success. The final study took a quantitative approach to determine if students who earned a higher number of dual credit hours were graduating from high school on time and meeting their college and career ready (CCR) benchmarks before graduating.

In unique ways, each of these studies addressed early college and college readiness using data obtained from a single ECHS in the southeastern United States. By addressing the relationship between early college and college readiness, we sought to add to the corpus of research valuing the experiences of marginalized voices and exploring the effectiveness of ECHSs from an accountability perspective. Our collective research objective was to inform policy and practice efforts to improve high school level achievement, college readiness, persistence in college, and degree completion for students traditionally under-represented in higher education.

Situating the Capstone in the Socio-Political Context

In today's educational settings, educators strive for student success. However, the definition of student success typically lies at the local school board. Yet with recent government involvement, schools strive to improve systems, structures, programming, and teaching to meet expected objectives. The government's involvement in school accountability is seen in the *A Nation at Risk* report of 1983, Bill Clinton's Goals 2000, the No Child Left Behind ACT of 2001, and most recently the repeal of No Child Left Behind in 2015. As a result, the federal government demands more accountability from the states that receive federal monies. The most recent intervention of the federal government is with the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA). This act is a re-authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Though there are revisions, the ESSA retains many of the key accountability requirements that were a part of the previous re-authorization.

The state in which this study is located has traditionally stood at the forefront of the ever-changing educational frontier. Its policymakers have developed initiatives to

improve school accountability to create success for all its students. Moreover, the state has led initiatives to improve four components of student achievement: student achievement, gap population novice reduction, student graduation rate, and student attainment of college and career readiness.

The city in which this study is located has also been proactive in leading educational initiatives. Under the previous mayor, the city launched a degree campaign to add more degrees to the local economy—40K more bachelor’s degrees and 15K more associate or technical degrees by 2020. The campaign directors have worked to collaborate local partnerships to provide resources to the citizens to assist them in reaching the goal. According to the organization’s website (2014), the pledge includes opportunities for monetary support, as well as other opportunities such as mental health support, housing support, and educational philanthropy support.

Earning a college degree may now be the outcome for every high school graduate in the state. The present governor announced a program on June 1, 2017, to provide every public school junior and senior the opportunity to take dual credit courses at no cost. The program’s aim is to help every graduating student in the state realize that college is possible. This program does just that by providing each student with the opportunity to earn nine college credits for free and reducing the price for additional dual credit hours if a student wishes to take more coursework aligned to a college degree. Once students see success of earning college credit, they may be more likely to persist to college for their technical degree, associate's degree, or bachelor’s degree.

As a result, it is imperative that state, collegiate, and local education policy be in place to ensure equal access to dual credit coursework to reach the state’s new dual credit

goal. In order to assist policymakers in making informed decisions for future policy, this capstone sought to provide empirical evidence linking the benefits of the ECHS model to student success. We conducted three independent studies to increase the scholarly literature on student and school success factors.

Methodology

Study One: Blending the Gap between High School and College: A Look at Social Emotional Learning and Early College

In the first study, Lawrence applied the tenets of the social emotional learning theory (CASEL, 2015; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Goleman, 1995) to describe how the ECHS model is effective in improving the odds of helping traditionally under-represented students bridge the gap between high school and college. Lawrence set out to understand how ECHS graduates experience the transition from high school to college, as well as the meaning they ascribed to this experience. Lawrence also sought to understand how graduates interpreted what they experienced. She chose a phenomenological approach to allow her to understand the perceptions of social emotional support and the shared experiences of early college graduates regarding the transition to college. True to phenomenology, this study relied on interview data from six participants who recently transitioned from an ECHS to college. These participants engaged in a series of three semi-structured interviews over a two-month period. Lawrence conducted two levels of coding of interviews, as well as member checking, peer reviews, and repeated analysis of data. Researcher memos and reflections allowed for the documentation of the more subjective side (Bogdan & Biklen,

2003) and allowed the researcher to maintain accurate records of personal thoughts, concerns, and questions.

Study Two: A Narrative Inquiry into Academic and Social Experiences of Four Early College High School Students

In the second study, Millsaps applied the ethics of care theory (Noddings, 1992) to the conversation of college experiences in order to address the “so what” and “who cares” (Clandinin & Caine, 2008, p. 545) about ECHSs. This study sought to create potential dialogue among researchers, practitioners, and policymakers, and most importantly, students whose voices fall silent. Millsaps strove to gain insight into students’ experiences of empowerment, engagement, connection, reciprocal caring, and reciprocal dialoging in the ECHS program. This study used narrative inquiry to understand the lived academic and social experiences of ECHS students who were currently enrolled in an ECHS program. Millsaps relied on purposeful sampling of four participants. Participants engaged in a three-interview series (Seidman, 2013) over a two-month period. In addition to interviews, the researcher also collected documents, such as participant self-reflection logs, journals, transcripts, and academic program plans. Millsaps engaged in first and second cycle coding using both deductive and inductive analysis.

Study Three: Graduating On-Time and College and Career Ready in an Urban Early College High School

In the third study, Newman utilized a tiered theory design of social capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), human capital (Becker, 1975), and academic capital (St. John, Hu, & Fisher’s, 2011) theories. Combined, these theories have identified attributes

of capital and its relationship on student success. While the ECHS model provides both social and human capital to promote student success, this study sought to measure the tiered relationship of academic capital, or a student's attainment of dual credit hours, on the outcome variables of graduation and college and career readiness obtainment. For this research, Newman conducted a binomial logistic regression analysis utilizing three data sets spanning school years from 2008-2009 to 2015-2016. More specifically, this study sought to answer two research questions: (1) Is there a relationship between students' dual credit hours and high school graduation, while controlling for other variables in the model? (2) Is there a relationship between students' dual credit hours and meeting college or career readiness benchmarks, while controlling for other variables in the model? If students who earn more dual credit hours graduate on time and CCR, then early college programs may represent a possible solution to help schools maximize their graduation and CCR accountability benchmarks.

Significance of the Studies

These studies addressed a gap in the literature related to ECHSs and college readiness. Within the existing research related to ECHSs, few studies have explored the perceptions and experiences of students and graduates who live or lived the ECHS experience. In addition, there have been few bodies of literature linking dual credit or ECHS to college readiness. With additional insight provided in these areas by the studies in this capstone, researchers, policymakers, and educators can be more attuned to the significant benefits ECHSs can have on social emotional learning, relationships, perceptions of care, and college readiness.

The first study intended to build on the small number of empirical studies directly exploring the perceptions and experiences of students who lived the early college high school (ECHS) experience. Allowing students to share their experiences is vital to ensure a well-rounded body of literature of ECHS programs. Existing studies on ECHSs are primarily quantitative and measure the effectiveness of ECHS programs in terms of test scores. Few studies qualitatively address if, how, and why ECHSs are effective in building college readiness and helping students transition effectively (Ramsey-White, 2012). The second study sought to use student narratives to bring awareness of the benefits and challenges of the ECHS program as they relate to academic and social experiences. The researcher's desire was to capitalize on ECHS students' lived experiences to inform, improve, and involve them regarding goals, practices, and policy to create better pathways to success. The third study addressed the gap in literature regarding dual credit and high school outcomes. Most research on ECHSs has been limited to the state of Florida, North Carolina, and Texas, where students are tracked longitudinally between high school and college (Karp, Calcagno, Hughes, Jeong, & Bailey, 2007). However, no such data exists for the state where we conducted this study. Furthermore, there are few bodies of research linking dual credit to the attainment of this state's college or career readiness benchmarks. Instead, most bodies of research are associated with college readiness as defined by enrollment into college, persistence in college, GPA while in college, and degree completion.

Summary and Organization of Capstone

The purpose of this capstone was to provide researchers with an empirically rigorous vehicle to consider the importance of early college programming and dual credit

coursework on high school student success. We organized each study in the following manner. For each of the three studies, the researchers provide an overview of the purpose and significance of the study, a review of the related literature, the methodological design, the results of the study, and a discussion of key findings and implications.

The first study investigated how ECHS graduates described their high school experiences, as well as how those experiences contributed to their college readiness and transition to college. This study answers the following research questions: (1) How do early college graduates perceive their preparation for collegiate success? (2) How do early college graduates perceive their transition to the traditional collegiate setting in terms of college readiness skills and access to social supports?

The second study sought to understand the lived academic and social experiences of students currently enrolled in an ECHS. This study answers the following research questions: (1) How do early college high school students describe their academic experiences while enrolled in the early college high school program? (2) How do early college high school students describe their social experiences while enrolled in the early college high school program?

The third study sought to determine if students who have earned a higher number of dual credit hours are graduating from high school on time and meeting their college and career ready (CCR) benchmarks. This study answers the following research questions: (1) Controlling for other variables in the model, what is the relationship between students' dual credit hours and high school graduation? (2) Controlling for other variables in the model, what is the relationship between students' dual credit hours and meeting college or career readiness benchmarks?

To conclude this capstone, we collectively analyzed the three studies and provided an executive summary that synthesizes thematic results and implications through the lens of early college development and implementation.

STUDY ONE: BLENDING THE GAP BETWEEN HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE:
A LOOK AT SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND EARLY COLLEGE

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this capstone was to understand how early college high school (ECHS) students experience the transition between high school and college and how they perceive their preparedness for college. Despite the wealth of interventions that aim to improve college readiness among high school students, there is a lack of research on college readiness from the perspective of students (Woodcock & Beal, 2013). Indeed, programs and interventions that seek to increase access to postsecondary for opportunities are largely quantitative in design. Qualitative methodologies are infrequently used to explore the perceptions and experiences of students who lived the ECHS experience. In this capstone, I examined college readiness from the perspective of graduates who participated in one ECHS reform model in a southeastern state. I sought to document the experiences of students who participated in a manner that reveals the perspectives of students participating in this high school model. Partnering with students reminds teachers and administrators that students possess unique knowledge and perspectives about their schools that adults cannot fully replicate (Mitra, 2004).

While there is a growing body of research that offers meaningful conclusions about the ECHS model, the emphasis on ECHS student experiences is lacking (Woodcock & Beal, 2013). Allowing students to share their experiences is vital to ensure

a well-rounded body of literature on ECHS programs and the experiences and perceptions of college readiness among ECHS students.

Background and Statement of Problem

Although the concept of ECHS is not new, many of the schools currently operating were only established within the last fifteen years (Jobs for the Future [JFF], 2013; Martin-Valdez, 2009). The ECHS movement has expanded from just two ECHSs in 2001 to more than 280 schools across 32 states by 2014 (JFF, 2013). As a result, there has been little opportunity to evaluate the schools' success and effectiveness in the long term. Additional research is needed to examine thoroughly the benefits associated with ECHS models (Hoffman, Vargas, & Santo, 2008). There is a need to garner better understanding of the perceptions and experiences of students as a better way to deeply understand ECHS. A majority of existing studies on ECHSs are quantitative and measure the effectiveness of ECHS programs in terms of test scores. Few studies qualitatively address if, how, and why ECHSs are effective in building college readiness and helping students transition effectively (Ramsey-White, 2012). Both of these topics serve as the primary focus of this study and are discussed in greater details later in this introductory section and the subsequent review of literature.

In light of this reality, researchers and school administrators must assess current ECHS operations to measure program and school effectiveness. How are ECHSs functioning as they strive to educate the under-represented students in their classrooms? Furthermore, as the assessment process is initiated, it is particularly important to study the perceptions and reactions of graduates who were enrolled in these new and still developing institutions known as ECHSs. School administrators and policymakers

routinely neglect to petition the voice of students during reform planning and implementation. Woodcock and Beal (2013) stated, “A growing body of research offers meaningful conclusions about the ECHS model, yet an emphasis on ECHS student experience is lacking” (p. 71). Students who experience school firsthand offer an authentic voice, and as we explore the effectiveness of ECHSs, it is vital that we listen to their voices.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate how ECHS graduates describe their high school experiences, as well as how those experiences contributed to their college readiness and transition to college. While many studies on ECHSs have focused on students who were above-average academic achievers (Howley, A., Howley, M., Howley, C., & Duncan, 2013), few examined the effects of ECHSs on average or low achieving high school students.

This study is important because the success of ECHSs may provide a possible remedy for the challenges of the high school dropout rate, college preparedness, decreased college degrees, and training for the workforce. When policymakers and school-level administrators fail to elicit student voice during reform planning and implementation, their objectives can be hindered, particularly if their strategies conflict with the interests of students (Cushman, Cervone, & Rowley, 2003). Schools that intentionally incorporate student voice in curriculum discussions, actively involve students on school councils, and work to create greater academic and social emotional supports are schools that foster a culture of empowerment for students (Lee, 1999). Empowered students make for powerful allies in school reform. The lived experiences of

students, when petitioned and respected, can serve to advance strategies for effectively increasing student achievement and positive educational outcomes. This study focused on two research questions. (1) How do early college graduates perceive their preparation for collegiate success? (2) How do early college graduates perceive their transition to the traditional collegiate setting in terms of college readiness skills and access to social support?

These questions are significant to understanding the perceptions of support among ECHS graduates in order to understand their experiences, perceived challenges, and sources of support. Answers to these research questions yield important information for high school and college administrators regarding the perceptions of ECHS students from this study and assist them in creating solutions to the challenges encountered by the educational community. Together, these answers offer possible remedies for the educational challenges faced by under-represented students in today's secondary and postsecondary systems. Results of this study also afford valuable insight for ECHS, college partners, and policymakers on the relationship between social emotional supports and college readiness from the students' perspective.

Theoretical Framework: Social Emotional Learning

Within the conversation of college readiness, the theory of social emotional learning (SEL) has become increasingly important in educational research, policy, and practice in recent years (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2015). SEL, the theoretical framework that undergirds this study, is derived from the broader theory of emotional intelligence. SEL involves the processes by which students and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills

needed to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Durlak, Weissberg, Dynicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) identifies five core competencies that comprise SEL: (a) self-awareness, (b) self-management, (c) social awareness, (d) relationship skills, and (e) responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2015).

In the United States, many districts and even entire states have established an SEL curriculum requirement, mandating that just as students must attain a certain level of competence in math and language, so too should they master these essential skills for living (Goleman, 2005). In Illinois, for example, specific learning standards for SEL abilities were established for all K-12 students (CASEL, 2015). Around the world, other countries such as Singapore, Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, and Malaysia have undertaken an active initiative in SEL (Goleman, 2005). Helping children improve their self-awareness and confidence, manage their disturbing emotions and impulses, and increase their empathy pays off not just in improved behavior but in measurable academic achievement (Goleman, 2005). When schools address social emotional competencies in addition to skills more traditionally associated with academics, they more effectively prepare students for the realities of college and adulthood and help them master core academic content (Farrington et al., 2012). Numerous studies find that young people who master such competencies are less likely to engage in risky behaviors and more likely to succeed in school, college, and career environments (CASEL, 2015).

Background: Documenting the Needs of Underrepresented Students

For more than three decades, the United States has implemented a variety of reforms in an effort to improve high school performance and college preparedness. Despite these reforms, numerous challenges still exist related to higher education. These challenges include a deficiency in college preparedness among high school graduates (Barnes & Slate, 2010), equity issues related to student success (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012), a decrease in the number of students earning a college degree (O'Banion, 2011), and a dropout rate that decreases educational success among low-income, minority, and first-generation college-goers (Texas Education Agency, 2011). Census data indicate the fastest growing portion of our population is young people who are low-income and either African American or Hispanic (Martin-Valdez, 2009).

Research indicates only 65% of those from lower socio-economic status (SES) earn a high school diploma, compared with 91% of students from the middle and upper levels (Hoffman, Vargas, Venezia & Miller, 2007). In turn, the lack of adequate academic preparation leads to high college failure rates. While one out of two students from middle- and upper-class families can be expected to earn a college degree, only one in ten students from the lowest SES group will do so (Steinberg & Almeida, 2008). Over the last decade, research reveals that minority and low-income students can achieve at high rates when they are provided with expectations, resources, and opportunities that are commonplace in our nation's top schools. A possible solution to these educational inequities is the Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI).

Development of Early College High Schools

Traditional educational programs have a limited ability to serve the needs of under-represented high school students. This has prompted educators to develop programs attuned to the life situations of this student population. One such promising intervention is the ECHSI, which offers students traditionally under-represented in postsecondary institutions the opportunity to earn college credit in high school. ECHSI, which originated in 2002, now includes more than 240 schools serving more than 75,000 students in 28 states and the District of Columbia (Woodcock & Beal, 2013). The goal of ECHSI was to create culturally relevant and meaningful high school experiences and engage students in the learning process. ECHSI sought to address two fundamental goals: to alleviate the low high school graduation rates common in urban school systems and to increase the number of first-generation college students entering postsecondary education (Berger, Adelman, & Cole, 2010).

The ECHS curriculum consists of high school and college-level work blended into a single academic program. The goal of the ECHS program is to “minimize the barriers to high school and college, to ease the transition from secondary to postsecondary school, to prepare the students for and attract them to higher education, and to increase the high school graduation rates” (Glick, 2006, p. 2). Studies of ECHS programs have yielded promising results for student participants, including improved high school attendance (Edmunds et al., 2012), decreased dropout rates and improved end-of-course exam scores (Vargas & Quiara, 2010), increased high school graduation rate (Adams, 2010), and improved college readiness and college completion rates (Nodine, 2009). The ECHS program also offers promising methods to enhance students’

SEL skills which research shows are needed both in college and in the workforce (CASEL, 2015; Goleman, 2005).

ECHS operates under the assumption that improved high school curriculum and instruction tied to the incentive of earning college credits will motivate struggling students, thereby decreasing postsecondary costs while increasing their access to postsecondary education, interest and the likelihood of completing college. ECHSs seek to affect college access and degree completion positively by providing academic, financial, and social supports to students who have faced significant challenges and/or been under-represented in college going and graduation (JFF, 2013). It is equally important to the ECHS mission that students have adequate social emotional supports to navigate the physical and cultural transition from high school to college (Hoffman, et al., 2008). Access to social support is embedded within the social networks to which ECHS students have access (Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006). A detailed discussion of the origins and applications of the theory of emotional intelligence in educational research is provided in the literature review.

Context: Willow Early College High School

This study, in an effort to add to the limited existing research regarding SEL and its impact on the college transition, relied on data from a single ECHS in the southeastern United States. The district in which this public high school operates has 150 schools, serving approximately 100,000 students. The school under study opened in 1961 as a comprehensive high school that traditionally educates students from high-poverty families within the neighboring urban community. Currently, the school serves the student population targeted in the national ECHSI (i.e., first-generation college going,

low-income, urban, minority students). At Willow Early College High School (WECHS), 71.5% of students identify as Black, 23% identify as White, 3% as Hispanic, and 2% other. In 2015, 81% of students qualified for free or reduced lunch.

Because of administrator turnover, changing neighborhood dynamics, and demographics, this school has performed poorly on state and national assessments over the last 20 years. In addition to the struggles with accountability, WECHS students also have difficulties transitioning to and persisting through college. According to a 2015 data report from the National Student Clearing House, 26% of WECHS graduates enrolled immediately in college with 17% enrolling in a four-year institution and 9% enrolling in a two-year institution. In 2013, the freshman to sophomore persistence was 59% (National Student Clearing House, 2015). Only 6% of WECHS graduates in the Class of 2009 graduated from postsecondary institutions within six years (National Student Clearing House, 2015). The ECHSI did not begin at Willow until 2011, so data do not yet exist to quantitatively evaluate the effectiveness of the program on college graduation. This data will not become available until 2017 when members of the 2011 freshman class have reached the six-year mark post high school graduation. It is for this reason, coupled with the fact that most ECHS research has been quantitative in nature, that a qualitative design was used in this study.

Methods and Research Design

Within this capstone, I utilized the phenomenological method, a common type of qualitative research (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994) in order to develop an in-depth understanding of the perceptions of supports offered high school students in an ECHS. Phenomenology is linked strongly to constructivism, which emphasizes how the world

appears to a particular people based on their views and experiences. The primary objective of phenomenological research is to explicate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experiences of a person or group of people around a specific phenomenon. The phenomenon under study is the transition to college, an experience that was shared among all participants. True to phenomenology, the purpose of the study was to understand what participants experienced and how they experienced it (Mustakas, 1994). This approach provided insight into the students' experiences, perceived challenges, and sources of support.

Among the various methods of data collection in phenomenological inquiry, interviews are the most common (Creswell, 2007). Because the graduates of ECHS were available in person, face-to-face individual interviews were used. Qualitative researchers typically utilize a variety of data (Johnson & Christensen, 2008); therefore, memoing and reflection were used in addition to interviews. In this capstone, I incorporated a three-interview process as is recommended by Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological approach. This approach is based on the premise that reality consists of phenomena as they are perceived or understood by participants.

For this study, I relied on criterion sampling. The criteria for participant selection required students to be a recent graduate of WECHS (graduated between 2014 and 2016) and currently enrolled in either a two- or four-year postsecondary program. In phenomenology, Dukes (1984) recommends studying 3 to 10 subjects. I utilized six participants who met the following criteria: (a) at least 12 college credits earned, (b) first-generation college attenders, and (c) enrolled in a postsecondary institution immediately following their graduation from high school. Consent was obtained from each

participant. Following interviews, I used a method of coding, reduction, and analysis of specific statements to tease out overarching themes.

Definitions of Terms

To ensure consistency within my study, I have included a list of terms and how they are defined within this study.

Dual credit: refers to programs that allow high school students to enroll in courses and simultaneously earn college and high school credit.

Early college high school (ECHS), early college, and early college high school initiative (ECHSI): used interchangeably in this study. These terms refer to public secondary schools designed to offer under-represented youth an accelerated course of study enabling them to simultaneously earn a high school diploma and an Associate's degree or up to 60 hours of college credit at no cost to the students.

School and university partnerships: collaboration between K-12 schools and institutions of higher education.

Under-represented students: students who are first-generation college students, low-income, minority, and/or English language learners. These students are traditionally under-represented in higher education.

College readiness: For purposes of this study, college readiness is defined as the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed, without remediation, in a credit bearing general education course at a postsecondary institution (ACT, 2005; Conley, 2007; Hooker & Brand, 2009).

Success: defined as completing entry-level courses at a level of understanding and proficiency that makes it possible for the student to consider taking the next course in the sequence or the next level course in the subject area (Conley, 2007).

Postsecondary institution: intended to include a full range of educational and work-based experiences available for students after high school. These experiences include, but should not be limited to, two-year and four-year colleges, technical schools, trade schools, and apprenticeships (Conley, 2007; Hooker & Brand, 2009).

Social emotional learning (SEL): the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2015).

Emotional intelligence (EI): defined as the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, pg. 189).

Summary and Organization of Study

In this introduction, I preview the topic, background, and research problem. Despite 30 or more years of focus on high school reform and improved access to postsecondary education for low-income, minority, and English language learners, there are still significant gaps in access and retention in postsecondary education. This warrants investigation. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore how early college high school graduates described their high school experiences and how those experiences contributed to their college readiness and transition to college. The

underpinning theoretical framework for this study was SEL, and a small urban ECHS in the southeast was used as the site of study. This school fits the demographic and student profile targeted by the national ECHSI and was believed to yield findings consistent with the literature.

In the literature review, I examine the relevant literature related to the early college model, social emotional learning, educational research, and college readiness. The methodology section presents the research methodology designed to gather data regarding the perceptions of former ECHS students at WECHS. Data for this study were derived from focus groups and interviews with former WECHS students who have now transitioned into postsecondary institutions. The results of the research data gathered from primary and secondary sources at WECHS are detailed in the findings section. The final section of the study focuses on an analysis and interpretation of the research results.

STUDY ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate how early college high school (ECHS) students perceive their college readiness and the role in which social emotional learning (SEL) played in their transition to and persistence in college. In this study, I sought to answer the following research questions: (1) How do early college students perceive their preparation for postsecondary academic success? and (2) How do early college students perceive their transition to the postsecondary environment in terms of access to SEL supports and college readiness skills?

In order to gain a better understanding of how SEL supports college readiness in ECHS students, this review of the literature examines five areas as they provide the most vivid account of the struggle under-represented students face in the transition to postsecondary education: the returns of higher education, educational disparities among under-represented students, college readiness, the Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI), and SEL. The review of literature on the returns of higher education paints a picture of why high school reform is needed in order to improve the collegiate graduation rate. Next, the review of literature on the educational disparities among under-represented students describes the challenges faced by first-generation, minority, and English-language learners as they attempt to navigate the transition from high school to college. The literature review on college readiness examines best practices and approaches for cultivating college readiness in secondary schools. The literature review

on the ECHSI looks at the initiative and how its core principles align with the doctrines of emotional intelligence theory. Lastly, the literature review on emotional learning theory includes a dialog of the ways in which the theory has been conceptualized and applied to educational research and the conversation of college readiness.

The Returns of Higher Education

The recent 2008 recession has reinforced the idea that there is little work in the 21st century for young adults without a high school diploma and limited work for those who lack at least some postsecondary schooling (Balfanz, 2013). Education is now the primary pathway to adult success, and as a result, public education must be designed to prepare all students for postsecondary achievement. In short, a high school diploma can no longer be a final and stand-alone degree (Balfanz, 2013). The national agenda on education in the United States has made it clear that every American needs an education through at least two years of college (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

Investments in higher education hold benefits for both the individual students and societies in which they reside. During their working lives, college graduates earn, on average, about 65% more than high school graduates, and those with advanced degrees earn two to three times as much as high school graduates (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). In 2011, the median earnings of bachelor's degree recipients with no advanced degree and working full time were \$21,100 higher than those of high school graduates (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). These findings do not mean there are not exceptions to this rule. Some individuals make a fortune with little formal education while some individuals with a college education struggle financially. However, overall patterns are clear and consistent: more education means increased financial opportunities.

Salaries are not the only form of compensation associated with education levels. For example, college graduates are more likely to enjoy employer-provided health and pension benefits (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). College graduates are also more likely to feel engaged and satisfied with their work than other groups of employees. According to the National Opinion Research Center (2013), the percentage of workers ages 30 – 45 who report being very satisfied with their work varied by levels of education. Forty-two percent of workers with less than a high school diploma reported job satisfaction compared to 51% of those with a bachelor's degree or higher. Among workers with a bachelor's degree, 56% claimed their job required them to keep learning new things (National Opinion Research Center, 2013). This compares to just 30% with a high school diploma. Controlling for demographic characteristics and income, education still has a significant and positive effect on job satisfaction, which leads to consistent and continued employment (Oreopoulos & Salvanes, 2011).

Opportunities for social mobility also rise with the level of education. Of adults who grew up in the middle family income quintile, 31% of those with a four-year college degree moved up to the top income quintile between the years 2000 and 2008, compared with just 12% of those without a four-year degree (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2012). According to the same source, of adults who grew up in the bottom family income quintile, 47% of those without a bachelor's degree remained in the bottom quintile, compared to 10% of those with a four-year degree. Three percent of those without a bachelor's degree moved up to the top quintile compared to 10% of those with a four-year degree (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2012). These statistics illustrate how a college

education increases the chances that adults will move up the socioeconomic ladder and how education is a means for low-income students to rise out of poverty.

In addition to individual benefits, society as a whole experiences financial returns on the investment in higher education. College educated workers not only improve productivity in the workforce, but the higher wages earned by college graduates generate higher tax revenues at the local, state, and federal levels. Four-year college graduates pay, on average, 78% more in taxes each year than high school graduates (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Spending on social support programs, such as unemployment compensation and Medicaid, is much lower for individuals with higher levels of education (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013) reports that the unemployment rate for individuals with at least a bachelor's degree has consistently been about half the unemployment rate for high school graduates. Local, state, and federal governments enjoy increased tax revenues from college graduates and spend less on income support programs for them, thus providing a direct financial benefit for society.

Beyond the economic returns to individuals and society as a whole, higher education provides a higher quality of life in a variety of ways, only some of which is easily quantified. High levels of labor force productivity, employment, and increased earnings improve the material well-being of individuals and the wealth of society. There are also civic benefits. Adults who obtain higher levels of education are more likely to understand political issues, vote, and participate in organized volunteer work than those with a high school diploma (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). In addition, research also shows that mothers with higher levels of educational attainment spend about 51% more

time (113 minutes versus 75 minutes per day) on their children's activities than employed mothers without a college degree (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Kalil, Ryan, and Corey (2012) found that highly educated mothers not only spend more time in active child care than less educated mothers, but they alter the composition of that time to suit children's developmental needs more than less educated mothers. Parental educational level is also an important predictor of children's educational and behavioral outcomes (Davis-Kean, 2005).

Individuals with higher levels of education are also more likely to live healthy lifestyles. Lifestyle is not merely about access to better wages and healthcare. It is also about making health-minded choices. Research shows that college-educated individuals tend to smoke less (National Center for Health Statistics, 2013), exercise more (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012), and have lower rates of obesity (National Center for Health Statistics, 2011). These differences not only affect the lifestyles and life-expectancy for the individuals but can significantly reduce medical costs for society as a whole.

In sum, higher education provides many opportunities and benefits for graduates and the societies in which they reside. For individuals, college degrees often lead to better job prospects, higher wages, dependable employer-provided health and pension plans, increased job satisfaction, civic benefits, and healthier lifestyles. For society as a whole, higher education improves local, state, and federal tax revenues, reduces spending on social support programs, improves civic participation, and improves the quality of civil society.

As our nation continues to emerge from the Great Recession, it is abundantly clear that our postsecondary education system, and the economic and social context supporting it, must evolve if we are to take full advantage of our human and physical capital (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013). In the wake of the Great Recession, surging tuition rates have resulted from a decline in state and local government spending (Johnson, 2014). Unfortunately, the result has been an uneven rise in tuition rates in precisely the states where the population can least afford it (Johnson, 2014). While life for many Americans has improved, those at the top are still benefiting the most. The poorest states raised four-year tuition, on average, by \$2,800, while those least affected raised it by less than half that amount (Johnson, 2014). At community colleges, tuition increased by \$680 in the worst-off states and by \$380 in those least affected by recession (Johnson, 2014). The gap between those who grow up in privilege and those who do not continues to widen, and too many young people are struggling to find their way in an adult world (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013). While a college education does not guarantee a good life or even financial security, the evidence is overwhelming that education beyond a high school diploma significantly increases earning and other outcomes to individuals. The question becomes, how do we grant all students access to a college education, especially those who are traditionally under-represented?

Education Outcome Disparities for Under-represented Students

Over the past few decades, there has been a sizable increase in the number of students attending college; however, significant inequalities still exist in the college enrollment rates for minority students, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and students who are English language learners (Adelman, 2006; Brand, 2005). Between

1984 and 2004, undergraduate enrollment of minority students increased by 146% (Li & Carroll, 2008). This increase raised the percentage of Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American students in postsecondary institutions from 18% in 1984 to 32% in 2004 (Li & Carroll, 2008). Statistics such as these indicate a concerted effort to increase college access for traditionally underserved students. Despite the effort, compelling evidence exists to show that increased access to college has not equated to a rise in completion rates given that students who have been traditionally under-represented in postsecondary education tend to still be those least prepared to succeed in college (Adelman, 2006; Reid & Moore; 2008; Roderick, Nagaoka, & Coca, 2009).

According to Snyder and Dillow (2011), 67.7% of African American students and 58.3% of Hispanic students enter college in need of remediation. This compares to 46.8% of White students. For low-income students, more than 64% enter college needing remediation (Snyder & Dillow, 2011). Researchers find that remedial courses can be a roadblock for the vast majority of all students: regardless of race, age, or income. The percentage who did not complete remediation and associated college-level courses in two years is 85.6% for African American, 76.2% for Hispanic, and 76.9% of White (Snyder & Dillow, 2011). For low-income students taking remedial courses, almost 80% failed to complete their remedial coursework and subsequent degree (Snyder & Dillow, 2011).

Research reveals that more than 40% of college students fail to complete their degree (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015), and as much as 33% of this attrition occurs in the first year (Hamilton & Hamilton, 2006). In addition to the roadblocks created by remedial courses, the first weeks and months of college pose a multitude of challenges, including developing new social networks, negotiating the

temptations of the college environment, and maintaining focus on academics in an environment of greater autonomy. Given these challenges, college entry is seen as a major transition of emerging adulthood, one in which young adults develop new levels of “separation-individualism” from parents while also maintaining a healthy connection to others (Mattanah, Hancock, & Brand, 2004; Rice, FitzGerald, Whaley, & Gibbs, 1995).

While the transition to college is potentially problematic for any college student, comparative studies (e.g., Bui, 2002; Riehl, 1994) indicate first-generation and minority college students often encounter more challenges than do their peers. Research reveals first-generation college students face difficulties prior to and during their college experience that makes them vulnerable to lower academic performance (Bui, 2002) and problematic transitions as they adjust to college (Chen, 2005; Choy, Horn, Nunez, & Chen, 2000; Terenzini, Springer, Yeager, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). Other studies have shown first-generation college students have more problematic transitions (Terenzini et al., 1996) and higher levels of attrition (Saenz, Hurtando, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nuñez, 2001) than students who had at least one parent attend college. Fallon (1997) hypothesized that parents who did not attend college were often unable to provide the necessary mentoring and guidance their children needed during the college application process and later during their transition.

While statistics are troublesome for first-generation college-goers, they become increasingly grim for students who are also low-income and minority. These students are far less likely to earn a degree than those from higher income or white families (Thayer, 2000). According to Complete College America, just 7.5% of Black students and 11.1% of Hispanic students completed an associate’s degree within three years (2012). For low-

income students, the completion rate during this same time span was 11.8% (Complete College America, 2012). Young people who do not pursue an education beyond high school are at significant risk of leaving themselves isolated in the current labor market and reducing their opportunity for social mobility (Hooker & Brand, 2009; Warburton et al., 2001). This is particularly important for youth from low-income communities who stand to gain the most from earning a postsecondary education which can boost their economic mobility and the likelihood of earning a family-sustaining wage (Hooker & Brand, 2009).

I established in the aforementioned sections that the returns of a higher education are abundant but disparities in college completion rates exist for under-represented student populations. Much of this disparity is caused by students exiting high school academically and socially ill-prepared for college (Li & Carroll, 2008; Mattanah, Hancock & Brand, 2004; Terenzini et al., 1996). As a result of this underrepresentation, a research agenda has emerged that focuses on identifying best practices and strategies focused on improving college readiness for all students, specifically for at-risk populations. While the goal of improving access for under-represented students is significant, it is the gap in high school graduates' college readiness skills that still jeopardize the ultimate goal of college graduation. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2010), the national education agenda has given prominence to the need for all students, regardless of income, race, ethnicity, language background, or disability, to be college and career ready upon graduation from high school.

College Readiness

While there has been a concerted effort to increase college access for all students, this increase has not equated to a rise in the college completion rate for low-income, minority, and first-generation college-goers (Adelman, 2006; Brand, 2005). This is evidenced by the fact that those students who are least prepared for college are still the students traditionally under-represented in postsecondary education enrollments. In this section on college readiness, I set out to define key definitions as they pertain to the discussion of college readiness, as well as to evaluate the current measures of college readiness and the risks these readiness measures pose to the students who do not meet them. Later in this section, I propose a change in college readiness measurements that emphasize social emotional skills in addition to knowledge in specific content domains.

Defining College Readiness

The gap between high school and college exists because there is a disparity between high school exit requirements and college entry expectations (Conley, 2007). The most common approach used to define college readiness is to evaluate high school course-taking patterns. These patterns include course titles, perceived challenge level, and the number of credits required for graduation, combined with the grades students receive in these courses (Conley, 2007). Adelman (2006) employed transcript analysis to reach the conclusion that completing a challenging high school curriculum is the greatest pre-collegiate indicator of a bachelor's degree completion. The potential problem in this analysis is that it leads to a course title-based definition of college readiness that may not be sufficient, especially for students who attend high schools with low academic standards and expectations (Conley, 2007). According to ACT (2005), the nature and

quality of high school courses are ultimately what matters; however, few valid measures of course quality exist.

Assessment-driven mandates have also been attached to the college readiness agenda, making high stakes tests a requirement to ensure high school graduates are prepared to succeed academically and socially in college. While states began adopting K-12 content-based standards in the 1980s, it is only in recent years that momentum has built for adopting college and career readiness (CCR) standards. In recent years, high school level assessments in nearly every state have shifted from measuring high school-level knowledge to measuring the knowledge and skills practitioners and policymakers deem necessary for students to succeed in non-remedial math and English courses as well as in the workforce (Education Commission of the States, 2014). Increased expectations have been driven by several factors. The first factor was the adoption of Common Core State standards and other CCR standards with the goal of propelling students to college readiness upon graduation from high school. In addition, states who wished to receive a No Child Left Behind (NCLB) waiver had to adopt CCR standards and assessments aligned to these standards. Assessment-driven mandates also stemmed from the high postsecondary remediation rates across the country and an outcry from business and industry leaders who claimed high school graduates lacked the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate the workforce.

As a result of the CCR push, common assessments now define college readiness by establishing benchmarks empirically or through “cut scores.” For example, ACT has defined college readiness by establishing college readiness benchmarks representing the minimum ACT test scores required for students to have a high probability of success in

corresponding credit-bearing courses. Currently, students must score the following: 22 in math, 22 in reading, 18 in English, and 23 in science to be considered college ready (ACT, 2015a).

While the percent of students meeting three or four ACT college readiness benchmarks went up slightly from 39% to 40% nationally, the fact remains that 31% of the tested population are not meeting any of the benchmarks, which makes it difficult for them in their post-high school experiences (ACT, 2015a). African-American students are twice as likely to meet zero ACT college readiness benchmarks compared to their peers (ACT, 2015b). This report furthered the discussion by stating that of the African-American students who tested in 2015, 61% met zero benchmarks compared to only 31% of all students (ACT, 2015b). In addition, only 6% of African-American students tested met all four ACT benchmarks compared to 28% of all students (ACT, 2015b).

Despite nationwide dependence on course requirements and standardized test scores, these measures have yet to produce significant improvements in student performance in college (Soares, 2012). In addition, Chatlani (2016) found that most standards-based high school tests were not well aligned with postsecondary expectations. The tests are good measures of basic academic skills but not necessarily of the knowledge and capabilities needed for college success. In fact, one study shows up to a third of students assigned to remedial coursework based on placement scores could have gone straight into college classes and earned a grade of “B” or better (Hanford, 2016).

Contrary to the academic-only definitions of college readiness, Conley’s (2007) definition also incorporates the attitudes and academic behaviors of successful students, as well as general, institutional knowledge about navigating the world of college,

described contextual knowledge, and is linked to social capital and emotional intelligence. Conley identifies four areas of college readiness: key cognitive strategies, key content, academic behaviors, and contextual skills and awareness (Conley, 2007). A brief description of each of these areas, taken from Conley's model, are discussed in the section below.

Modifying the Measures for College Readiness

The gap in college completion rates renders it imperative for policymakers, school systems, and researchers to identify a measurable set of skills and attributes which students need to ensure their successful completion of college. Recent research on college readiness has revealed that traditional indicators such as achievement scores, course taking, class rank, and high school grade point average (GPA) do not tell a complete story of how ready a student is for college (ACT, 2005; Adelman, 2006; Conley, 2007; Wiley, Wyatt, & Camara, 2010). A review of these indicators across racial/ethnic and income lines reveals that disparities exist for students traditionally under-represented in postsecondary education. While much has been learned about college readiness in the last 20 years, few systematic attempts have been made to integrate the various aspects or components of college readiness that have been investigated in some depth during this period of time (Conley, 2007).

In 2002, Conley led *The Understanding University Success* study, which set the groundwork for developing indicators of college readiness that extend beyond an examination of the content knowledge needed for collegiate success. This two-year study brought together more than 400 faculty members from 20 research institutions to collaborate on identifying the content knowledge, skills, and abilities student need in

order to succeed in an entry level course at their institution – English, math, natural sciences, social sciences, foreign language, and the arts. Building on this work, Conley (2007) established a multifaceted model of college readiness that incorporates factors which are both internal and external to the high school environment. This research suggested that a range of cognitive and metacognitive capabilities often described as key cognitive strategies have been consistently identified by those who teach entry-level college courses as being important (or more important) than any specific content knowledge taught in high school.

Central to Conley's (2007) definition of college readiness are key cognitive strategies, or foundational skills, that apply to the broad intellectual skills that students must develop in order to be successful in college. They include ways of thinking, methods of approaching subjects in a disciplined way, and patterns of asking questions. According to Conley (2007), the most important cognitive strategies are intellectual openness, inquisitiveness, analysis, interpretation, precision, problem solving, and reasoning and argumentation. In addition to these cognitive strategies, students must also possess foundational skills in the key content areas of English, math, social studies, science, world languages, and the arts, as well as possess strong academic skills in the areas of research and writing.

Academic behaviors, the emphasis of this study, are comprised of students' abilities to make choices, monitor and manage their progress and behavior, and apply study skills in ways that help them engage in course materials. Academic behaviors require students to be aware of their learning and be able to control their study habits as needed. Of similar importance are the social and emotional attitudes and behaviors of

students who are successful in college. Among these are study skills, time management, awareness of one's performance, persistence, and the ability to utilize study groups (Conley, 2007). As used in this conceptual model, academic behaviors comprise "a range of behaviors that reflect greater student self-awareness, self-monitoring, and self-control of a series of processes and behaviors necessary for academic success" (Conley, 2007, p. 16).

The final component of Conley's Four Dimensions of College Readiness is contextual skills and awareness, which include being able to function within a wide postsecondary system that may be unfamiliar and may create social and communication challenges. This dimension requires students to understand academic culture and its expectations in order to navigate their way through college.

Conley (2007) provides a visual depiction of this college readiness model intended to show the interactive nature of the four key parts of college readiness. As depicted in Figure 1 below, the four areas are represented by concentric circles that intend to show how all elements are integrated and work together. Conley is careful to mention that these are not four separate facets of college readiness. Instead, the figure represents the five interrelated components of SEL, which support non-cognitive skills needed for collegiate success and the new definition of college readiness proposed by Conley.

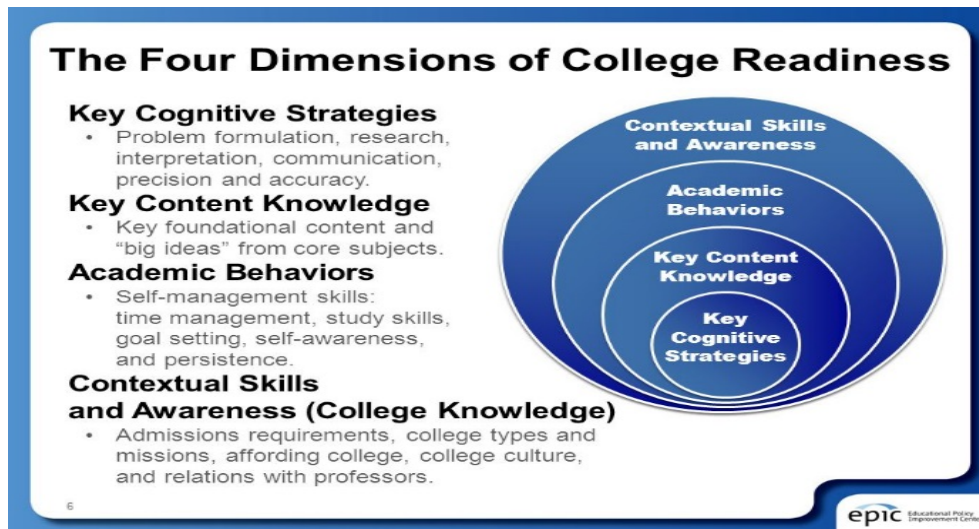


Figure 1. *Visual representation of Conley’s Four Dimensions of College Readiness.*

As the quest to improve college access for under-represented students continues to gain attention, inquiry into non-cognitive measures has risen (Thomas, Kuncel, & Credel, 2007). More researchers and decision-makers have begun to look at definitions beyond standardized testing, high school GPA, class rank, and courses taken as predictors for college success (Ramsey, 2008). Researchers also look to explore ways to broaden the indicators used to evaluate the cognitive skills that will better reflect the skills needed for success in the 21st century college environment. Until a better system for defining college readiness is developed that aligns with postsecondary expectations, students will continue to face remediation and the risks inherent within (Conley, 2007).

Risks of Remediation

More than 1.7 million beginning college students participate in remedial courses each year (Snyder & Dillow, 2011). The goal of remediation programs is to serve as an academic bridge from poor high school preparation to college readiness and was inspired by a commitment to expand access to all who sought a college degree. Unfortunately,

remediation has become higher education's bridge to nowhere (Complete College Now, 2012). Despite the more than \$3 billion spent annually by states and students on remedial courses, there is very little student success to show for it (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011).

According to Snyder and Dillow (2011), more than 50% of students entering two-year colleges and nearly 20% of those entering four-year universities are placed in remedial classes. Frustrated by their placement into remediation, thousands of students who are accepted into college never show up for classes (Snyder & Dillow, 2011). Of those, nearly 4 in 10 remedial students in community colleges never complete their remedial coursework (Complete College Now, 2012). Graduation rates for students who started in remedial coursework are staggeringly low; fewer than 1 in 10 students in remediation graduate from community colleges within three years and little more than a third complete a bachelor's degree in six years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). The National Center for Education Statistics (2004) reports that only 17% of students who take one remedial class receive a bachelor's degree and, for those students who are required to take two or more remedial courses, only 20% actually complete their degree.

Race/ethnicity, income, and parental education are all closely associated with a student's likelihood of remediation placements. Rates of remedial education enrollment are higher for students of color than for their white or higher income peers. In 2016, 56% of African-American students and 45% of Latino students enrolled in remedial courses nationwide, compared with 35% of white students (Jimenez, Sargrad, Morales, & Thompson, 2016). In addition, a student's likelihood of taking remedial classes is

associated with family income. According to a study of students at public colleges in Ohio, 50% of students whose family incomes are under \$18,000 a year, for example, take remedial classes while 18% of those with incomes over \$100,000 a year end up in remediation (Hanford, 2016). First-generation college students are also more likely to enroll in a remedial course than students whose parents previously obtained a bachelor's degree (Wiley et al., 2010). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2000), 55% of first-generation college students took some remedial courses during their college years, compared with 27% of students whose parents held a bachelor's or advanced degree.

The consequences of having to enroll in any remedial course can be detrimental to a student's degree completion. Students should be college-ready upon graduating from high school; however, many are not. For the college and career readiness initiative to be effective, state education systems must revise or implement higher standards in English and mathematics, while also developing assessment systems aligned to college and career readiness standards in order to determine if students have the necessary skills to be successful in postsecondary education (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The epidemic of remediation in America's higher education accentuates the need for a more robust and comprehensive strategy for measuring college readiness (Conley, 2007). This new strategy must lead to new tools, methods, and indices that will help students understand how ready for college they are and must help schools make systematic improvements to increase the number of college-ready students who graduate each year (Conley, 2007).

While there are many high school reform models focused on increasing access and success for traditionally under-represented students, the early college model is the focus of this study and stands to make a significant contribution towards improving the college readiness rates for under-represented students as well as reducing the risks associated with remediation.

Early College as Reform

This section of the literature review seeks to explore early college as a reform model designed to address the philosophy that academic challenge, not remediation, will address the needs of students who may be disenfranchised in traditional school settings. In this section, I also look at the background and core principles of early college and how these features help students become college ready both academically and emotionally.

The Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI) started in response to the need for better communication between high schools and colleges, as well as to improve the college-going and completion rates of high school students, particularly students from poverty (Muñoz, Fischetti, & Prather, 2014). Reformers recognize early college as an approach that holds benefits for increasing academic rigor and improving social and human capital development, particularly among “academically average” students (Berger et al., 2009; Jobs for the Future, 2008). Despite decades of education reform efforts, traditional public high schools are not meeting the needs of a large number of students, especially students of color and youth from low-income families (Webb & Gerwin, 2014). Their graduation rates were lower than their white peers and few went on to higher education. A national commission’s report *The Lost Opportunity of the Senior Year* (2001) sparked interest with educators who were seeking new solutions. The early

college model, developed by Janet E. Lieberman over three decades ago, introduced the radical idea that schools could better motivate struggling students by raising expectations and providing supports for them to engage in more challenging coursework, rather than relegating them to remedial classes.

By combining high school and the first two years of college, ECHSs provide the opportunity for students to take college classes as soon as they are ready and earn an associate's degree or transferable credit by the time they graduate high school. Each ECHS is a partnership between a school district and a postsecondary institution. Often located on a college campus, ECHSs establish small, nurturing, innovative communities with creative pedagogical inputs that capitalize on the power of place, stimulating and inspiring underserved students to believe that a college education is within their reach (Lieberman, 2004). ECHSs also offer a practical, financial incentive by offering students college courses free of tuition. These aforementioned elements of the partnership are not new to the ECHSI; rather, they date back to 1974 with the establishment of the first Middle College High School (MCHS).

The first MCHS was established in 1974 on the campus of LaGuardia Community College in New York City. This experimental public school believed the location of a high school on a college campus would be a vital strategy for improving outcomes for at-risk students, thus creating what they called "power of place." The school altered the high school paradigm by reducing school size and moving the physical location of the high school onto the college campus. The school offered not only college courses but also personalization and extensive student supports. As a result, dropout rates fell,

college attendance increased, and today, more than 50 MCHSs exist across the nation, forming the Middle College National Consortium (Webb & Gerwin, 2014).

In 2001, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation committed funding to plan and implement early college as a large-scale national reform initiative. The goal of the early college pilot program provided an opportunity for underachieving students to take college courses in their 11th and 12th grade years of high school. The acceleration into college coursework provided at-risk students the opportunity to earn an associate's degree in a reduced period. To support the initiative, The Gates Foundation enlisted other leading foundations, such as the Carnegie Corporation of New York, Ford Foundation, and W.K. Kellogg Foundation. More than \$130 million in private start-up funds helped the early college movement expand from three schools in 2002 to nearly 250 in 2012 (Webb & Gerwin, 2014).

The early college model, while fundamentally based on the lessons learned from the MCHS, set out to provide additional structural elements, such as stronger collaboration between the high school and postsecondary institution and more formal opportunities for academic acceleration (Lieberman, 2004). The early college model set forth by Lieberman sought to accomplish several non-negotiable objectives. First, Lieberman reached out to students underserved by regular schools. Second, through a cooperative relationship between the district high school and the college president, Lieberman combined the resources of the high school and college so that early college students had access to college facilities (gym, library, cafeteria). Next, Lieberman integrated the high school and college study in an articulated program, which offered accelerated coursework from the ninth grade to the associate's degree. The goal was for

students to achieve an associate's degree in five years or less, instead of six. In order to accomplish this goal, Lieberman required an enhanced role of high school faculty, as well as an active college campus collaboration from the college administrative structure: faculty interchange, support from the college division of finance, admissions, scheduling, and counseling under a college-appointed administrator.

According to Lieberman (2004), the aforementioned structures that form the foundation of early college are based on well-established theories of developmental psychology. The first theory is that intellectual maturation is a continuous process in which there is little or no difference between a student at the conclusion of the twelfth grade and a student at the beginning of college enrollment. Therefore, learning should be a continuous process; the transition should be smooth; and the curriculum between high school and college should be coordinated. The second theory is challenge, both academic and personal, is a strong motivator for achievement. The third theory is that positive role models improve behavior. The fourth theory is that flexible use of time advances opportunities for mastery. The final theory is that teachers involved in reform have increased motivation for success; caring teachers improve student success (Lieberman, 2004).

Lieberman (2004) ultimately believes that the success of early college means the destruction of the hierarchy between high school and college. She also believes that the structural and theoretical components of the early college model are indistinguishably interwoven and that to remove any element would be to reduce the effectiveness of the model.

Goals of Early College

The ECHSI set out to accomplish two goals: (1) improve the secondary experience for high school students, especially for the broad population of students who are traditionally under-represented in the postsecondary environment, and (2) increase the college readiness and subsequent college experience for these students (Berger, Adelman, & Cole, 2010). To carry out these goals, the ECHSI guaranteed that participating schools incorporated the small school model, provided meaningful college exposure, offered an array of support for academic endeavors, ensured student-centered learning environments, and fostered high-quality relationships with adults (Nodine, 2009).

What distinguishes the ECHSI from other reform efforts is the expectation that most students, not just those identified as academically elite, would enroll in college coursework, and with support of the school, go on to a postsecondary program. Nodine (2009) professed that prior to the implementation of early college, advanced placement (AP) programs were the only meaningful “curricular coherence and sequencing between the senior year of high school and postsecondary education” (p. 6). In this regard, ECHSs have the potential to promote a seamless transition between high school and college experiences.

The goal of the early college initiative sought to revise a paradigm of low expectations and hopelessness for the most marginalized students in education (Lieberman, 2004). By focusing on traditionally underserved students, the initiative challenged the prevailing thought about what students were capable of accomplishing in high school (Webb & Mayka, 2011). Previously, only the academically elite were provided the opportunity to earn college credit in high school through dual enrollment

programs. This opportunity was not afforded to low-income, minority, and first-generation college-goers because the overarching opinion was that these students could not withstand the rigor of college coursework and that they would be unprepared for such endeavors.

Dual enrollment programs typically extend the opportunity for juniors and seniors in high school to take college classes that will count for credit at both the high school and college concurrently. In the case of dual credit and early college, college courses are taken in lieu of a class that is required for high school graduation. In order to reduce the financial barriers to low-income students and their families, these courses are typically offered either free or at a discounted cost. In the case of early college students, many of the requirements for inclusion in the college courses are relaxed in order to grant greater access to lower performing students. Many dual enrollment courses are offered on the college campus, which in turn, helps to ease the psychological transition between high school and college (Bailey, Hughes & Karp, 2002). Access to the college campus also creates an opportunity for students to experience the college culture from both the academic and extracurricular side and allows students to receive guidance and support through the high school and college support systems.

Research on dual enrollment supports positive outcomes for participating students (Bailey, Hughes, & Karp, 2002). Berger et al. (2010) reports that students who engage in college courses while in high school hold a higher likelihood of enrolling in college and are more likely to enroll in a four-year college degree. Students in dual enrollment courses also hold higher collegiate GPAs and earn more credits during their first year of college compared to students with no college experience in high school. One of the

pinnacles of the early college program is the research that shows students who accumulate at least 20 college credits by the end of their first year are more likely to persist to college graduation (Abel Foundation, 2007). In many ECHSs serving under-represented students, this becomes the ultimate goal over an associate's degree. If under-represented students are supported in their quest for 20 college credits by high school graduation, it would be reasonable to assume they would increase their likelihood of persistence in the college environment (Hoffman et al., 2010).

Early College Outcomes and Core Principles

Using the core principles of early college as a guide, this section will explore the most recent outcome data using access and persistence rates available for early college graduates. However, no progress will be reported on core principle five as there has been little to no research conducted in this area at this time.

Core Principle 1 - Early colleges are committed to serving students under-represented in higher education. Initial data support the claim that early college schools are diligently working to enroll high percentages of minority and low-income students (American Institute for Research & Stanford Research Institute International [AIR/SRI], 2008). In fact, most early college schools enroll a greater percentage of minority students than their corresponding school district and state (Webb & Gerwin, 2014). Drawing on data from the early college information system Berger et al. (2010) reported that 70% of early college students are students of color and that at least 59% are eligible for free or reduced lunch. In addition, 56% of early college students will be the first in their immediate families to attend college (Webb & Gerwin, 2014).

Core Principle 2 - Early college schools are created and sustained by a local education agency, a higher education institution, and the community, all of whom are jointly accountable for student success. Partnerships with a postsecondary institution is a cardinal component of the early college initiative (Berger et al., 2010). Each school is a partnership between a school district and a nearby postsecondary institution—either a community college, a technical college, a four-year college, or a university (Webb & Gerwin, 2014). The model is rooted in a commitment from both the K-12 system and its higher education partner to collaborate and provide early college students with both the academic and social supports needed to be successful in postsecondary (Hooker & Brand, 2009). Most ECHSs are located on or near the college campus, which allows them to capitalize on power of place (Cunningham & Matthews, 2007). The location of ECHSs on (or proximal to) the college campus allows early college students to build an identity as a college-goer and is associated with helping students build knowledge about expectations and the college culture. The strategic location also provides students the opportunity to learn about college by attending classes on campus, using facilities such as the library and computer labs, and interacting with other college students. This “power of place” also allows early college students to gain confidence in themselves and their abilities (Hooker & Brand, 2009).

Core Principle 3 - Early colleges and their higher education partners and community jointly develop an integrated academic program so all students earn one to two years of transferable college credits leading to college completion. This core principle of early college has been modified from its original intent, which was for ALL students to earn an associate’s degree or two years of a college degree. The modified

goal is for all students to earn at least one year of college credit; however, this may still prove to be a lofty goal for some schools. Compared to peers in traditional high school programs, students who enroll in early college programs are more likely to enroll at an institution full time (Deruy, 2015). The American Institute for Research states 86% of early college graduates who go on to college stay for their second year compared to just 72% of college students nationally (Deruy, 2015). Not only do early college programs improve students' overall persistence and determination, but they also assist students in becoming more knowledgeable about the overall college systems.

Core Principle 4 - Early colleges engage all students in a comprehensive support system that develops academic and social skills, as well as behaviors and conditions necessary for college completion. To succeed in college, students need more than just academic capital achieved through rigorous high school coursework. They also need crucial nonacademic skills, sometimes referred to as “college knowledge” (Conley, 2007). This knowledge includes the ability to manage time effectively, to recognize when help is needed to navigate campus resources, to manage time effectively, and to make responsible decisions. These skills are rooted in Goleman’s (1995) theory of emotional intelligence. Nakkula and Foster (2007) note that “college expectations are communicated in every facet of the ECHS experience” (p. 153).

It should come as no surprise that given the needs of early college students, articulated support structures are a vital aspect of the early college model. ECHSs do well at providing social, emotional, psychological, and financial supports (Hoffman, et al., 2008). Through these support structures, first-generation college-goers can learn the background knowledge, problem solving strategies, and other college-going skills that

young people from more affluent families may learn from their parents. Helping students to be self-advocates reinforces and enhances existing college readiness skills in the domain of what has been termed college knowledge. Formal academic supports are also offered in the areas of mathematics, research skills, literacy, and life skills. Many schools also support students by placing them in cohorts where they receive common supports together and/or allow students to take parallel courses at the high school in order to supplement college courses. These cohorts increase motivation by providing social emotional support, study groups, and positive role models for dealing with common problems (Newton & Vogt, 2008). Lieberman (2004) notes that combining academic and emotional counseling in ECHSs work better than a single focus on academics because problems are often intertwined.

Theory of Emotional Intelligence

The support structures discussed in Core Principle 4 are vital to the success of the early college model and account for why early college students are often more successful persisting through college than traditional high school students (AIR, 2009; Jobs for the Future, 2011). Research indicates modern students contend with significant social, emotional, and mental health barriers that prevent them from succeeding in both school and life (Dymnicki, Sambolt, & Kidron, 2013). In order to understand and overcome these barriers, it is beneficial to explore students' lived experiences of the college transition using the theory of emotional intelligence. In this section of the literature review I seek to provide a broad definition of emotional intelligence and its ties to social emotional learning (SEL).

Emotional intelligence (EI) is defined as “the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions’ (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 189). Social and emotional learning (SEL) emerged from research rooted in social competence, which is widely applied to EI. EI theory (along with its common alias, emotional literacy) and research provides the “integrative concept” of SEL (Elias et al., 1997). SEL is defined as “the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (CASEL 2015).

In his best-selling trade book, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ*, Goleman (1995) coined the term “emotional intelligence” and introduced research supporting its relation between cognition and affect. This research concluded that emotions such as anger, happiness, and fear, as well as mood states, preferences, and bodily states influence how people think, make decisions, and perform different tasks (Forgas & Moylan, 1987; Salovey & Birnbaum, 1989). Goleman (1995) also declared that emotional intelligence was both an answer to the violence plaguing our schools and “as powerful and at times more powerful than IQ in predicting success in life” (p. 34).

In 2003, researchers devised a comprehensive performance test of emotional intelligence called the Mayer-Salovey-Caruseo Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT). Within this test, respondents are required to solve tasks pertaining to each of the four abilities defined by the theory: managing emotions, understanding emotions, using emotion, and perceiving emotion (Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, & Sitarenios, 2003). The test

takes approximately 45 minutes to complete and yields scores for each of the four abilities mentioned above. Using this tool, researchers have found a connection between emotional intelligence and cognitive abilities, mental health and well-being, social functioning, and workplace performance.

Cognitive Abilities

Van Rooy, Viswesvaran and Pluta (2005) reported correlations in the 0.30 range between MSCEIT scores and assessments of both verbal and spatial intelligence. Other studies have shown that the MSCEIT scores correlate moderately ($r_s = 0.20 - 0.50$) with verbal SAT scores (Brackett, Mayer, & Waner, 2004; David, 2005), ACT scores (O'Connor & Little, 2003), reasoning ability (O'Connor & Little, 2003), academic giftedness (Zeidner, Shani-Zinovich, Matthews & Roberts, 2005), and measures of general intelligence (Gil-Olarte, Palomera Martin & Brackett, 2006).

Mental Health and Well-Being

The skills associated with emotional intelligence should help individuals deal effectively with unpleasant emotions and promote both personal growth and well-being. MSCEIT scores were found to correlate ($r_s = 0.10 - 0.40$) with psychopathologies and have roots in emotional disturbances, including depression, social anxiety disorder, and schizophrenia (David, 2005). Among college students, MSCEIT scores positively correlated with measures of psychological well-being (Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Lopes, Salovey, & Straus, 2003). Studies also found that individuals with higher MSCEIT scores were more likely to seek psychotherapy in times of need (Goldenberg, Matheson, & Mantler, 2006). Rivers, Brackett, Reyes, Mayer, Caruso & Salovey (2010) also found an association between MSCEIT scores and school problems was particularly high

($r = -0.57$), indicating students with higher emotional intelligence may have better attention skills and fewer learning problems.

Social Functioning

Emotional intelligence is postulated to promote positive social functioning by helping individuals to detect the emotional states of others, adopt others' perspectives, enhance communication, and regulate behavior. Indeed, studies have found people with higher MSCEIT scores tend to be more socially competent, have better quality relationships, and to be viewed as more interpersonally sensitive than those with lower MSCEIT scores (Brackett, Warner, & Bosco, 2005; Brackett, Rivers, Shiffman, Lerner, & Salovey, 2006; Lopes, Salovey, Cote, & Beers, 2005; Lopes et al., 2003). For example, college students with higher MSCEIT scores were viewed by their peers as more interpersonally sensitive and prosocial (Lopes et al., 2005). Similarly, a study of dating and married couples with higher MSCEIT scores reported more satisfaction and happiness in their relationships (Brackett, Warner, & Bosco, 2005).

Workplace Performance

Emotional intelligence influences the success with which employees interact with colleagues, the strategies they use to manage conflict and stress, and overall job performance (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2005; Lopes, Cote, & Salovey, 2006). A study of one health insurance company found employees with higher MSCEIT scores had higher company rank and received greater merit pay increases than employees with lower MSCEIT scores (Lopes et al., 2006). Similarly, employees with higher emotional intelligence received better peer and/or supervisor ratings of interpersonal facilitation, stress tolerance, and leadership potential than those with lower emotional intelligence

(Lopes, Cote, & Salovey, 2006). In a study of middle and high school teachers, MSCEIT scores were associated positively with job satisfaction and negatively with burnout. These scores were mediated by teacher reports of experiencing positive emotions in school and their perceived support from their school principal (Brackett, Palomera, Mojsa, Reyes, & Salovey, 2010).

SEL Logic Model

The CASEL SEL logic model (2003) describes the process by which SEL works to produce a range of positive outcomes for students (See Figure 2). It is as a meta-logic model describing a series of processes generalizable to SEL interventions at large rather than relating to a specific program. First, the SEL logic model proposes that SEL interventions do two main things – firstly, they create school and classroom climates that are well-managed and participatory, and in which students feel cared for and safe. At the same time, they provide explicit instruction in the development of social and emotional competence (e.g. self-awareness, decision-making skills).

The second assertion of the logic model is that the two proposed core elements of SEL programs have both direct and indirect effects on school and life outcomes for students. With regard to direct links, SEL improves students' school outcomes because it enables them to work better with others. Durlak et al.'s (2011) meta-analysis found effects equivalent to an 11-percentile point increase in children's academic scores as a result for participating in SEL programming. Data cited from CASEL (2007) provide similarly appealing findings.

The logic model also proposes indirect links between SEL and school outcomes such as mediating/moderating influences on students' attachment to school, their

likelihood of engaging in risky and/or adaptive behavior, both of which in turn influence subsequent academic performance. Longitudinal research has been supportive of the proposed link, with school climate influencing middle school students' vulnerability to psychopathology (Kuperminc, Leadbeater, & Blatt, 2001). Similarly, perceptions of school climate among high school students have been demonstrated to affect their endorsement of positive attitudes towards help seeking for bullying and threats of violence (Eliot, Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2010).

The logic model also proposes a link between students' attachment to school, their likelihood of engaging in risky and/or adaptive behavior and subsequent academic performance. The National Youth Risk Behavior Survey found a clear negative association between engagement in health-risk behaviors (e.g. using alcohol, carrying a weapon) and academic achievement among adolescents in the United States, even after controlling for a range of other influential factors (e.g. sex, ethnicity) (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). However, it should be noted that this research was cross-sectional in nature and also relied on students to self-report their academic progress.

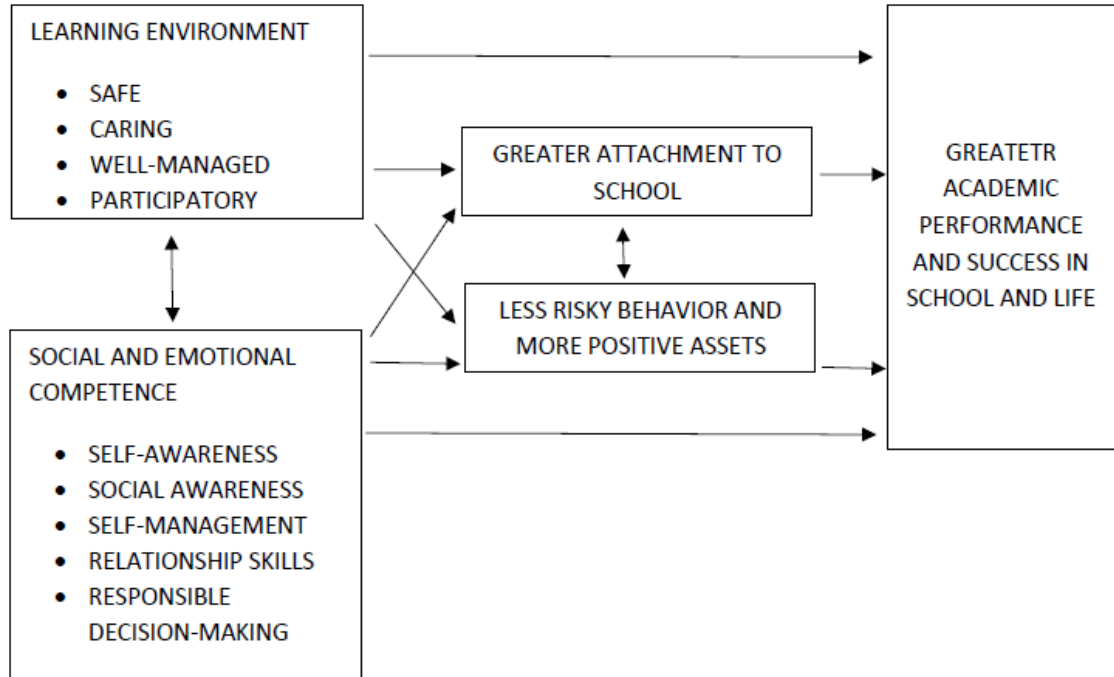


Figure 2. *Visual Representation of SEL Logic Model*

Emotional Intelligence and Academic Success

Emotional intelligence may aid in prioritizing thinking and to enable one to manage emotions in anxiety-provoking situations, such as taking standardized tests. Evidence supporting the role of emotional intelligence in academic setting, however, is mixed. Some studies show positive associations (Barchard, 2003; Brackett & Mayer, 2003), whereas others show no links (O'Connor & Little, 2003; Rode et al., 2007). Although more research is necessary to unpack whether (and how) emotional intelligence relates to academic performance, it appears that emotional intelligence may influence other aspects of student performance in school (Brackett, Rivers, & Salovey, 2011). Students scoring higher on the MSCIT were less likely to be rated b their teacher as having school problems, including attention and learning problems. Students scoring

higher on the MSCEIT also were less likely to report negative attitudes towards school and towards their teachers (Rivers et al., 2008).

As I discussed in the previous section, SEL is defined as the process in which children and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL 2015). Research illustrates that EI improves cognitive abilities, mental health and well-being, social functioning, workplace performance, and academic success. Such evidence makes it apparent that building EI through SEL direct instruction is vital to improve the transition to college and life. Conley's (2007) definition of college readiness requires schools to emphasize the following SEL components in order to improve collegiate success: self-awareness, social awareness, self-efficacy, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. I discuss each of these below in relation to their impact on college success.

Self-Awareness

The definition of self-awareness is the ability to “accurately assessing one’s feelings, interests, values, and strengths and maintaining a well-grounded sense of self-confidence” (Dymnicki, Sambolt, & Kidron, 2013). Self-awareness is one of the most important paradigms in emotional intelligence and is vital to SEL. Meta-analysis indicates academic self-awareness is the best predictor for academic achievement (GPA) and student retention in postsecondary education (Robbins et al., 2004). Research also shows high-achieving college students tend to reflect on their own thought processes during learning and engage in meta-cognition (Weinstein & Underwood, 1985) and “self-

monitoring” of their academic performance (Weinstein, 1994). In contrast, students who are not skilled in self-awareness cannot effectively learn about themselves and their personal needs, strengths, and weaknesses. These students are more likely to blame others for things that go wrong and fail to take responsibility for the problems they face, thus preventing solutions and progress (Steiner, 2014).

Social Awareness

Researchers link college success and retention not only to students’ awareness of themselves but also to their awareness of the world around them. Research illustrates students who become socially immersed with other members of the college community are much more likely to complete their first year of college and continue to complete their post-secondary degree (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Socially aware students can carefully consider what people want and can communicate in a manner intended to meet their need. In his study, “What Works? Research-Based, High-Impact Practices for Promoting Student Success,” Cuseo (1993) concludes, “Student success is enhanced by human interaction, collaboration, and formation of interpersonal connections between students and members of the college community” (p. 3). The likelihood for success in college is higher among students who possess interpersonal and social skills that enable them to interact with a diverse cross-section of academicians and peers, and socially aware students possess a better understanding of interactions in a college environment (Conley, 2007).

Researchers also found parental and peer support during the transition to college important in lowering anxiety levels and helping students meet the academic demands of college classes (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005). In contrast, feelings of isolation or

alienation likely contribute to student attrition (Tinto, 1993). The SEED Foundation (2010) reported that students who seek out help are more likely to be successful in college.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy, defined as one's perception of their own ability to execute the behaviors required to produce certain outcomes, contributes to college success (Bandura, 1997). Level of self-efficacy relates to whether or not a person engages in specific behaviors or activities. People may avoid or exert less effort in situations in which they possess a lower level of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). In contrast, high expectations of self may increase performance and a person's willingness to persevere (Bandura, 1997). Overall, confidence in academic ability related to better adjustment to college, and a higher level of self-efficacy seemed to be an advantageous resource in regulating first-year transitions in general (Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007).

Relationship Skills

Equally important as those competencies that ask students to look inward (self-awareness, self-efficacy) and outward (social awareness), relationship skills mix recognizing and managing emotions and behaviors as key to forming positive relationships, working well in teams/groups, and coping with conflict. Students who develop on-campus relationship skills during the first year of college possess a greater sense of belonging and a reduced sense of loneliness (Hurtado et al., 2007; Mattanah et al., 2010). The literature documents the benefits of social relationships and the important role they have in the areas of self-concept (Reid & Moore, 2008), social skills (Stanton-Salazar, 1997), and educational attainment (Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006). The early

college model, which targets minority students at risk of dropping out of high school, first-generation college-goers, and students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, is a reform initiative capable of examining the ways in which social networks and the socialization process are infused in the education process of early college students.

Responsible Decision-making

Making responsible decisions becomes increasingly important as students move toward independence from their parents and adapt to college environments. Too frequently the newfound independence finds students struggling to negotiate the temptations of the college environment (e.g., alcohol, drugs, and sex). As a result, it is during the first weeks and months of college that most students face the greatest decision-making challenges (Mattanah et al., 2010). Furthermore, knowing how to seek assistance from high school counselors, college faculty, and other support services help students build social capital (Dymnicki, Sambolt & Kidron, 2013).

Research supports the notion that SEL instruction in a supportive environment can enhance participants' academic and social development and improve overall college readiness. Yet despite the wealth of existing literature, there is limited discussion of SEL curriculum or programming outside of stand-alone, encapsulated programs. Researchers have offered little information about how to (a) infuse SEL interventions into the regular academic curriculum, (b) include informal SEL practices outside of classroom lessons, (c) strengthen SEL by facilitating cooperation between faculty and parents, or (d) create opportunities for students to learn through authentic experiences (Zins, Weissberg, Wang, Walberg, 2004). This is the gap that this research project seeks to fill—specifically, how the structures and principles of early college support the teaching and learning of SEL

skills to assist traditionally under-represented students as they transition to and persist on in postsecondary education. Currently there is vast research aligning individual SEL skills to collegiate success, but no such studies that look at all five categories of SEL together.

Emotional Intelligence and Educational Leadership

When Goleman's book, *Emotional Intelligence*, was published in 1995, the field of social and emotional learning (SEL) was just beginning to evolve. At the time, there were only a handful of well-designed, school-based SEL programs. In most cases, these programs were implemented as a "war on" a particular problem, such as reducing dropouts, substance abuse, unwanted teenage pregnancies, or school violence (Goleman, 1995). In short, these SEL programs were lessons in emotional intelligence.

In the 20 years since Goleman's best-seller, scientific data have demonstrated the effectiveness of SEL programs as interventions that help lower the risk of various problems young people face, and that increase their skills in addressing life's challenges, have been accumulating steadily. As a result, a growing number of districts are adopting systematic strategies that embed SEL into every aspect of school life (CASEL, 2015). They are building SEL into their strategic plans and budgets. In fact, some states adopted SEL standards of learning as early as the 1980's (Zinsler, Weissberg, & Dunsenbury, 2013).

One of the largest organizations of SEL promotion, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), has been reviewing policy for the past three years. The organization's current research shows 49 states now have freestanding SEL standards for preschool (Dunsenbury, Wuissberg, Goren, &

Domitrovich, 2014). Only four states have developed comprehensive standards of SEL for K-12 collectively, and 11 states developed comprehensive standards for at least some grades (CASEL, 2015). Although some states recognize the need for SEL programming and have even gone so far as enacting policies to ensure all students receive social and emotional instruction to improve collegiate success, much remains to be done at the elementary, middle, and high school levels (CASEL, 2015).

While some researchers would argue in favor of traditional college readiness predictors, such as ACT score and GPA, a growing body of researchers are in favor of examining non-cognitive variables (Allen, 1999), such as SEL, to better address the academic and social health of first-year college students. Research illustrates “SEL has positive effects on academic performance, benefits physical health, improves citizenship, is demanded by employers, is essential for lifelong success, and reduces the risk of maladjustment, failed relationships, interpersonal violence, substance abuse and overall unhappiness” (Elias et al., 1997; Zins et al., 2004). Effective schools devoted to educating the whole child, however, are finding social-emotional competence and academic achievement go hand-in-hand, and inclusion of both areas helps students capitalize on their own potential in school and successfully transition to the next level (Elias et al., 1997).

College Readiness, Early College, and Emotional Intelligence

The ECHSI supports the learning needs of under-represented students as they navigate the barriers to a higher education. When ECHSs implement the following strategies, they improve the odds of helping traditionally under-represented students bridge the gap between high school and college. These strategies are as follows: provide

faculty advising for the first two years of college, facilitate the transition to higher education for all students, and develop the flexibility to integrate individualized levels of learning that will better serve the intellectual and developmental needs of the students (Jobs for the Future [JFF], 2012). To enhance successful outcomes for students, early college administrators must revise the traditional curriculum sequences, find innovative ways to align the high school and college experience, and provide both academic and social emotional supports students need as they embark on more challenging coursework (JFF, 2012).

The educational community, in conjunction with employer demands, has finally begun to emphasize so-called 21st century skills in addition to knowledge in specific content areas as a definition of college readiness (Conley, 2007). This is in hopes of promoting the development of critical thinking, communication, problem solving, collaboration, and creativity (Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yeng, 2011). Central to being a good student, worker, and citizen, these 21st century skills have also been linked to social emotional learning. Instead of focusing heavily on academic credentials for college admission, colleges should turn to SEL to determine students' potential for persistence through the first year (Conley, 2007). Currently, however, the only research available examines individual SEL variables as indicators of college readiness, not a collective measure of all SEL competencies.

Summary of Literature Review Findings

I began the literature review section by setting the tone for this capstone through a discussion of the returns of higher education in terms of individual and societal benefits, including higher earnings, employee-provided benefits, higher levels of job satisfaction,

social mobility, reduced unemployment rates, increased tax revenues, and a higher quality of life. While I described a multitude of benefits for college graduates within this literature review, I also laid out the disparities that exist for under-represented students that prevent them from enjoying the rewards of higher education. This under-representation sparks the need for the research within this capstone. I presented a wealth of literature within this section that shows the significant inequalities that exist in the college enrollment rates for students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, minority students, and students who are English language-learners (Adelman, 2006; Brand, 2005). This literature review presents research that reveals that first-generation college students face difficulties prior to and during their college experience that makes them vulnerable to lower academic performance (Bui, 2002), problematic transitions (Terenzini et al., 1996), and higher attrition (Thayer, 2000). Literature in this section also supports the belief that minority and low-income students can achieve at high rates when provided with expectations, resources, and opportunities that are commonplace in our nation's top schools.

A primary focus of this literature review was to discuss existing definitions of college readiness and present research advocating for the need to a move away from course-based and assessment-driven definitions of college readiness. Contrary to the standard definitions of college readiness, Conley (2007) presents a 21st century definition that extends beyond academic knowledge and incorporates the attitudes and social emotional behaviors needed for college and workplace success. I cited several studies in support of this move that indicate traditional definitions are not effective in propelling students into credit-bearing courses at the college level. I cited research by Karp (2011)

that describes certain non-academic standards professors expect from students. However, a lack of these skills drives many college students to leave school (Rath, Rock, & Laferriere, 2013). These aforementioned skills closely align with social emotional learning (SEL).

Flowing from my discussion on the definitions of college readiness, I presented a discussion focused on the risks of remediation. While the goal of remediation programs is to bridge the gap from poor high school preparation to college readiness, they currently serve as a bridge to nowhere (Complete College Now, 2012). Studies presented within this literature review revealed little student success to show for the nearly \$3 billion spent annual on remedial programs. For the college and career readiness initiative to be effective, state education systems must turn to the literature and implement reform models focused on increasing access and success for traditionally under-represented students. Reform efforts must also address the non-academic needs of students, including SEL. The focus of this capstone is the Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI) and the literature that supports its positive impact on both academic and non-academic indicators of college readiness.

Within this section, I presented a synthesis of the literature on ECHSs specific to their origin, principles, and outcomes. I outlined the significant body of quantitative literature on ECHS programs that substantiate the benefits of the program on high school completion and college transition rates for all students, including those who are traditionally under-represented in postsecondary education. I also discussed the goals of early college, which are to alleviate the low high school graduation rates common in urban schools and to increase the number of first-generation college students entering

postsecondary education (Berger, Adelman, & Cole, 2010). I reviewed studies of ECHS programs, which revealed promising results for student participants, such as improved high school attendance (Edmunds et. al., 2012), improved end-of-course exam scores (Vargas & Quiara, 2010), increased high school graduation rates (Adams, 2010), improved college readiness and college completion rates (Nodine, 2009), and improvements in student social emotional learning (Goleman, 2005).

The literature review provided an opportunity to tie the structures of the early college model to the growth in SEL for participating students. Research from Nakkula and Foster (2007) noted that “college expectations are communicated in every facet of the ECHS experience” (p. 153). In addition, ECHSs do well at providing social, emotional, psychological, and financial supports (Hoffman et al., 2008).

The theoretical framework for this study of the ECHSI is rooted in social emotional learning (SEL) and emotional intelligence. I used existing literature to tie this framework to Core Principle 4 of the ECHSI, which states that early colleges engage all students in a comprehensive support system that develops academic and social skills, as well as behaviors and conditions necessary for college completion. I presented empirical research suggesting that ECHSs are successful at providing social, emotional, psychological, and financial supports (Hoffman et al., 2008). I also presented research to suggest that the cohort model used in early college increases motivation by providing social emotional supports, study groups, and positive role models for dealing with common problems (Newton & Vogt, 2008). Lieberman (2004) claimed one of the most successful components of the early college model is the combination of academic and emotional counseling.

The justification for the early college model and the social emotional learning experiences embedded within the core principles are rooted in emotional intelligence research. The literature review supports the value of emotional intelligence by outlining the connections between emotional intelligence and cognitive abilities, mental health and well-being, social functioning, workplace performance, and academic success. The SEL logic model developed by CASEL (2007) was a means of connecting the components of SEL to greater academic performance and success in school and life. According to the model, these benefits result from building a greater attachment to school and by reducing risky behaviors.

As I discussed in the review of literature, the early college model is a promising strategy for supporting academic engagement and higher levels of academic performance of a wide range of students (Brewer, Stern, & Ahn, 2007). Research also suggests that, from a policy perspective, early college has benefits for increasing rigor and improving social and emotional capital among academically average students (Berger et al., 2009). In order for the early college model to gain popularity with policymakers and practitioners, more research is need. Currently, there is a lack of qualitative studies addressing how and why ECHSs are effective in building college readiness and helping students transition effectively (Ramsey-White, 2012). Woodcock and Beal (2013) also identified that the emphasis on ECHS student experiences is lacking. Research also suggests partnering with students reminds teachers and administrators that students possess unique knowledge and perspectives about schools that adults cannot fully replicate (Mitra, 2001).

Looking ahead, the methodology section draws upon the context of the literature review. There, I describe the methodology used to guide my understanding of the social and emotional experiences of recent graduates from WECHS. I outline systematic procedures for conducting this phenomenological study, including my decisions regarding data sources, sampling, data collection, data management, and data analysis. I also discuss methods for inductive and deductive coding and outline the limitations, assumptions, and delimitations of this study. Finally, I discuss protocols for developing positionality and establishing trustworthiness. I also draw on existing research as I discuss each of these factors.

STUDY ONE: METHODOLOGY

Within this methodology section, I rationalize the use of the phenomenological method, as well as the use of interviews as the primary data source. I describe the research setting, how I gained access to the site, and sampling. Since the researcher is the instrument of data collection in qualitative research, I discuss the process by which I methodologically explored my own researcher positionality. I also outline protocols for data collection, analysis, reporting, and methods employed to maintain validity of data.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of my study was to investigate ECHS graduates' perceptions of their high school experience. As a result, I focused on the insights of recent graduates of the ECHS program. I paid particular attention to the students' perceptions of how effective ECHS strategies were in preparing them to succeed academically and socially in the postsecondary environment. Social emotional learning (SEL) served as the theoretical framework for this study since data shows that social emotional learning yields a strong benefit in academic accomplishment (CASEL, 2015; Conley, 2007; Goleman, 1995). Fundamentals of SEL theory such as self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, decision-making, and relationship management all translate to on-the-job and academic success (Goleman, 1995). The methods I used within this study were designed to measure student perceptions of ECHS programming designed to support students both

socially and emotionally not only as they engaged in college coursework but also as they transitioned into the role of full-time college students.

I undertook qualitative research, specifically, the phenomenological method. A phenomenological approach allowed me to discover, interpret, and highlight student perceptions of the SEL support structures that were most valuable to a successful transition. It was my goal to capture the essence of the subjective and objective experiences from participant narratives (Creswell, 2014). In order to understand the perceptions of social emotional support, it was important to understand the shared experiences of early college graduates and their perceptions of the transition itself. Use of phenomenology provided rich and detailed understandings of the meaning participants ascribed to the transition process (Creswell, 2014). This method also allowed the results to emerge from the data instead of by a structured statistical analysis.

Among the various methods of data collection in phenomenological inquiry, interviews are the most common (Creswell, 2013). This research design follows the tenants of qualitative research, utilizing individual interviews, memoing, and reflection as the methods of data collection. These strategies align with Moustaka's (1994) phenomenological design. This methodology section also presents an explanation of the research concepts, the development of research questions, details of the research design, overview of phenomenologically based interviewing, methods of data collection, and related topics. In this study, I sought to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. How do early college graduates perceive their preparation for collegiate success?

2. How do early college graduates perceive their transition to the traditional collegiate setting in terms of college readiness skills and access to social support?
3. How do participants interpret what they experienced?

Phenomenology: Its Relevance to the Study of Early College Graduates

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) assert that qualitative research is concerned with how people make sense of their lives. Qualitative research, as compared to positivistic research, focuses more on theory generating than on theory testing. Merriam (1998) and Creswell (2013) provide criteria for qualitative research that will be used to establish the methodology within this capstone. Merriam (1998) posits that, while the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection, the true understanding of the phenomenon of interest must come from participants' perspectives and not the researcher's. Qualitative research must employ an inductive research strategy that captures emergent findings that are thick and richly descriptive (Merriam, 1998).

I employed Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological approach within this study, which is a modified Husserlian approach (Husserl, 1980). Edmund Husserl's method of inquiry was based on the premise that reality consists of objects and events (phenomena) as they are perceived or understood in the human consciousness (Vagle, 2014). Phenomenology is linked to constructivism, which emphasizes how the world appears to a particular person based on his or her views and experiences. In this capstone, I used phenomenological methods to explore the perspectives of early college graduates who have transitioned into the traditional postsecondary environment following high school. As with all phenomenological studies, I did not study the individuals themselves; rather, I studied how a particular phenomenon manifested and appeared in the lifeworld.

Phenomenologists do not believe that humans construct a phenomenological experience (Vagle, 2014). When humans experience the world, they find themselves in the experience (Vagle, 2014). Husserl was interested in what he called “turning to the things themselves,” rather than arriving at subjective meanings, objective meanings, or predictive and explanatory theoretical explanations of human experience (Vagle, 2014, p 29). Thus, the “unit of analysis” or phenomenon focused on participants’ experiences and perceptions about transitioning from high school to college.

Context of the Study

The research setting for this phenomenological study included students enrolled in an urban high school from 2012-2016. Early College High Schools (ECHSs) are unique partnerships between a local school system and an institution of higher education. Memorandums of understanding outline the responsibilities of each partner in relation to facilitating a seamless transition for early college students between high school and postsecondary. The research setting involved the student experiences at both the secondary and postsecondary institution.

Study Location: Willow Early College High School

The research location for this study was Willow Early College High School (WECHS) located in a large urban school district in the southeastern United States. I selected this school (a) because it was the first of its kind in the state that situates this study, (b) because of my accessibility to the school, participants, and the data, and (c) because of its administrative leadership guiding the school. WECHS has the distinction of being the first early college high school in the state in which it is located. This study, in an effort to expound on existing research regarding social emotional learning (SEL)

and its impact on the college transition, relied on data from this single southeastern ECHS. The district in which this public high school operates has 150 schools serving approximately 100,000 students. The school district serves a high percentage of high-risk urban students with high levels of poverty. The district has a student assignment plan based on managed choice, which simplifies the racial desegregation of its schools by providing students with transportation from their home neighborhoods to other parts of the district (Muñoz, Fischetti & Prather, 2014).

The school under study opened in 1961 as a comprehensive high school that traditionally educates students from high-poverty families within the neighboring community. Because of administrative turnover, changing neighborhood dynamics, and demographics, this school has performed poorly on state and district assessments over the last 20 years. Currently, the high school serves the student population targeted in the national ECHS Initiatives (i.e., first-generation college going, low-income, urban, and minority students) (Muñoz, Fischetti & Prather, 2014). The school operates using the school-within-a-school early college model, and select students have the opportunity to take courses on the high school campus, as well as at the neighboring community college.

In addition to poor performance on state and district assessments, WECHS students also have difficulties transitioning to and persisting through college. According to a 2015 data report from the National Student Clearing House, 26% of WECHS graduates enrolled immediately in college with 17% enrolling in a four-year institution and nine percent enrolling in a two-year institution. In 2013, the freshman to sophomore persistence was 59% (National Student Clearing House, 2015). Only six percent of WECHS graduates in the Class of 2009 graduated from postsecondary institutions within

six years (National Student Clearing House, 2015). Given these statistics, the use of WECHS as the site of study was useful to determine whether the early college model is effective in improving the transition to college and the perception of readiness.

Positionality

Conducting qualitative research requires the researcher to become an instrument of data collection but also requires the researcher to identify his or her own personal values, assumptions, and biases that may contribute and shape the way in which the data are interpreted (Yin, 2003). In this section, I focus on the frameworks used within this capstone to guide me in the practice of inquiry and introduces the methods used to ensure researcher introspection during the process of research. This capstone utilized the works of Milner (2007a) to frame positionality.

I followed Milner's (2007a) framework as a process of racial and cultural awareness, consciousness, and positionality. The premise of Milner's argument is that dangers seen, unseen, and unforeseen can emerge for educational researchers when they do not "pay careful attention to their own and others' racialized and cultural systems of coming to know, knowing, and experiencing the world" (Miler, 2007a, p. 388). Within this framework, Milner (2007a) outlines a four-step process to guide researchers in the practice of inquiry: researching the self, researching the self in relation to others, engaged reflection and representation, and shifting from self to system.

The first feature of this framework requires researchers to engage in critical race and cultural self-reflection. In this phase, I posed racially and culturally grounded questions about myself with the intent of bringing about self-awareness of the known (seen), unknown (unseen), and unanticipated (unforeseen) issues, perspectives,

epistemologies, and positions (Milner, 2007a). During this phase, I also explored the ways in which my own racial and cultural background influences how I experience the world, what I emphasize in my research, and how I evaluate and interpret others and their experiences. I am aware that the nature and depth of my answers may evolve or change throughout my research.

The second feature of this framework asks researchers to reflect about themselves in relation to others. This feature requires researchers to question the way the racial and cultural backgrounds of participants influence how they experience the world. In using this framework, I reflected on what my participants believe about race, culture and education in society and how they and I attend to these tensions in the research process. I also worked to balance my own interests and research agendas with those of my research participants.

The third feature of this framework is engaged reflection and representation wherein I engaged in reflection together with my participants to think through what is happening in the research community. Race and culture was at the core of this reflective activity. This feature allowed for both researcher and research participants' voices, perspectives, narratives and counter-narratives represented within the findings of this study (Milner 2007a). This also ensured that my voice, as the researcher, did not overshadow that of the participants. The final feature of this framework required me to shift from the self to the system. By shifting to the systematic and institutional level, I worked with participants to fight against the salience of race and racism in the cultural context rather than at the individual level.

Negotiating Access

As in the case with many teachers and principals who seek doctoral degrees while maintaining employment, conducting the study at the site where I work proved to be the most convenient and expeditious way to obtain the needed data. Convenience, however, needed to be secondary to a more important factor: minimizing bias. I had to think through the ramifications of conducting research at the site where I work, as well as think about ways to develop a data collection plan that was the least disruptive and as unobtrusive as possible. Those were the first steps to negotiating access to this site.

There were a number of gatekeepers contacted in order to conduct my research: (a) the high school principal, (b) the institutional review board at the school district, and (c) the institutional review board at my university. The school principal was helpful in gaining access to the site when we decided to partner our research in the form of this capstone. The principal saw a direct benefit for the students and an opportunity for the district and school administration to learn valuable information from the study so he was in support of the project. Issues of confidentiality were discussed with key shareholders and permission granted to access the data and interview participants.

I submitted separate institutional review board (IRB) proposals at the university and at the school district, seeking approval to undertake this study. Since graduates were the source of interview data, all participants already reached the age of majority at the time of this study (18 years of age) and did not require parental consent.

Data Collection

In order to provide an accurate account of the perspectives of the early college graduates, the primary source of data came from individual interviews. The interviews

were central aspects of the study as the students' voices were vital to data collection efforts. Giorgi (2009) articulates a concrete process for data collection and analysis, which guides such processes in this research study.

Merriam (1998) asserts that interviews are the most common qualitative tool used in the field of education. The primary way a researcher can investigate an educational organization or process is through the experiences of the individual people who make up the organization or process (Seidman, 2013). Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggest, "Qualitative interviews and ordinary conversations share much in common" (p. 12). Interviews, just like daily conversations, rely on the back and forth conversational patterns where people take turns talking to each other and where answers follow questions. This is a testament to the participants contributing to the study. They are partners in the process of creating evidence that document their experience. Both the interviewer and interviewee work together to create a "shared understanding" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p.14).

I used qualitative interviewing with individuals and groups to gather information that unavailable by other methods (Tierney & Dilley, 2002). This study used phenomenologically based interviewing to gather an in-depth and descriptive understanding of how the early college graduates perceived their preparation for college based on tenants of the social learning theory. In this approach, I used open-ended questions to build upon and explore participants' responses to those questions. The goal was to have participants reconstruct their experiences as dual enrollment students and their perspective of their transition to postsecondary. During interviews, I asked participants to reconstruct and reflect on their experiences. I sought participants' point of

view of their experience or their “subjective understanding” (Schultz, 1967, p. 20).

According to Van Manen (1990), “The aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experiences into a textual expression of its essence” (p. 36).

Although phenomenological researchers use a variety of interview strategies and techniques, the unstructured interview is the most popular, for it tends to be the most dialogic, open, and conversational (Vagle, 2014). However, conversational interviews can be more difficult to enact than a structured or semi-structured protocol. It is important to remember that phenomenological research is not experimental, comparative, or correlational (Vagle, 2014).

It is immaterial to the phenomenologist whether one interview is the same or different from another (Vagle, 2014). All interviews are exciting opportunities to learn something important about the phenomenon. In many phenomenological studies, it is not necessary, or even desirable, to ask the same questions in the same way.

In a phenomenological study, it is important to realize that the interview process is disciplined by the fundamental question that prompted the need for interview in the first place (Van Manen, 2013). Van Manen (2013) goes on to warn that proceeding without a clear understanding of the phenomenon might result in interviews that become speculative and not necessarily focused on the concrete phenomenon under investigation. In preparing the protocol for my interviews, I followed Van Manen’s (2013) advice, orienting myself with the phenomenon through a thorough review of the literature. When I got to the point of planning my interviews, I re-oriented myself to the phenomenon and social emotional learning theory by returning to the literature and writing about my own experiences in an attempt to bracket my own understandings of the phenomenon. As I

planned my interviews, I thought about them broadly. Phenomenology allows for an open mindset to gathering data (Vagle, 2014), so while I planned and mapped out my interviews in advance, I remained open for the impromptu discussions that arose. Even though I planned for three interviews with each participant, I adjusted my plan accordingly if I noticed something in an interview that warranted a follow-up conversation.

Interview Process

In order to best collect and analyze interview data, I recorded the interviews and utilized Rev.com to transcribe them. Recording interviews allowed me to return to my original data if something was not clear within a transcript. It allowed me to verify later for accuracy, also. Moreover, recordings allowed me to study my own interviewing techniques and improve upon them. This was specifically important as a doctoral student relatively new to interviewing and qualitative research. I followed Seidman's (2013) recommendation to always conduct a test to determine how well the recorder is picking up the sound of the participant's (and my own) voice before starting the actual interview.

Effective interviewing requires researchers to develop interview protocols. These protocols were discussed thoroughly in this section. True to phenomenology, this study relied on interview data from six participants who recently engaged in the experiences relevant to the study. In the case of this study, the experience of interest was the transition from high school to college. These participants engaged in a model of in-depth phenomenological interviewing, which involved a series of three interviews with each participant. Within these interviews, I sought to explore the meaning participants gave to the experience (phenomenon) within the context of their lives. Interviews established

context, provided details of the experience, and allowed participants to reflect on meaning.

Interview One (See Appendix 1A) focused on establishing context. This first round of interviews began in mid-February. My task during this round of interviews was to put the participants' ECHS experiences in context by asking them to tell as much as possible about themselves in light of their college transition, social emotional supports, and perceived readiness up to the present time in their college career. I asked participants to tell me about their experiences in education and as students, going back as far as possible within 60 minutes. I asked them to reconstruct their high school and college experiences, in terms of social emotional supports, to understand them in context to their educational experiences. The goal was for students to narrate a range of events in their past.

Interview Two (See Appendix 1B) concentrated on the concrete details of the participants' present lived experience as college students, thinking specifically of their readiness levels and support structures. The second interview took place seven to ten days after the initial interview. My goal was for participants to reconstruct those details. I asked students about their lives as college students and details of their experiences socially, emotionally, and academically. I asked students to reconstruct a day in their college lives, beginning from the time they wake up until the time they fall asleep. I asked for stories about their experience as high school and college students as a way of eliciting details (Seidman, 2013).

Interview Three (See Appendix 1C) reflected on the meaning participants attributed to their experiences and elicited details about the emotional connections

between participants' experiences in ECHS and life. This round of interviews took place seven to ten days following the second interview. I asked questions, such as "Given your educational experiences before participating in early college and given what you have said about your collegiate experiences now, how do you understand the early college experience in your life? What sense does it make to you now?" The goal in this phase of the interview process was to look at how the experiences of the ECHS program interacted to bring them to their present situation. This interview required participants to look at their personal experiences in detail and within the context in which it occurred. The third interview could only be productive if the foundation for it was established in the first two (Seidman, 2013). As participants reconstructed the details of their experiences, they selected events from their past and, in doing so, imparted meaning to them.

Seidman (2013) states that it is important to respect the structure of the three-interview series as each interview serves a purpose. While Seidman (2013) recommends a 90-minute format, I shortened the time frame to an hour given the age of the participants and their busy college and work schedules. I held each interview to an hour in order to provide unity to each interview. I spaced interviews from three days to a week apart in order to allow participants to mull over the preceding interviews but not allow enough time to pass that they lost connection between the two. Spacing in this fashion allowed me to work with participants over a two to three-week period. This allowed me to develop a positive relationship with the participants, as well as allowed for internal consistency of what they say.

Sampling

This study relied on purposeful sampling. In interview studies, it is not possible to employ random sampling. Randomness would be prohibitive in an in-depth interview study (Seidman, 2013). Informants provided consent to participate, so there is always an element of self-selection in an interview study. Self-selection and randomness are not compatible.

I relied on six participants within this study. Vagle (2014) states that there is no magic number of research participants; instead, he believes that the phenomenon calls for how it is to be studied. Dahlberg, Dahlberg and Nystrom's (2008) advice regarding sample size states, "The question of sample size is essential in research when using statistical calculation. In lifeworld research, the selection of informants is different.... One idea is that the more complex as phenomenon, the larger the group of informants" (p. 175). Vagle (2014) asserts that if it makes sense, relative to the phenomenon under investigation, to spend a lot of time with one or two participants in a particular context over an extended period, then one or two participants will be sufficient. However, if spending relatively little time with 10 to 15 participants makes sense relative to the phenomenon under investigation, then it is appropriate to do so (Vagle, 2014). Conducting three interviews with six participants allowed me to meet the criteria of both sufficiency and saturation. Six participants also allowed me to reach saturation or a point in the study at which I began to hear the same information reported. To interview more participants might have outweighed the practical exigencies of time, which is especially important in doctoral research.

Because the early college program is only in its seventh year of existence at WECHS, the pool of informants depended upon the criteria that the participants must be graduates of the program between the years of 2014 and 2016. I selected a representative sampling of students from each of these three cohorts. These students represented the first class of students to matriculate through the on-campus program. I petitioned graduates to participate on a voluntary basis. I selected informants based on the following criteria: (a) the number of college credits attempted while in high school, (b) their first-generation college attender status, and (c) their enrollment in postsecondary institutions in the semester immediately following high school graduation. I chose these criteria based on factors directly related to the early college program. By selecting students who had attempted at least 12 hours as a dual enrollment student, I ensured that a student had the requisite experience to describe how prepared they felt to be successful at the university as an early college graduate.

As I discussed in the introduction and literature review, the ECHS model targets under-represented students who are minority, English language-learners, low income, and/or first-generation college attenders. Given that WECHS' student population is 71.5% African American and 81% received free or reduced lunch, these elements of the model were met in sampling. However, it was also important to represent the perspectives of first-generation students in the study population. The final criterion is that students had to, at the time of the study, be either enrolled full time in a two- or four-year postsecondary institution. This is important as this study focused on student perspectives of the transition from high school to postsecondary. I made efforts to ensure that participants represented both two- and four-year college programs.

I conducted a contact visit with participants prior to the actual interview. This aided in selecting participants and helped build a foundation for the interview relationship. It also laid the groundwork for mutual respect and allowed me to explain the project. I informed all prospective participants about the purpose of the study and provided information about its design. Following the description and assurances of confidentiality and anonymity, students provided a letter of consent containing a detailed description of the study. Another purpose of the contact visit was to assess the appropriateness of a participant for the study. I made note of participants that seemed most suitable.

Data Management

A vital step in the data analysis process was to create and maintain a deliberate data management plan. I maintained and organized data physically, as well as electronically. Time spent on developing this plan may have saved hours of frustration (Seidman, 2013). First and foremost, I needed to keep track of participant information and consent forms throughout the duration of my study. Once the interview process began, it was vital that I labeled audio recordings of interviews accurately and managed the extensive files that developed in the course of working with the transcripts of these interviews. In order to maintain an audit trail, I needed to keep track of decision points in the entire research process (Seidman, 2013). This required attention to detail. Concerning security, I saved and stored all electronic documents in two separate places: on my password-protected computer and on a dissertation specific and password protected storage device. The storage device and physical, handwritten documents were stored in a locked file cabinet in my home office.

Data Analysis

The act of data analysis involves a number of processes that guide the researcher in making sense of his or her data. Fetterman (1998) described analysis as a test of the researcher's ability to think and process information in a meaningful and useful way. Data analysis can also be described as a cyclical process of analyzing (taking the data apart), synthesizing (putting it together differently), and finally theorizing to contribute to the end result of the research, a phenomenological report that contributes knowledge and information to the field of study on early college.

Seidman (2013) states that in order to work most reliably with the words of participants, the researcher has to transform the spoken words into a written text to study. Each word a participant speaks reflects his or her consciousness (Vygotsky, 1987). To substitute the researcher's paraphrasing or summaries of what the participants say for their actual words is to substitute the researcher's consciousness for that of the participants. To do so would also veer away from the goal of phenomenology, which stems from the belief that a participant's words embody their thoughts. Because my research relied on three interviews with each of the participants, I hired a transcription service through Rev.com whose employees transcribed audio recordings verbatim.

In this capstone, I utilized Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological analysis method adapted from the Husserlian approach. Giorgi (2009) advocates a commitment to whole-part-whole-analysis and cautions against setting up an a priori criteria to determine meaning units. Following these underpinnings and assumptions, I first conducted a holistic reading of the entire text. During this step, I read with the goal of

becoming involved and attuned to the whole data collection event. I took notes, but simply spent time becoming acquainted with the data.

Next, I conducted my first line-by-line reading. Within this reading, I took careful notes and marked excerpts that appeared to contain initial meanings. I placed parentheses around large chunks of text and made margin notes that yielded possible questions for future interviews or follow-up with participants (Vagle, 2013). As I read and made notes, I relied on my own journal to explicate some of my own thoughts. This followed the theory of bridling as it allowed me to harness what was being read versus what was being thought.

The next step in the descriptive analysis process was to craft follow-up questions for participants. Once I read the whole text and completed the first line-by-line reading of the text, I then reviewed margin notes in order to devise follow-up questions for each participant (Vagle, 2013). These questions were designed to clarify intentional meanings that I predicted, at the early stages of analysis, might be important to describe, interpret, or represent the phenomenon.

Once transcribed, I conducted a second line-by-line reading of follow-up interviews. This reading involved articulating meanings based on the markings, margin notes, and the follow-up with participants. During this phase, I copied and pasted electronically each excerpt or part of each participant's transcript that contained potential insight into the phenomenon. It was not until the third line-by-line reading that I began to articulate my analytic thoughts about each part. I conducted this analytic process with each participant's interview. Finally, I conducted subsequent readings across individual participants' data, with the goal of looking for what Giorgi (2009) calls *meaning units*

and then *invariant structures*. Once tentative manifestations emerged, I assigned them preliminary titles (Giorgi, 2009). Through this process, I noticed new things and therefore revised, added, and deleted the analytic thoughts from earlier in the data analysis process.

Giorgi (2009) warns that a descriptive analysis, in principle, does not try to go beyond the given and that the researcher's description does not try to resolve ambiguities unless there is direct evidence for the resolution in the description itself. To follow this guidance, I became skilled at not only noticing when I saw ambiguities in the descriptions, but I also resisted the urge to interpret those ambiguities, both of which point back to Giorgi's call for the psychological phenomenological reduction in the form of bracketing.

While many qualitative methodologists emphasize the importance of triangulation in order to more fully justify claims, and therefore increase the validity of any themes, assertions, and categories, Vagle (2014) does not believe triangulation is necessary. Vagle (2014) asserts that sometimes a single statement, from one participant, at one moment in time is so powerful that it need not be amplified. Another time, there might be convergence across multiple data moments and this contextual variation, as Dahlberg et al. (2008) like to call it, provides deep and rich insights into a particular shape the phenomenon has taken. For this reason, this capstone relied on individual interviews, as well as memos and researcher reflection as sources of data.

Throughout the data collection process, I wrote memos and reflections to document my personal thoughts, concerns, and questions. Through observer comments and memos within my transcripts and my personal capstone/dissertation diary, I was able

to document “the more subjective side” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 114) of my study. Reflection during the study served to help me maintain an accurate record of procedures, methods, and analysis; it also assisted with maintaining my awareness of my relationship with the setting and participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Because I was (and still am) so intricately involved in the implementation of the early college program, it was essential for me to use written reflections to examine my feelings, concerns, motives, disagreements, mistakes, and assumptions throughout the process.

In terms of qualitative computer software programs, Vagle (2014) suggests that if a program such as NVIVO helps the researcher, then he or she should use it, but if it feels uncomfortable and stifling, then do not. Instead of using computer software, I used post-it notes, colored highlighters, and a spreadsheet to organize, highlight and code words, phrases, and other chunks of data. This first-cycle open coding of data allowed me to categorize the data and become intimately engaged with it (Bright & O’Connor, 2007). This manual process was helpful, as it capitalized on my visual and reader/writer learning styles.

In this study, I incorporated a combination of deductive and inductive coding. I developed a provisional starting list of codes prior to fieldwork (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). This list stemmed from the conceptual SEL Logic Model, the list of research questions, and problem areas identified in the literature. From an inductive standpoint, other codes did emerge progressively during data collection. Despite using a combination of inductive and deductive coding, I operated on a “theory later” approach rather than “theory first” (Wolcott, 1994). It is the goal of phenomenology to remain open to what the site has to say rather than force-fitting the data to pre-existing codes

(Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). I anticipated that several codes would change and develop as I moved forward in my field experience. Some codes do not work while others decay (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). It would be negligent not to look for new ideas that might present themselves during fieldwork. In an inductive process, I worked back and forth between the themes and the database until I established a comprehensive list of themes. I then looked back at data from each theme to determine if I needed to gather additional data. I utilized complex reasoning skills throughout the process of research as I moved between the inductive and deductive logic process (Creswell, 2013).

Trustworthiness and Validity

Validity is vital in any empirical study. However, Lincoln and Guba (1985) substitute the notion of “trustworthiness” for that of validity. They argue that qualitative researchers must inform what they do by concepts of “credibility,” transferability,” “dependability,” and “confirmability”. Kvale (1996) sees the issue of validity as a question of the “quality of craftsmanship” of the researchers as they make defensible knowledge claims (p. 241). To ensure validity and maintain the quality of my craftsmanship, I established credibility, dependability, and confirmability by maintaining internal consistency, bridling my own knowledge, and engaging in member checking with participants.

In phenomenology, discussions of validity are often marked primarily by a consideration of the researcher’s sustained engagement with the phenomenon and the participants who have experienced the phenomenon (Glesne, 2014). This sustained engagement requires the researcher to be open and sensitive to the phenomenon under

investigation (Dahlberg et al., 2008; Van Manen, 2013) throughout all phases of the study. The three-interview structure incorporates features that enhance the accomplishment of validity by ensuring internal consistency. It places participants' comments in context and encourages interviewing participants over a period of one to three weeks. This allows researchers to account for idiosyncratic days and check for internal consistency of what participants say. In addition, by interviewing multiple participants, the researcher can connect his or her experiences and check the comments of one participant against those of others (Seidman, 2013). Internal consistency over a period of time leads one to trust that he or she is not lying to the interviewer (Glesne, 2014).

From a technical standpoint, phenomenological researchers have tended to use the technique of bracketing as a method of maintaining validity. This technique stems from Husserl's philosophical notion of the phenomenological reduction. Giorgi (1997) stresses that phenomenological reduction demands that the researcher bracket "past knowledge about the phenomenon encountered, in order to be fully present to it as it is in the concrete situation in which one is encountering it" (p. 240). For Giorgi (2009), the task of bracketing does not mean removing all past knowledge. While bracketing has become a common practice in qualitative research, Dahlberg, Dahlberg & Nystrom (2008) move from bracketing to a practice they call "bridling" to accomplish two primary goals. First, bridling involves the essence of bracketing in that pre-understandings are restrained, so they do not limit openness. Second, bridling is an active project in which one continually tends to the understanding of the phenomenon as a whole throughout the study. The

methodology section offers a more in-depth discussion of the process used for bracketing throughout the data collection and analysis process.

Maintaining transcripts of interviews aids in creating validity as it allows readers to see that the interviewer has kept quiet, not interrupted his or her participant. Readers can also see that the interviewer has not tried to redirect the participant's thinking while he or she was developing it. In this way, the participant's thoughts seem to be his or hers and not the interviewer's. This audit trail serves as evidence of the research process (Glesne, 2016).

Another method I used to maintain validity was to conduct member checking with all participants and engage in peer examination during data analysis (Glesne, 2016). Member checking involved taking the data and preliminary interpretations back to the study participants and providing them the opportunity to read and discuss the information gathered. Participants were encouraged to correct any notes that were not transcribed as they had intended. While not the same as member checking, peer examination also involves the practice of engaging a trusted source to provide feedback on the findings as they emerge. Glesne (2016) urges qualitative researchers to obtain external reflection and input on their work. Following the completion of my open coding process and upon the identification of the themes that emerged from the data, I met with my colleague to review my coding and rationale. She helped me identify potential bias emergent in the interpretation. This helped to maintain internal validity. Merriam (1998) stated that "internal validity deals with the question of how research findings match reality" (p. 201).

Qualitative research is concerned with the accurate recording of what occurs in a research setting rather than determining if the findings hold up beyond the specific research subjects and setting involved in a particular study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Because of the small sampling of this study, I acknowledge the limited generalizability of this study. Further, there are no compelling reasons to determine if the students are typical or atypical of other ECHSs across the United States. This uncertainty may result from the attitudes of the students in the study; the attitudes, focus, and philosophy of the community college partner; and the ethnic composition of the ECHS. The generalizability determination is therefore left to subsequent research and professionals conducting similar research to conclude its fit into the general scheme of their work (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Transferability is enhanced through a detailed description of the research context and the assumptions that are central to the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By writing descriptively, I addressed the issue of external validity (Glesne, 2016). External validity affects the extent to which findings from the study may be generalizable. By using verbatim quotes to substantiate the themes and by providing enough description of the issues and context, “readers will be able to determine how closely their situations match the research situation, and hence, whether findings can be transferred” (Merriam, 1998, p. 211).

Ethical Concerns

While procedures such as obtaining consent from participants and requiring IRB approval from both the public-school district and my supervising university provided protections of human subjects, these measures are fallible. There are many ethical concerns to consider and address when conducting qualitative researchers. As a

researcher, I have an obligation to their participants and to my work to perform due diligence in thinking through the ethical challenges that may arise within my study (Glesne, 2016).

Before beginning my study, I provided participants with a precise description of data collection methods. I was explicit about the procedures and the use of the results. I emphasized the voluntary nature of the study. Creswell (2014) emphasizes that people should participate in research through voluntary and informed consent. I compensated the graduates of the ECHS for the participation. At no point did I infer or offer compensation during the course of the research. If at any time participants wished to withdraw from the study, they were able to do so.

To protect the rights of the participants in the study, I procured the authority of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Use of Human subjects in Research at the University of Louisville to conduct the research. While there were no risks involved to the participants in this study, I assured participants that their responses and participation would remain confidential. I implemented multiple measures to ensure the confidentiality of study participants. First, data collected during the study were stored in a location to which only I possessed access. Second, the identities of the interviewees were kept confidential, and pseudonyms were used when the findings were recorded (Creswell, 2014). In addition, any reference to instructors were kept anonymous. I will destroy all data that could compromise the confidentiality of the participants upon completion of the study.

Because I was the primary data collection instrument in this qualitative study, the issue of researcher bias is of foremost concern. I acknowledged certain biases and

expectations. Assumptions and preconceived notions were noted and shared with members of the dissertation committee, who monitored the study and were alert for evidence of bias. I established protocols for positionality, using the framework established by Miler (2007a) for working through seen, unseen, and unforeseen dangers in the practice of inquiry. I further discuss researcher positionality as part of the findings section.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

I make several assumptions in this study. The first assumption is that the interview questions were able to get to the heart of the research questions. The second assumption is that participants would provide truthful responses with the assurance of confidentiality. I assured participants that there would be no direct link between their true identity and the data/experiences they shared during the interview process. I used pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality at all times during the research process.

Although this research study was carefully constructed, there were some unavoidable limitations. First, I conducted research using a small sample size of WECHS graduates, who were in their first semester of college. The sample was also obtained using a single research site chosen for its close proximity to my hometown. The small sample size and single site combine to prohibit generalizability across a larger population. However, generalizability is not the goal of this qualitative study. Instead, my goal was to present the experience of the people interviewed in compelling enough detail and in sufficient depth that those who read the study can connect to that experience, learn how it is constituted, and deepen their understanding of the issues it reflects (Seidman, 2013).

Because I conducted this study over a short period of time, this research only represented a snapshot of the students' collegiate experiences and did not follow them to the point of degree completion. The final limitation is the reliance on interviews as the primary source of data. In using interviews, I eliminated the randomization of sampling. With all interviews, there is an element of self-selection. Also, another inherent concern with interview data is that the information obtained was indirect and filtered through the views of the interviewees. The limitation comes in that not all graduates were equally able to articulate and perceive their experiences. To minimize the impact of this limitation on study findings, I utilized member checking as a way to allow participants to review interview transcripts and correct any inaccuracies.

Summary

In the methodology, I outlined the methodology of this study, beginning with a description of the methodological framework and the statement of the specific research questions that guided it. Additionally, I discussed the research setting and participant selection. I also shared my subjectivities by describing my role as the researcher and my positionality and impetus for wanting to conduct this study. In the data collection section, I described the qualitative interviews, which will generate most of the data for this study. An explanation of data analysis process and my descriptions of the trustworthiness of the data collected, ethics and confidentiality, and strengths and limitations. I also foreshadowed future findings and discussed how such findings would be reported. In the findings section, I present the findings from this study.

Foreshadowing of Future Findings

The findings for this capstone are written for two primary audiences. The first audience is program administrators and operators who are running and/or making decisions about ECHS programs. The second audience is practitioners engaged in the same sort of work as those studied but in different settings. Policymakers may comprise a third audience. The goal here would be to persuade policymakers, governing boards, legislatures, and agency officials to buy-in to the benefits of ECHSs on helping under-represented students transition successfully to college. Regardless of the audience, the intended effect of this capstone and the findings discussed in the next section will be to show connections between the findings and the problem of collegiate underrepresentation. Findings seek to improve decision-making and to provide guidance for actions related to the development and delivery of ECHSs.

This study was designed around the idea of emergent themes. Once themes developed from interview data, I examined whether patterns and emergent themes from my study corroborated with findings from other studies. I looked particularly at data related to social learning theory as this is the theoretical framework used to guide this study. I then presented findings based on the major themes that emerged from participant interviews. Based on existing literature, I anticipated how themes related to the importance of a positive school environment, the impact of family members, the necessity of support from peers and teachers, and the importance of decision-making would emerge from the interview data. However, I “bridled” this background knowledge during my interviews so as not to influence the direction of participant conversation.

The findings section presents data using a traditional presentation mode. It provides readers with what Erickson (1986) calls the “natural history of the inquiry,” so readers can see clearly what was done, by whom, and how. Data is presented in a way that allows readers to see how key concepts emerged over time, which variables appeared and disappeared, and which categories led to important insights. The report provides basic data in focused form (vignettes, organized narratives, or data displays), so readers can, in parallel with the researcher, draw warranted conclusions (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). I connected all results to the study’s two over-arching research questions and the theoretical and conceptual frames that drove this capstone.

STUDY ONE: RESULTS

In this section, I present the findings from my research, in which I examined the early college high school experience and the perceived college readiness from the perspectives of early college graduates. The information in this section presents data gathered to answer the following research questions: 1) How do early college graduates perceive their preparation for collegiate success? (2) How do early college graduates perceive their transition to the traditional collegiate setting in terms of college readiness skills and access to social support?

I organized this section into three subsections. The first subsection looks at the early college experiences of graduates as they were first introduced to the culture of college at 16-18 years of age. Subsection one addresses my first research question. The second subsection of this findings section presents findings relevant to my second research question and seeks to understand how early college graduates perceived their transition to the traditional college setting. The third subsection provides a summary of findings. The data in this section derive from three interviews with six informants whose profiles are presented below (Table 1). Each participant was a graduate of Willow Early College High School (WECHS) between 2014 and 2016. Each graduate completed at least 12 college credit hours while in high school, and each transitioned immediately to college following high school graduation. True to the vision and mission of early colleges, all informants were first-generation college-goers. Informants were in good academic standing at the time of the interviews, and each participant had already

scheduled courses for the fall 2017 semester. Within each section, I discuss the predominant themes that surfaced from the data relevant to the informants' experiences either as early college students or as traditional college students following graduation from high school.

Table 1. *Informant Profiles*

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Current College/ University</i>	<i>Current Classification</i>	<i>College GPA</i>	<i>Credits Earned in E.C.</i>	<i>Degree Earned (if any)</i>	<i>Intended Major</i>	<i>Graduation Date from WECHS</i>
<i>NW</i>	Bellarmino	Junior	3.56	60	Associate's Earned in HS	Art Administration	2015
<i>RH</i>	Bluegrass Community College	Sophomore	3.5	33	X	Criminal Justice	2016
<i>KT</i>	Lindsay Wilson College	Sophomore	3.0	18	X	Undecided	2016
<i>SW</i>	University of Louisville	Junior	3.0	31	X	Global Science & Criminal Justice	2015
<i>BM</i>	University of Louisville	Junior	3.6	35	Associate's	Psychology & Criminal Justice	2014
<i>NR</i>	Indiana University Southeast	Sophomore	3.7	35	Associate's	Business	2015

Revisiting Researcher Positionality

As discussed in my methods section, I made note of my own positionality throughout the research process. As it was defined in the methodology section, bridling refers to setting aside or rendering past knowledge as non-influential. Dahlberg and Dahlberg (2003) contend that bridling requires the researcher to gain some distance from the phenomenon so that they might see the phenomenon in a different way. When we take on a phenomenological attitude in phenomenological research, we are bridling. We

are “actively waiting for the phenomenon, and its meaning(s), to show itself” (Dahlberg, 2006, p. 16). This requires taking on a phenomenological attitude as opposed to a natural attitude (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2003), where we do our everyday living. In the natural attitude, we do not reflect as we are living – we just live.

Respect, trust, and genuine care are pivotal constructs upon which a guiding theoretical principle of the early college model was built (Cravey, 2007; Nakkula & Foster, 2007; Newton & Vogt, 2008). During interviews with students, it was necessary for me to bridle this information. While I waited for the notion of relationships to emerge as a phenomenon in interviews, I remained open. I know through the experience of working at WECHS for ten years that without healthy and trustworthy relationships, the students would be less likely to access the necessary instruction or information that would prepare them academically and socially to persist onto the postsecondary environment. Similarly, I know from experience and the research literature that relationships are integral to the exchange of social emotional learning between a student and those in his or her network (Elias et al., 1997; Durlak et al., 2011). My own experiences, coupled with the need to understand how the perceptions of the ECHS model among program graduates, is the motivating force behind this capstone. To understand the effectiveness of the ECHS program in building social emotional skills, it was necessary to examine student perceptions of their early college experience, particularly in regards to their college readiness skills.

Another area that impacts my positionality within this study and created the need to bridle is my role within early college at the site under study. While I was not a member of the formal school administration or grant-writing committee that established

the foundation of ECHS model at Willow, I have played a supportive role in the selection of students and courses since the beginning. As the Director of Early College, I now play a pivotal role as I coordinate the partnership between the high school and the college partner, facilitating a smooth transition to postsecondary institution for the early college students. My responsibilities require me to work closely with the teachers, students, parents, and college personnel who are involved with the project. My own perceptions and attitudes about ECHSs are shaped by my duties as a Director of Early College and by the conceptual model put forth nationally by the Gates Foundation and Jobs for the Future.

As a person in a position to influence the implementation of the ECHS model and as a researcher, I feel tremendous self-imposed pressure to balance the practice with the theoretical. Over the course of time working with the ECHS program, there have been a variety of academic outcomes among the students, and it is difficult to determine why some students are able to succeed in college course while others are not. Informal conferences with students throughout the course of the program have revealed a multitude of observations, attitudes, and perceptions voiced by students. While high school administrators and college coordinators hear the voices of these students, there is still no organized and purposeful investigation designed to understand what strategies and principles of the early college model contribute to the success or failure of the students. Personally, I want to know what it is that gives some students the ability or motivation to succeed while others are met with negative outcomes for which they are not prepared. This desire to better understand student motivation and success led me to enroll in the Ed.D. program and carry out the very research in this capstone.

Coding Methods

As indicated in the methods section, the development of overarching themes for the study occurred during a process of multiple cycles of initial coding as I collected interview data during April and May, 2017. Saldaña (2009) asserted that coding is “an exploratory problem-solving technique without specific formulas to follow” (p. 8). This statement was appropriate to my process in that the study was exploratory in nature, and my goal was to examine early college from the perspective of graduates, privileging their voices by documenting their experiences with their words. While there are many types of coding methods for qualitative data, I utilized in vivo and descriptive coding were most appropriate for my first round of coding. I began with in vivo coding, seeking to prioritize and honor the informants’ voices since the voices of adolescents are often marginalized (Bahou, 2011; Cook-Sather, 2006; Kozol, 1991; Mitra, 2001). I found coding their actual words enhanced and deepened my understanding, as an adult, of their cultures and worldviews. In vivo coding is applicable to action and practitioner research (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010; Fox, Martin, & Green, 2007; Stringer, 1999), since one of the primary goals of such research is to frame the facilitator’s interpretation of terms “that informants use in their everyday lives, rather than in terms derived from the academic disciplines or professional practices” (Stringer, 1999, p. 91). This practice also helped me to maintain my positionality and ensure I grasped what was significant to the participant. I kept track of codes that were participant inspired rather than researcher generated by keeping in vivo codes in quotation marks. When something in the data stood out, I applied it as a code.

Following my first cycle of coding with in vivo, I had pages of participant inspired codes. I decided to incorporate descriptive coding as the first step in analysis by summarizing large passages of interview transcripts using a word or short phrase. These descriptive codes were topics (what is talked about), not abbreviations of the content (substance of the message) (Tesch, 1990). These descriptive codes allowed me to take a categorized inventory of the interview contents across all informants and all interviews. This formed the groundwork for second cycle coding and further analysis and interpretation (Wolcott, 1994, p. 55). Table 2 below is one created using common categories from descriptive coding within each of the three interviews. This table displays the 15 most frequently mentioned descriptive categories from first cycle coding. This table also identifies which participant and in which of the three interviews the theme emerged.

Table 2. *Descriptive Categories from Cycle 1 Coding*

Descriptive Codes	<i>Informants</i>																	
	NW			RH			KT			SW			BM			NR		
	#1	#2	#3	#1	#2	#3	#1	#2	#3	#1	#2	#3	#1	#2	#3	#1	#2	#3
Peer Support	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X		X	X
Faculty Support	X	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
High School v College		X			X	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X
E.C. Students – Treated Different		X			X			X	X				X	X				X
Experiences as Foundation	X	X			X					X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
“Outsiders”/ Disconnected	X	X						X	X								X	
Relationships / Comm. – Professors		X			X	X			X	X		X			X		X	X
Struggles after HS	X	X	X	X					X			X	X					
Time Manage / Study Habits	X	X			X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Opportunities of E.C.	X			X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Networking	X									X	X	X	X			X	X	X
Perceptions of Preparation		X	X			X			X			X			X			X
Support Beyond HS	X				X		X						X			X		X
Degree Plans	X		X	X			X			X			X		X	X		X
Improving EC	X	X	X			X			X	X		X			X	X	X	X

For second cycle coding, I chose to use axial coding, which is consistent with many phenomenological studies. The purpose of axial coding is to strategically reassemble data that were “split” or “fractured” during the initial coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 124). As Boeije (2010) explained, axial coding’s purpose is “to determine which codes in research are the dominant ones and which are the less important ones...and to reorganize the data set: synonyms are crossed out, redundant codes are removed and the best representative codes are selected” (p. 109). Grouping

similarly coded data reduced the number of initial codes developed during first cycle coding (in vivo, descriptive) by sorting and labeling them into conceptual categories. During this cycle, “the code is sharpened to achieve its best fit” (Glaser, 1978, p. 62). Below is a sample of axial coding and related categories from this study (See Figure 3). First cycle coding yielded descriptive categories related to developing academic identity, a commitment to degree plans/completion, and lessons learned during early college. During second cycle coding, these categories were collapsed under the umbrella of college foundation.

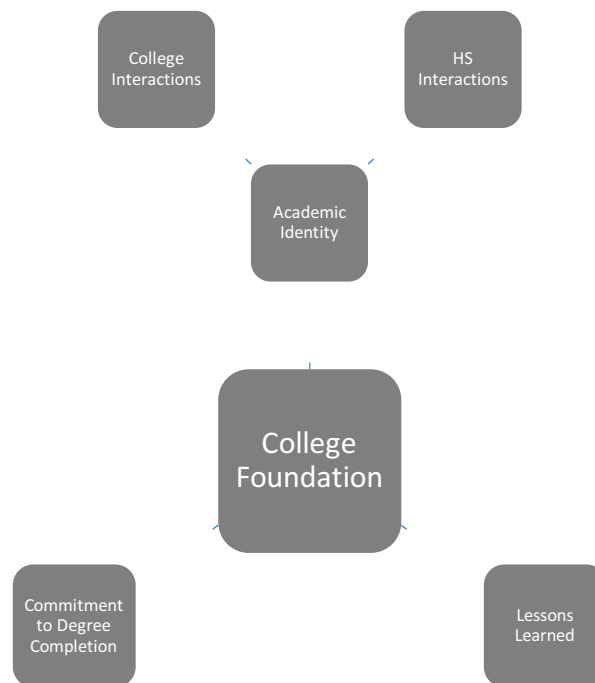


Figure 3. *Example of Axial Code and its Related Categories*

Preparation for Collegiate Success

The early college high school (ECHS) curriculum consists of high school and college-level work blended into a single academic program. The goal of the ECHS program is to minimize the barriers to high school and college, to ease the transition from secondary to postsecondary school, to prepare the students for and attract them to higher education, and to increase the high school graduation rates.

(Glick, 2006, p. 2)

To put the above quotation in context, participation in early college is not for everyone. Students are expected to work hard and manage dual roles and expectations. In exchange for their effort, students can earn college credit and a high school diploma in the same amount of time as their peers in traditional high schools would earn a high school diploma. Early colleges are designed to meet the needs of under-represented students who are highly motivated to succeed in high school but may not have the necessary academic preparation to do so. The early college model is rigorous, and students are expected to perform successfully in both the high school and college setting.

To increase the odds that early college students will graduate from high school and transition to the postsecondary environment, Hoffman, Vargas, and Santo (2010) identified three essential resources that must exist. These resources include a dependable funding source for higher education; a rigorous academic program that scaffolds academic demands seamlessly between high school and college; and a network of support systems that includes schools, families, and the community that will follow them through high school and into college. The adult partners in the initiative must ensure that students are not only academically and emotionally prepared but also that they have developed the

necessary social emotional skills associated with college readiness. This approach to fully developing early college students is evidenced in the five interrelated core principles of early college (only four principles are relevant to this study). These core principles are as follows:

- Core Principle 1: Early colleges are committed to serving students underrepresented in higher education.
- Core Principle 2: Early colleges are created and sustained by a local education agency, a higher education institution, and the community, all of whom are jointly accountable for student success.
- Core Principle 3: Early colleges and their higher education partners and community jointly develop an integrated academic program so all students earn one to two years of transferable college credits leading to college completion.
- Core Principle 4: Early colleges engage all students in a comprehensive support system that develops academic and social skills, as well as behaviors and conditions necessary for college completion.

Early college experience should provide a strong foundation upon which students are able to make a successful transition to the traditional postsecondary environment.

The informants in this study provided in-depth reflections on the impact early college had on their academic, social, and personal development in the context of preparing them for college after high school. Four themes emerged from the data as the informants described their transition experiences: (a) faculty support, (b) the impact of student peer group support, (c) early college as a foundation for the college experience, and (d)

navigating the college culture. See below for visual display of themes and subthemes (See Figure 4).

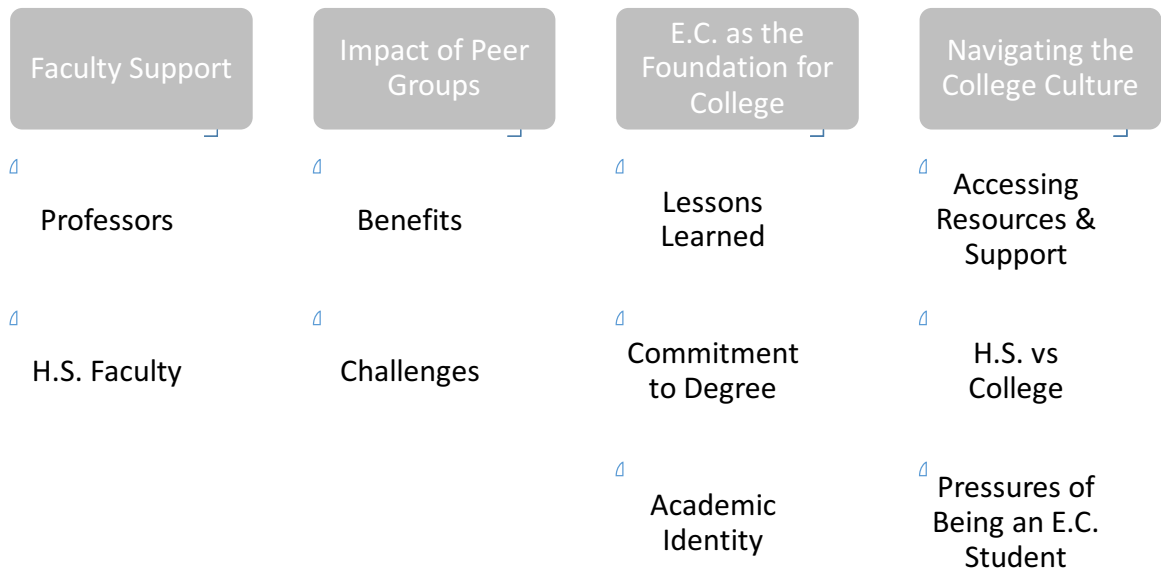


Figure 4. *Perceptions of Preparation – Themes and Subthemes*

The first theme, faculty support, was the most predominant theme that emerged from graduate interviews. This theme refers to the involvements of teachers on student development and provides awareness of how informants were impacted by the relationships with early college faculty and administrators. The second theme, the impact of student peer group support, depicts the positive and negative outcomes of the early college cohort model. The third theme, early college as a foundation for the college experience, portrays student perceptions of academic and social preparedness upon enrolling in the traditional college environment. Finally, the theme focused on navigating the college culture describes the informants' ability to maneuver through and conform to

the values, beliefs, and behaviors central to the postsecondary culture. These four themes combine to describe graduate perceptions of college readiness.

Faculty Support

All informants participating in this study acknowledged that the early college faculty and administrators were a source of support while in high school and during their experiences as traditional college students. BM claimed that while high school teachers tended to “baby” them, the early college faculty set college-level expectations for academic, social, and behavioral outcomes. Informants discussed their perspectives on their relationships with high school faculty and college professors as well as their capacity to establish personal caring relationships. To the graduate informants, these relationships were indicative of their genuine concern for the students and their collegiate success. Informants described faculty as friendly, caring, great mentors, and most commonly “family.” Two informants even described their early college advisors as “mother hens,” who looked over their shoulders and never gave up on them. NW, a graduate who started taking college classes when she was a sophomore, said this about her early college mentor: “She was a big supporter. She just always...you know, when things went downhill, she always had the answer like, ‘That’s okay. This is what we can do. It’s going to be better.’ So she’s always like the mother hen.”

When asked about the types of supports offered to her as an early college student, KT stated that her early college mentors were always there to offer emotional or school-based support. She said, “If you were willing to put in the work, the administrators, teachers, and professors were willing to meet you in the middle to ensure that you were successful.” KT also felt that her teachers gave her advice on personal matters, as well.

She stated that having that relationship with her early college mentors helped her because she had someone to lean on when she needed motivation and reassurance. KT went on to say that her early college mentors continued to assist her even once she graduated and transitioned into the traditional college environment. She stated of this experience:

If I am having a hard time with an assignment, or a course, or anything school and sometimes even personally related, I can contact any of the early college administrators to seek advice. It does not seem like something big, but when you're 100 miles away from home, and no one from high school attends your college, it means a lot.

SW, a graduate who participated in the early college on-campus program during his senior year, talked about the persistence of his mentors in helping him learn that it is okay to seek out help:

When I hear the word support, I just automatically think about the people who have helped me out, and even if it was just a pep talk, you know those things, even the small things, helped me become the person I am today. My foundation is strong. My support system is strong, but that's because you all saw my potential, and you all were like, "Hey, we're all here to help, so let us help you." I want to thank you all for that, by the way, because that was amazing. A lot of people give up easily, but you all are resilient, and you keep coming back like, "Look! We can help you. Just let us do our job and what we love." I'm not who I am today because of me. I'm who I am because of the people who have helped me become who I am today.

Related literature supports that there are many non-cognitive skills tied to college readiness that students need to be successful in college (Ramsey, 2008). Central to Conley's (2007) definition of college readiness are key cognitive strategies, or foundational skills, that apply to the broad intellectual skills that students must develop in order to be successful in college. Persistence, motivation, and help-seeking are a few of these skills (Conley, 2007). Graduate perceptions indicate that their early college mentors were vital in helping to develop these key college readiness skills.

The Impact of Student Peer Group Support

One of the key factors in learning is the impact of community – the people whom we learn with and from (Tinto, 2003). Cohorts are central to the early college model in that they allow schools to provide common supports. These cohorts increase motivation by providing social emotional support, study groups, and positive role models for dealing with common problems (Newton & Vogt, 2008). Lieberman (2004) notes that combining academic and emotional counseling in the ECHSs works better than a single focus on academics because problems are often intertwined. This cohort-model influence has a formidable impact, both positively and negatively, on the students of WECHS.

When the early college students are scheduled for classes at the local community college, administrators attempt to place students in classes together, especially core courses required for high school graduation or courses common across all academic program plans. The rationale for such scheduling is to create a support system for the students while not creating a college class specifically of high school students. The collective power and influence of friends proved both beneficial and problematic for students.

Student Peer Groups – Benefits. Research indicates that peer support has significant influence in the promotion of student learning (Lerner & Brand, 2007) and the development of necessary social skills that young people need to be successful in college and beyond. Peer support for the informants in this study came in many forms. In its simplest form, early college graduates showed appreciation for having a familiar face to sit with in their college classes. Eventually, this appreciation grew into a reciprocal relationship where, if students missed a class, they had someone they knew who they could get information and assignments from. As bonds formed, students began to rely on members of their cohort for help with schoolwork – tutoring, peer review, and study groups. They also admitted to relying on each other to help clarify discussions and concepts from class that they may not have understood. RH stated:

If you had someone in your class with you that you went to school with, then you were lucky. Because you had someone to study with, and someone that knows what's going on, they know what to do. You can count on them.

KT stated that her relationship with peers in the cohort grew into one in which her peers were like her siblings. SW said of his cohort support, “Being in class with early college peers was very supportive because when you're struggling, they see that you're struggling. The people in class, we were all like a big family.”

Student Peer Groups – Challenges. In the same way that the close association of peer groups can foster a positive community of learners, it can also reinforce the less desirable characteristics commonly associated with the high school environment, such as excessive socializing, misconduct, disruptive behavior. Since early college students range from 16-18 years old, emotional maturity may have played a considerable role in

negative behaviors students incurred in the college classes in which multiple early college students were enrolled. However, the informants in the study expressed great disdain for those peers who engaged in negative behaviors. While NW noted the benefits of having other high school students in her college classes, she also noted that it was distracting at times. She believed the classes with multiple early college students enrolled had a lower level of maturity than classes where she was the only non-traditional college student.

NR told a story about one of her early college peers who was notorious for sleeping in class. NR said she had classes with him throughout high school and that he slept through most of them. When he joined the early college program, she thought his behavior would change. However, it did not. He continued to sleep despite warnings from his professors. Even NR and his early college peers tried to convince him that his behavior was unacceptable. She stated she was not surprised when the student did not finish the semester.

KT shared a personal story in which she and her peers in college algebra were called to the assistant principal's office at the high school following an email from her professor regarding their behavior. KT stated that a group of about six WECHS students began mocking the professor and, in an effort to be funny, shared the joke with one of their college-aged peers in an attempt to bond. Following class, the student informed the professor of their joke. The professor then informed an administrator at WECHS about the class behavior. KT described the entire experience as "embarrassing." While having her peers in class had its advantages, it also served to reinforce undesirable behavior. It was negative behavior such as this that prompted many of the informants to disguise their

high school status from professors and from their college-age peers in an effort to adopt the cultural traits of traditional college students.

Placing students in cohorts had its benefits and its challenges; however, the positive experiences outweighed the negative. Students were able to work together to support each other academically and socially. Students formed both formal and informal study groups with their early college peers, an academic behavior associated with college readiness and collegiate success. Conley (2007) outlined social and emotional attitudes and behaviors of students who are successful in college. Among these are study skills, time management, awareness of one's performance, persistence, and the ability to utilize study groups.

Learning to Navigate the College Culture

During the course of interviews, informants discussed the challenges they encountered as early college students. As first-generation college students, informants did not have the luxury of learning college norms and customs from their parents. Based on the perceptions of informants, information and strategies related to college success were primarily learned from older early college peers and through explicit lessons on college success learned while in the early college program. BM stated:

Nobody in high school talked to us about the difference in expectations in high school compared to college. They explained that you will get more freedom, but I just thought that meant moving out of your parents' house. I didn't really know that meant the classes are two days a week. Less time in class. You have to teach yourself. It wasn't until my first semester in early college that I understood college expectations and how the college culture worked.

NR also stated:

Early college offers an extra support system. As opposed to when you leave high school, you go to college, and there's no one there to really answer your questions unless you have a really good relationship with professors on your own. No one is really there to help you navigate through college life and academics. I've experienced that with other people that I know who weren't in early college. My boyfriend, he wasn't in early college, and he tells me all the time that if he had a support system like I did he would probably be more successful in school. I think that having that support system from early college..., it really helps you feel more confident navigating the new experiences and you don't feel like you're just thrown in the pool.

In this regard, informants reported a number of challenges that described their experiences learning to understand the culture of postsecondary education. Informants felt the following issues were explicitly addressed during their involvement with early college and directly impacted their ability to transition to the traditional postsecondary setting. These issues are broken down into the following subthemes: accessing resources and supports, differentiating between high school and college expectations, and handling the pressures of being an early college student. Table 3 below identifies which informants and in which interviews these subthemes were discussed.

Table 3. *Challenges to Navigating College Culture*

Challenges	Informants																	
	NW			RH			KT			SW			BM			NR		
	#1	#2	#3	#1	#2	#3	#1	#2	#3	#1	#2	#3	#1	#2	#3	#1	#2	#3
Resources & Supports		X	X		X	X			X		X				X	X		
Differentiating Expectations	X	X	X		X			X	X		X		X	X	X			
Pressures of EC	X	X	X		X			X	X			X	X	X	X		X	X

Accessing Resources and Support. College courses often require students to be “independent, self-reliant learners” (Conley, 2007, p. 5) who are capable of recognizing and understanding when they are having problems and who also understand ways to access support from peers, professors, and other campus resources in order to overcome those challenges. One of the goals of the early college program is to guide students to become these independent and self-reliant learners.

Graduate informants acknowledged that, while there were some logistical problems because WECHS is not located on the college campus like many other early colleges across the country, program mentors helped them overcome these obstacles. Because students are bussed from the high school to the college every day, transportation limited students in their ability to seek help from professors during typical office hours and hindered their ability to engage in group tasks with traditional college students. NW stated:

I tried to meet with professors as much as I could outside of school, like, go into their offices during office hours and stuff. I didn’t really have transportation. So it was during any free time that I had at the community college, I would do that.

But then again, they wouldn't really have office hours during the morning time because that's when most classes are.

Another student said that, at the advice of her early college mentors, she resorted to emailing her professors when she had questions or concerns since she could not make it to their office hours. She also said she learned how to have quick conversations with her professors before or after class.

While these concerns were not identified by all informants, they were a challenge for some. From a policy perspective, this represents the challenge of having students governed by two systems that are not formally aligned with the goal of student success in mind. Informants in the study indicated that, while the traditional high school environment did not equip them with the necessary skills or confidence they needed to access college resources and support, their involvement in early college did.

SW discussed how, after transitioning to his four-year university, he encountered a professor who was always "on his case." He said he was bothered by the fact that the professor seemed to hate him. He said, "Every time I messed up, he put me on blast in the class. He was like, 'You can do better.'" Frustrated by what seemed like the only adult who did not like him, SW reflected on his previous experiences in early college and thought about how he was instructed to interact with professors. He decided to stay after class like many of his peers and began making appointments during his professor's office hours. In doing so, he was able to create a positive relationship with this professor. He claimed he is now closer with this professor than any other. He now recognizes that the professor was merely pushing him to what he felt was his potential. This professor now serves as a mentor and a key resource for SW within his studies as a political science

major. He now feels that because he is more comfortable talking to this professor that he achieves better grades in the courses in which this professor teaches.

For some students, instead of moving along the continuum to becoming more “independent and self-reliant” during their early college experience, they developed a greater dependence on their high school teachers and administrators to assist them with their college assignments. For example, NW, who wanted to impress her professors and not stand out as being less competent than her college-aged peers, shared that she would go back to her high school English teacher or other content area teachers and ask them to proofread and revise her college essays. She wanted her work to be perfect by the time she submitted it to her professors. She said, “I felt safe in the high school setting. So I was trying to stay in the high school setting, even though I wanted to be a college student. I didn’t really know how to do that.” Even though NW, who earned her associate’s degree while in high school and has since moved on to a four-year university, is no longer concerned with the perception of perfection, she still emails her former high school teachers when she struggles with an essay. Like NW, NR also considers and relies on her former early college teachers and administrators when she needs a resource she cannot find on her college campus. She said:

Just recently, I had a conflict with one of my instructors, and I messaged one of my former professors and the Director of Dual Credit at the local community college on Facebook and was like, “How do I handle this situation? I don’t know what to do,” and she talked me through it. Then, after I calmed down from being upset with the instructor, I went back to his class and was able to resolve the

conflict and get all the issues handled. I just think having those connections from early college really helped.

All of the informants recognized the strong support system of early college and commented that if they ever needed anything, they knew they could still rely on these individuals. However, all informants had grown comfortable reaching out to professors and adults on their current campus. In fact, they shared that their interactions and persistence in reaching out to the instructors often made the difference between their failing and passing courses. Some shared their initial fear of approaching professors but that, over time, they came to realize that most professors are quite approachable and genuinely care about student success. BM shared that he felt overwhelmed in his first criminal justice class, which was held in a large lecture hall. The moment he felt himself struggling, he decided to move to a seat in the front of the room so the professor could “see his face” and started staying after class to ask questions. He acknowledged that this was not typical for him. He soon found a passion for the content and was highly motivated by the energy of the professor. This energy, which he believed might not have been as easily felt in the back of the room, motivated him to work harder in the course. He is now majoring in criminal justice.

Developing the confidence and knowledge necessary to access and utilize college resources, such as professors and peers, is a key foundation of college readiness (Conley, 2007). While five of the six informants were slow to let go of their high school resources, all informants eventually learned to advocate for the resources and support they needed to achieve academic success at the college level.

Differentiating Between High School and College Expectations. The transition from high school to postsecondary environment yields new opportunities and new rules for students. The social and cultural expectations in college are often very different from those experienced in high school, especially for those students attending low performing high schools. Navigating those differences can pose many challenges, particularly once students learn that most of the rules they learned during their K-12 experiences are either “discarded or modified drastically” (Conley, 2007, p. 4). One informant commented that college expectations needed to be taught prior to high school and enforced throughout all classes and grade-levels. BM spoke regularly of being “babied” in high school, which put him and his peers at a disadvantage when they reached the traditional college environment. Informants revealed that deadlines in high school were often fluid, and there were no consequences for late or missed deadlines. While teachers often warned students that “this will not be acceptable in college,” they never held students to those standards and expectations. Collier and Morgan (2008) state that college success is more than just academic proficiency; it is also necessary for students to understand their professor’s course expectations and be able to apply their skills to meet those expectations. All six informants in this study stated that they were not held to the same academic rigor in high school as they were in their college classes – neither in early college nor in the traditional setting. Many students said that, prior to enrolling in early college, they had never studied and managed to make A’s and B’s. BM displayed frustration over high school teachers offering multiple extensions on assignments:

They would put their foot down and say, “It’s due on this day.” I would have it down, and it made me really mad when on that day I would come in and 50% of

the class didn't do it, so the teacher would say, "Ok, well, I'll give you another week." It just made me mad. I spent my time doing this, and you're giving us another week because they didn't do it.

This practice, common in high school, is in direct contrast to what is expected of students in college. Early college high schools are designed to introduce college expectations, college exposure and experience, and college-level challenges to students that attend them (Nakkula & Foster, 2007). Using the structure of the program at WECHS, teachers and administrators worked directly with student on time management skills and the importance of adhering to deadlines in order to equip students with knowledge of these expectations (Nakkula & Foster, 2007). As first-generation college-goers, students at WECHS relied on the early college faculty to impart on students the necessary skills needed to develop their competencies, abilities, and confidence to succeed in college.

For all informants, being able to balance their status as high school and college students concurrently was a true test of how well they could manage their time and whether they could discern the appropriate priorities at both academic institutions. As early college students, they balanced 12-15 collegiate hours while taking one or two classes at the high school. The number of courses at either institution varied depending on the individual student. When asked how students prioritized their time, students were clear that the high school and college courses needed for high school graduation took precedence over elective courses for their academic program plan (APP). For many of the informants, time commitments also included part-time jobs, sports, clubs, and other extra-curricular activities in addition to family commitments and obligations.

Time management skills are essential as a college student (Adelman, 2006; Conley, 2007; Hooker & Brand, 2009). Learning to prioritize responsibilities and allocate appropriate amounts of time to specific tasks takes time, practice, and skill. The informants indicated that there was a heavy burden on them to manage the demands of two sets of workloads with two sets of conflicting expectations. Informant BM discussed his first semester of early college where he had both high school and college classes:

I feel like having them both at the same time the first semester was tougher than the second because you have to change your mindset on how things work. My high school classes were easy, but they still took up time during the day. I didn't really have to study for them, so I built up bad habits in my college classes of not studying and procrastinating. I quickly realized I had to take my work more serious.

Informant RH echoed this sentiment and went on to add, "You're used to having teachers reminding you of deadlines and keeping you on track. Then suddenly you realize professors aren't going to bug you about it. All you have is yourself."

Handling the Pressures of Being an Early College Student. Early college students at WECHS share the common identity attributes by virtue of the populations of students that the program targets—students who are minority, low-income, first-generation college-goers, and English language learners (JFF, 2005). Ogbu (2004) defined collective identity as a sense of "belonging," a way in which people develop a sense of who they are. This collective identity as an early college student gave students an elite status within WECHS since the population of students participating in early college was small relative to the total population of the student body. That position

heralded them into a notoriety that drew attention from administrators, faculty, and staff. These students often found themselves in the spotlight, being reminded daily that they are ambassadors for the program and models to younger students.

Within the context of the interview, I asked informants the question, “What does it mean to be an early college student?” Informants responded in a variety of ways to this question. SW focused on the opportunities and resources provided by early college by saying, “Not only did I get the campus experience, but the people that I met along the way, they were amazing.” NR also emphasized the support she acquired through participation in early college. She said, “It means you get an extra support system. You got to college and you’re prepared. People tell you what to expect.” RH discussed the increased expectations faculty and students had for early college students. He stated, “When I told people I was in college and high school at the same time, they tend to think highly of me. Like, “How did he accomplish that.”

Other students focused on the social changes associated with participation in early college. NW shared her feelings that she no longer felt like she was in high school. She said, “You’re kind of outside of the high school.” BM followed this up by saying, “You have to give up your social life. You don’t have to, but if you want to get the most out of your education, you probably should.” For KT, involvement in early college meant she had to make sacrifices. She said, “I had to make sacrifices, but the payout was so much better than any of those things.”

The aforementioned responses depicted the pressures informants felt in their dual role as high school and college students. On the one hand, informants recognized the value of the program and the supports they would gain from participation; however, on

the other hand, they acknowledged the pressure of having to make sacrifices not typical for their age. KT shared why making sacrifices was worth the payoff:

To me, being an early college student meant I was the first person to ever go to college in my family. I was the one laying the groundwork for my own future, and I was in control of it. It meant having to make sacrifices, but that ultimately led to me being ahead of others. It meant that sometimes I would work a double shift and still have four hours of homework to do that night when I got off. But the end payout was so much better than anything else. I got a head start on the education that I might not have pursued if early college was not placed in front of me.

NR stated that playing sports and engaging in extracurricular activities in addition to taking college classes made for long days, but it gave her a chance to reconnect with the students at the high school. She said:

A lot of times as an early college student, you feel kind of left out. The people in the building, your classmates, they don't really know you anymore because they don't see you. You don't get to interact with the other students. It was good to be able to come back and still feel like part of the school.

NW echoed this pressure by stating:

Because you're not physically in the high school most of the time, you're outside of it. You don't really get to see the students in the high school, and you're really not part of the high school community or culture anymore. You kind of have to force yourself to be there for games and other stuff so that you can kind of remember that you're still in high school.

Another pressure students discussed during interviews was the attention they received for being the only cohort of high school students attending the college and earning college credit. For five of the informants participating in this study, the unwarranted attention and notoriety only added to the pressures they were already experiencing. The students sought to fit in on the college campus and, in most cases, did not want to be identified publicly as high school students. When I asked KT how she felt about her identity being known as a high school student the conversation went as follows:

Lawrence: Talk to me about your relationships with your peers, teachers, and professors.

KT: The relationship with professors was interesting because some professors knew that we were in high school, and other professors did not. I realized that the professors who were aware of the fact we were in high school would often times talk to us differently than they would talk to our peers.

Lawrence: How did your professors talk to you differently if they knew you were in high school?

KT: Professors would talk to us as if they were more so our parents than professors. It did not bother me that much, but it made it very evident to some of our other peers that we were not as old as they were, nor were we as experienced as they are in collegiate level courses.

While KT was indifferent as to whether or not she was identified as a high school student, RH preferred that his professors and college-aged peers did not know that he was

in high school because he did not want them to think less of him. He said he did not want anyone to know. He just wanted to fit in. NR had a different reason for wanting to keep her high school status a secret. When asked if it was supportive to have early college peers in her college class the conversation went as follows:

NR: Yes. Absolutely. I think it was good to have someone who knew what we were going through, because like I said, most of our classmates unless we told them, they didn't know we were high school students on campus.

Lawrence: Was that not something you wanted to tell them? Did most of them not know that you were a high school student?

NR: Most of them did not know, unless there was a teacher that had a couple of us, multiple times. Mr. E. had early college students before, and once he saw that there were adults checking in on the students, he figured it out. That's not normal. Personally, I didn't tell just because I wasn't there to be showing off and be like, "I'm a high school student." There were college students there that couldn't do the work. They were impressed once they did find out. They were like "What? This kid, she's only 17, and she's in college."

Lawrence: If they didn't know that you were a high school student, they treated you as equals? How did that work out?

NR: They didn't know, so they treated me like another classmate. Some of them could see that I did my work every day, and I turned

in homework, so they would maybe ask me for help or be like, “Hey, did you do that assignment? Do you remember this? How did you feel about that?” I think once I told people that I was a high school student, and when I was doing better than them, they were kind of intimidated. Then they stopped talking to me.

KT, RH, and NR reflected on the underlying frustration that many informants expressed regarding the differential treatment they perceived at the college. These practices tended to challenge their ability to acclimate to the college culture and build confidence and their educational identities as college students. In their research on early college educational identity, Nakkula and Foster (2007) claimed that college experiences help reinforce the “knowing” that a high school students need in order to form the foundation of who they are as students. They point out:

Knowing is different from believing. Knowing...is rooted in experiential evidence. Whereas believing is largely an abstract, future-oriented phenomenon – “I believe I can succeed in college, based on my success in high school” – knowing has a stronger, immediately relevant, experiential foundation: “I know I can succeed in college because I have begun to do it. (p. 155)

Being able to blend into the college culture and build traditional relationships with peers and professors is vital to building the confidence needed to not only believe in their abilities as college students, but also to know that they can be successful on their own, without the assistance of high school mentors.

It should come as no surprise that students who participate in early college programs are challenged not just academically but emotionally and physically, as well.

Informants discussed the long days they faced every day and the level of discipline required to be successful in their dual roles as high school and college students. When asked to describe a typical day as an early college student, informants depicted days that started as early as 5:30AM and ended around 11:30PM. Informants confessed that days were longer if they had final exams or a high stakes assignment due. Informants' descriptions of a typical day were uniform between the hours of 7:30AM – 2:30PM when they were engaged in the school day at either WECHS or the college campus. However, when students parted ways at 2:30PM, their lives and responsibilities took on very different forms. KT stated that she would normally work from 3:00PM to 11:30PM because she was in a management role at her job. When she got home, she would begin homework at 11:45PM and work until she could no longer stay awake. NW, who played varsity volleyball for WECHS, described her evenings during volleyball season as follows:

I played volleyball during my junior and senior year. I would go from my classes at the end of the day, get changed in the locker room, and then go to practice.

When we had a game, I'd get done around 8:00 and take the bus back to the school. Sometimes, I could get the bus driver to drop me off at the bus stop on the highway, and then I'd catch the city bus to go home. From the bus stop, I'd have to walk a mile to get to my house.

For students such as KT and NW, time management became a vital skill to their success. They realized that in order to continue participation in work and sports that they had to utilize their time well during the school day. Students said the structure of the day for early college students provided them ample opportunities to check email, contact

professors, get organized, study, and seek peer or teacher revision for essays. These students indicated that the key was to utilize this time in a productive manner. Whereas some students played video games on their phones or iPads or socialized excessively, successful students admitted to maintaining their productivity. Students reiterated time and time again that time management and effective study habits were some of the most beneficial lessons learned while in the early college program. These skills transitioned with them from early college into the traditional college setting.

The Early College Experience – Setting the Foundation

Professors expect college students to meet certain non-academic standards, such as being able to navigate complex bureaucratic requirements; adapt to new expectations, learning styles, professors, and surroundings; utilize good study habits and time management strategies; and engage in new kinds of social relationships (Karp, 2011). Rath, Rock, and Laferriere (2013) state that many community college students leave school because they lack the non-academic skills, such as social skills, study habits, and time management strategies. Early college sets out to alleviate these problems by providing college experience for students who are traditionally under-represented in postsecondary. The goals of early college are to alleviate the low high school graduation rates common in urban schools and increase the number of first-generation college students entering postsecondary education (Berger et al., 2010). Studies of Early College High School (ECHS) programs have yielded promising results for student informants, including improved high school attendance (Edmunds et. al., 2012); decreased dropout rates (Vargas & Quiara, 2010); increased high school graduation rates (Adams, 2010); improved college readiness and college completion rates (Nodine, 2009); and promising

methods to enhance student social emotional learning skills (Goleman, 2005). Evidence from this study provides concurring evidence that early college has had a positive impact on students' commitment to attending postsecondary institutions after high school.

Being prepared for college requires more than merely having the intellectual capacity to complete college work. Intelligence is vital, but there are also social and emotional skills that must be developed to ensure a successful experience for college students. When informants in this study were asked the question, "How prepared did you feel to continue your college education?" and "How did your participation in early college influence your college plans?" they provided responses that described the lessons they learned about how to be successful in college, the commitment they had to continue in the traditional postsecondary environment, and the development of their academic identities.

Lessons Learned. When informants were asked in interview three to describe how prepared they were for transitioning to the traditional college environment, responses included:

I felt very prepared, especially for my major. (SW)

I feel like I was very prepared. Especially since I already had two years of college under my belt. I feel like it's just been continuing on in college and not like starting college. Had I not joined early college, I think it would have been a little bit more difficult. I think I would have not known any of the resources that were available for me. When I started college, it was easier for me to know,

“Okay, I need to go look for tutors. I need to go look for people and my advisors.” (NW)

I believe that I was beyond prepared; I was a woman on a mission, and nothing could stop me. Early college gave me the push that I really needed to go to school. I was not a fan of high school that much, and it really wore me down; college wasn't like that, though. (KT)

I feel like I was 90% prepared. When I left here (WECHS), I guess I felt like I had it in the bag because we had transportation, internet access, and computers here. We had basically everything you needed for college. But when you get on your own, things are different. You have to start providing for yourself. I had to get a job, so now I have to schedule things out better and be more responsible. (BM)

I wasn't afraid of going to college. I knew what college work consisted of. I knew the papers I was going to have to type up. I just basically had everything I needed. I wasn't too nervous. I wasn't too scared. (RH)

Because I was going to a college, I was already familiar with, I felt like I was pretty prepared because I knew if I was struggling in a class I knew the campus so I knew where to go to for help. If I needed math tutoring, I knew where to go for that, or if I needed to connect with someone for working on a paper, then I knew

where I could go. Nothing about the assignments were challenging to me, but there were students that were dropping the class or that had to redo their essays multiple times. I was like, “I don’t understand how you don’t get this,” but apparently it wasn’t easy for them. (NR)

The early college program provided students the opportunity to learn in an environment where there were caring adults and resources to support and encourage their academic and social development, as well as building their self-confidence as college students. During their interviews, informants shared examples of challenges and successes they experienced while in the program and emphasized the value of the lessons learned. SW described the time in which he learned the importance of advocating for himself. During his senior year at WECHS, he took Spanish 101 at the college. He had already taken Spanish 1 at the high school level, but he needed a foreign language course for his college program plan. He decided to stick with Spanish. While many of the early college students struggled with the class’s online format, SW seemed to excel. However, during one of the final grade-checks, SW discovered he had a failing grade. He described how Ms. Martin sat down with him and helped him draft an email to his professor inquiring about his grade. The professor replied, stating that even though SW earned A’s and B’s on all his assignments, he failed to open any of the instructional links in Blackboard. SW advocated that, since he had a solid foundation in Spanish from high school, he did not need to access the links in order to complete the assignments. The professor reviewed SW’s performance throughout the semester and concluded that his work had been consistent over the semester. He changed SW’s grade from an “F” to a

“C.” Conley (2007) lists persistence and help-seeking as key learning skills and techniques necessary for college readiness. SW exemplified the importance of advocating for yourself with professors to further academic success. By reaching out to Ms. Martin for support, he was also able to draft an email that effectively communicated his concerns and drive to resolve the problem.

Conley (2007) identified that a key academic behavior for academically successful students is “the ability to participate successfully in a study group and recognize the importance of study groups to success in specific subjects” (p. 16). Enrolling multiple early college students in the same college course reinforced the students’ acquaintance with using study groups. The benefits and challenges of having other students to study with were mentioned in interviews by a number of students. RH described how being in college classes with this early college peers allowed the students to study together and utilize each other as resources. He said:

If you had someone in your class with you that you were in early college with, you were kind of lucky. Because you had someone to study with, and someone that knows what’s going on, they know what to do. You can count on them. We used to get together all the time and have big study groups.

If there was a common concern among the group with the material, they would seek out one of the traditional college students in the class or go to the professor together as a group. The steps RH outlined in this discussion show that he and his early college peers were developing academic behaviors that would carry over into their experience as traditional college students.

Commitment to Degree Completion. Nakkula and Foster (2007) found that success in college-level coursework positively influenced students' view of themselves as learners and as future college students. Each of the graduate informants in this study immediately transitioned into the traditional college setting following graduation from WECHS. Each of the informants were also in good academic standing at the time of their interviews. Three of the informants had already graduated with their associate's degree (one earned their associates while attending WECHS) and were currently enrolled in four-year programs. Two of the informants were enrolled in a four-year college and one participant was enrolled in a two-year program with plans to transfer to a four-year program after completing his associates. Each of the six informants expressed an interest in attending graduate school immediately following their bachelor's degree. All the informants credited their participation in early college as the experience that gave them the confidence that they could attend college and be successful. This reinforces Nakkula and Foster's (2007) concept of "knowing" previously discussed. Enrolling high school students in college classes on the college campus places them in the college culture, which is an integral component in their development of college knowledge and seeing themselves as college students. BM stated in his interview that he felt prepared for the college experience, calling it "no different" in terms of academic rigor. He credited early college with pushing him to do more. He said without early college, he probably would have "settled" for getting his associate's degree and getting a factory job. However, his experiences at WECHS and the support he received while there reinforced that he could do more. BM has already earned his associate's degree and is now working on a double major in psychology and criminal justice at the university where he attends.

Although he is undecided on his career plans at this time, he is certain that after graduation he will pursue either his master's or Ph.D.

NW, who earned her associate's degree while attending WECHS, concurred that her experiences in the early college program resulted in a more solid understanding of the college culture. She described her early college classes as being the first time she ever had to study. Coursework leading up to enrollment in early college had always been easy for her, so the college courses forced her to learn how to effectively study and manage her time. The experience, she said, allowed her to get used to the higher expectations of college. When she started school at a private liberal arts school for her degree in art history, she said it felt like she was continuing on with college rather than starting college.

RH joined the early college program during his senior year at WECHS. Among other courses, he enrolled in MAT150 and, because of lower ACT scores, had to take the MAT100 lab. Knowing that math was a weak subject for him, RH worked very diligently to meet the high expectations of the course and navigate his way through his first online course. However, regardless of his efforts, he was not able to pass the course. Despite struggling and the likelihood that he would not pass, he persisted on in the course. His belief was that, even if he did not pass, at least he could learn something from the experience. When asked if he ever thought about dropping out of early college he said, "No, never. I'm going to be the first person in my family with a degree. Since my father got locked away while he was in college, and my mother took care of me on her own, I've always wanted my degree. That's one thing I really look forward to, so I never thought about dropping out."

A key component of the early college initiative is to provide students with the opportunity to experience what it is like to be in college by taking college courses, interacting with other college students, and utilizing the college facilities (Hooker & Brand, 2009). These experiences allow high school students to see themselves as true college students and to build their academic self-esteem and confidence to transform their dreams into a reality. Rather than merely believing they are capable of attending college, they know they can.

Academic Identity. The informants' perceptions of their identities, academically and socially, during their time as early college students and as they transitioned into their roles as traditional college students revealed how demanding it was psychologically for the students to operate in their dual roles as both high school and college students. Nakkula and Foster (2007) in their study on academic identity of in early college students found that self-confidence or educational self-efficacy (confidence in one's educational abilities), pride, shame, motivation, and future orientation combine to form what we commonly call "identity" – that is, a core, consistent sense of who we are (p. 151). Managing these components of identity is challenging enough for typical high school students. However, the process becomes that much more challenging for early college students who are also negotiating the college persona, as well. Statements from informants revealed that their identities were ever-changing.

Interviews with informants contained comments alluding to the challenges students faced switching between the role of high school student and college students. Some made comments that described how they hid the fact that they were still in high school while they were on the college campus. Two of the informants referenced how

they felt young and inexperienced sitting in classes with adults. One informant went as far as to say she liked being in college classes without members of her early college cohort because it allowed her the opportunity to “watch and learn” from the other college students. She said, “I felt I got more out of the classes where I was the only person from the high school in the class. I felt like I could focus more on my part and not get distracted in class. I could be a true college student.”

NR described her experiences at WECHS taking regular high school classes after spending the day on the college campus:

I felt like the teachers didn't try to treat us like we were different or special, which I don't think was a bad thing. I think that it was weird enough to be out of the building...you kind of felt separated from the rest of the building, so I think the teachers kind of tried to bring you back in. They didn't necessarily give you special treatment.

RH disagreed slightly by stating he felt the teachers at WECHS were more lenient on the early college students when they were in the building. He said he could freely go into the library and into the hallway and, because of his status as an early college student, nobody questioned his motivations or where he was supposed to be. For RH, being in early college provided him more freedom, and he liked that younger students looked up to him. For this reason, he said he tried to act more mature.

The challenge of having to switch between their high school and college identities reflects their concerns with possible judgments, stereotypes, opportunities, restrictions and treatment (Steele, Purdie-Vaughns, Davies, Ditlman, & Crosby, 2008) tied to their collective college identity. The issue of their identities and the challenges associated with

who they are and what they represented emerged in the theme related to peer-group impact, as well as here in the discussion of college readiness.

Summary

The early college data from Jobs for the Future (2013) reveal that the early college program is opening doors to higher education and career possibilities for many young people who may not graduate high school and who have not traditionally transitioned successfully to the college environment without remediation. When students are presented with the opportunity to challenge themselves academically and experience success comments like those expressed within this section lend credibility to the early college initiative. Overall, the informants' perceptions of their early college experience were positive, and they revealed that participation in the program allowed them to gain critical academic and social skills that improved their transition to college and the likelihood that they will persist on to degree completion. This finding is consistent with the early college core principles and extant literature (Adams, 2010; Durlak et al., 2011; Edmunds et. al., 2012; Goleman, 2005; Nodine, 2008; and Vargas & Quiara, 2010).

The themes and subthemes presented the informants' descriptions of their early college involvement and provide valuable insight into how they lived and experienced the dual roles of high school and college students. There were successes, challenges, and lessons learned with regard to how students navigated the college culture, collaborated with peers, recognized the influence of teacher expectations, and how students created their academic identities.

All the graduate informants who participated in this study successfully transitioned to college immediately following graduation from WECHS and were either

enrolled in a two- or four-year university. All students were in good academic standing at the time of the interviews, and all students expected to be back in the fall of 2017. Informants all exhibited excitement for their major or program of study, and all had aspirations of earning future degrees. This next section of the literature review explains how early college informants perceived their college readiness and the impact their early college experience had on their experiences after high school.

College Readiness in the Traditional Postsecondary Experience

This section focuses on participant experiences in the traditional postsecondary setting. The literature review section of this study discussed the competing definitions of college readiness: the traditional definition, which relies on standardized test scores, such as the ACT; and Conley's (2007) definition, which includes indicators of college readiness that extend beyond an examination of the content knowledge needed for collegiate success. One of the goals of early college is to assist students in meeting more than just the academic benchmarks associated with college readiness. The goal is also to help them meet the non-academic indicators needed to be successful academically and socially. For this reason, I analyzed interview data in light of Conley's (2007) four dimensions of college readiness as well as literature on social emotional learning. These findings are listed below.

Webb and Mayka (2011) reported that close to 3,000 students from 64 early college schools across the country graduated from high school in 2009. Ninety-one percent of those students graduated with some college credit, and 44% had one or more years of college credits under their belts. Jobs for the Future's (JFF) student information system, in conjunction with the National Student Clearinghouse, has gathered substantial

data on early college students related to graduation rates, college credit accumulation during high school, and college enrollment following graduation from high school. What is not as readily available in the literature is an account from the early college graduates' perspective of what their experiences have been like since enrolling in college, particularly as it relates to their college readiness skills and educational preparation. The findings in this section derive from interviews with early college graduates who are now in their first, second, or their year as traditional college students. The results provide answers to the research question: How do early college graduates perceive their transition to the traditional postsecondary environment in terms of their college readiness skills and access to social support?

The findings presented here seek to answer the research question by examining the data through the lens of Conley's (2005, 2007) framework of college readiness. The results are presented as they relate to the five key characteristics of college readiness: (a) the need for academic remediation in college, (b) key cognitive strategies, (c) key academic content, (d) academic behavior, and (e) contextual skills and awareness. Additionally, I sought to examine the role of social emotional learning in the development of the students' contextual skills and awareness.

Key Cognitive Strategies

Key cognitive strategies, also referred to as habits of the mind, are described as the intelligent behaviors students must adopt and refine in order to be college ready (Conley, 2007). Conley's model of college readiness identifies seven key skills associated with college success such as: intellectual openness, inquisitiveness, analysis, interpretation, precision, problem solving, and reasoning and argumentation. These

strategies are closely aligned to the process of critical thinking. Graduate interviews allowed for the examination of students' perceptions related to developing cognitive skills focused on critical thinking. For purposes of this study, graduate perceptions related to their development of cognitive skills focused on how they described their ability to think critically. Participant results indicated that their early college experiences allowed them to develop self-confidence in their own intellectual capabilities. SW elaborated on the importance of honing his critical thinking skills by stating:

I remember my first political science course as a traditional college student. It seemed like no matter what, I struggled on his exams. I know politics, and I know my constitutional rights. I knew everything. But he always threw case studies at me. I thought I knew the answers, but I never got full credit. He wanted me to do more than just memorize what the case study was. He wanted me to think more critically and relate the case to other things. Discuss its impact. Once I realized this is what he wanted, I was prepared for it.

When asked how prepared she thought she was for the level of critical thinking required in college courses, NW stated:

Being at WECHS introduced me to the idea of having to think critically. Professors pushed me further than I think my high school teachers ever did, even when I took AP courses. I'm much better now at looking at issues from multiple perspectives and thinking, 'what is the author trying to accomplish here.' I think this really shows in my writing.

Key cognitive strategies and academic content are cornerstones for academic success in college. Employing the effective habits of the mind allows students to understand and

master academic content they will need in order to navigate across the academic disciplines in college (Conley, 2007). Informant perspectives, as discussed here, illustrate the impact early college experiences have on the way informants learned to think. Informants acknowledged that high school requires memorization, whereas college requires you to “put it all together.”

Key Content Knowledge

According to Achieve (2011), content standards are the foundation of K-12 and postsecondary systems and serve as a uniform measurement that communicate to parents, students, teachers, and administrators the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in college. Early college students are introduced to college coursework as early as their sophomore year of high school in order to prepare them for the challenging coursework they will experience as juniors and seniors. Students are first introduced to college courses at WECHS taught through a co-teaching model, where the college professor comes to the high school each week to deliver instruction. On the four remaining days, instruction is supplemented by the high school teacher. True to the tenets of early college, the curriculum of these courses is rigorous, relevant, and reflective of the course material used in the traditional college environment. When asked to reflect on their levels of preparedness as traditional college students, the informants praised their early college experiences as helping them adapt to the rigors of college courses.

High school and college classes differ in many ways. Informants in this study discussed the realities of these differences as they described the faster pacing of college classes, the more rigorous outcome expectations, and the difference in material covered. Many of these differences presented challenges for informants while in early college.

NW shared her frustrations with both calculus and accounting while in the traditional college setting by stating:

Math was the only course that I really felt not prepared for. I noticed that in my last year at WECHS. Some of the tests we did, they felt like oh gosh, I haven't prepared for this. I don't feel right in this subject in math. I think we just got a bit more support in math and learning how to study it a bit better in high school. I think that would have definitely helped.

NR echoed the frustrations with math courses saying that she took college-level math while enrolled at WECHS and did not pass. She struggled but admitted that, had she asked for more help and sought out tutoring, she would have likely passed. Since she will be taking math next year at her university, I asked her what her game-plan for success would be. She replied:

My university has a bridge camp where you go to the campus for four weeks, just once a week on Fridays, and they set you up with a peer mentor that you get for the whole freshman year. Whenever you sign up, they ask you what you think you will need the most help with, so I put down math because I'm gonna need help with that. So far that's the steps I've taken. Just put it out there, "Hey, I'm not a math person. I'm gonna need help." I'm willing to do the extra steps and learn where math help will be available.

While several informants shared their struggles and frustration with math courses, their perceived levels of preparedness for other content courses were high. RH stated that he was really prepared for English classes because at WECHS, he took English 101 and 102. As a result, he felt he excelled in courses where writing was a key component.

KT stated that learning the difference in the pacing between high school and college courses helped her manage her time when it came to lengthy assignments, especially writing papers. She said she learned how to balance other assignments and manage her time, a skill she said most people do not get to learn until they actually enroll in college. Like RH and KT, NR felt confident in her English classes and even went as far as to say the following:

My English classes were very easy. I took English 101 here at WECHS, and that was a dual credit class, and that was pretty easy. Then I took English 102 at the campus with Mr. E., and it was very easy. I feel like we did a lot of writing in high school, and just the practice prepared me.

While it seems most informants were confident in their academic preparedness for most content courses, a majority of students shared their frustrations and their utter dislike for math courses. These experiences of the students prevailed among a majority of the informants and support the findings in the literature concerning academic under-preparedness of high school students as they transition to college-level math courses. This issue was discussed previously in the literature review as it pertained to the related growth in remedial education. This issue also illuminates the distinct educational division, specifically in math, between secondary and postsecondary environments.

Academic Behaviors

Research by Conley (2007) emphasizes that, in addition to key academic knowledge, successful college students must also possess the ability to make choices, monitor and manage their progress and behavior, and apply study skills in ways to help them engage in course materials. Academic behaviors require students to be aware of

their learning and be able to control study habits as needed. Of similar importance are the social and emotional attitudes and behaviors of students who are successful in college. Among those are self-awareness, social awareness, self-efficacy, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Below, informants describe the impact of these social emotional skills on their transition to the traditional college setting.

Self-Awareness. Self-awareness represents the ability of students to actively assess their feelings, interests, values, and strengths while maintaining a well-grounded sense of self-confidence (Dymnicki et al., 2013). A meta-analysis undertaken by Robbins et al. (2004) revealed that academic self-awareness is the strongest predictor for academic achievement (GPA) and student retention in postsecondary education. Research also shows high achieving college students engage in self-monitoring of their academic performance (Weinstein, 1994).

During the course of this study, informants demonstrated their abilities with regard to self-awareness in a variety of manners. BM admitted that during his first semester as a traditional college student he had to drop a class. This was a reality check for him. He said:

If I'm going to see myself going to college and getting two or three degrees, I need to change now. I feel like that was the moment, looking at my grades, realizing I dropped a class my first time in college. It made me realize I needed to make a change because I'm not going to have my hand held anymore.

For several of his early college peers, being self-aware meant having to adjust study habits to not only fit the rigors and demands of specific courses but also to fit their own individual learning styles. RH realized he was an auditory learner and studied best

when he could write out content using the notes feature on his phone and play it back during commutes to campus or while walking to class. He preferred audiobooks, so he could listen on his phone, rewind, and replay if needed. For NW, she discovered she was a linguistic learner and gravitated to study habits focused on writing and reading. She found that she enjoys lecture courses where she can sit, take notes, and then go home to look over them after each class.

For WECHS graduates, becoming self-aware of learning preferences was only a fraction of what they took with them from early college to the traditional college setting. Graduate informants utilized their known academic strengths, interests, and values to find passion in a major or degree program. SW took his first criminal justice class during his senior year as part of the early college program. His passion for the subject grew throughout the semester, and as soon as he enrolled at the university, he declared criminal justice as his major. BM also used his knowledge of academic strengths to explore psychology as a traditional college student. He took an introductory level psychology course while attending WECHS and was naturally curious. When he took the next level course, he said he sat in the front of the class, which he said was uncharacteristic for him. As a result, the professor called on him all the time. He acknowledged that he enjoyed being engaged in the discussion, and the professor reinforced his passion by praising his responses and his course performance. BM said he fell in love with psychology.

The self-confidence these informants developed through the early college program and during their time as traditional college students is reflective of their experiences. Whether it be learning to assess academic strengths and adjust to meet the

needs of the content, or discovering a passion for a program of study, these students developed a sense of self-awareness for who they are as college students.

Social Awareness. Research illustrates students who become socially immersed with other members of the college community are much more likely to complete their first year of college and continue to complete their postsecondary degree (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). College success is higher for students who possess an understanding of interactions in a college environment (Conley, 2007). Informants in this study identified their early college peers as “family,” stating that they were a valuable resource during their time at WECHS. Informants confessed that, because they had their high school peers to depend on, they socialized very little with their college-age peers. KT commented in her second interview:

I felt as though outside of the classroom we were thrown into things socially. We were taught how to excel in the classroom, but it was very hard for us to navigate social parameters at the college, especially if our peers were not aware of the fact we were actually high school students.

She followed this statement by saying, “As early college students, it was hard for us to go out and get involved in things that our classmates may do together, such as study groups, social outings, and a few other things that most college-aged students do.”

Despite limited interactions with traditional college students, several informants referenced how they observed their older peers in order to learn how to interact in the college environment. In his interview, SW referenced the college campus as an “adult community.” RH agreed, adding that traditional college students “don’t play.” He said they are more focused. As a traditional college student, he now emulates these observed

behaviors in order to blend in. NW said she has learned that, contrary to her experiences in high school, the library on the college campus is not for socializing. As a college student, she goes to the library with the intent to actually study or use the books and computers.

Self-Efficacy. Self-efficacy, defined in the introduction as “one’s perception of their ability to successfully execute the behaviors required to produce certain outcomes,” contributes to college success (Bandura, 1997). High expectations of self and higher levels of self-confidence in academic ability increase performance and a student’s willingness to persevere (Bandura, 1997). Students join the early college program for a variety of reasons. Informants in this study all started the program with high expectations for themselves if they worked hard and persevered. When asked why he joined the early college program, SW stated, “I failed my freshman year, and I came to WECHS. I really just wanted a chance. I wanted to prove to my dad, prove to my family, and prove to myself that I’m not a failure, and I can actually pass high school and graduate.” BM had similar motivations for joining early college, stating that he did not want to, “end up like the norm.” He wanted to be better. He said he wanted to have kids one day and be able to say he was the first in his family to attend college. BM had high expectations for himself stating:

Some people’s parents didn’t even finish high school. They don’t even have a GED. I guess they feel like an associate’s degree is extraordinary. But, to me, I feel like the bachelor’s and the master’s are going to be extraordinary. That’s something I’ll be proud of. I’m proud of my associate’s, but it’s not the same.

The informants interviewed within this study all shared a common drive and determination to earn their degree. For some, their goal was an associate's degree. For others, it was a bachelor's or beyond. Whatever the end degree may be, students agreed that good study habits and hard work led to good grades and overall college success. KT stated that her early college experiences shaped her study habits by showing her that if she puts in the work, she gets the grades she is aiming for. NW shared the struggles she faced in her college calculus class at her university. She said:

I was just really annoyed and just kind of upset that I couldn't get it, and kind of blaming myself that I couldn't get it. I spent a lot of time. I mean, I tried everything. I went to study groups. I went to tutors. The tutor held a study group and I went to that, and I just...I mean, flash cards galore, reading the book. It was really frustrating, but at the end of it when the withdraw date came, I just had to withdraw. I waited until the last minute to withdraw because I wanted to make it work.

While having to withdraw from a course, as in NW's scenario, may not have been desirable, it did illustrate her self-efficacy and belief that she could persevere with hard work and determination. Later in her interview she discussed how she was able to find a business-specific calculus course the following semester and, because she had studied so hard in her previous calculus course, she had the background necessary to be successful.

Relationship Skills. While it is important for students to look inward (self-awareness, self-efficacy) and outward (social awareness), relationship skills represent a mix which require students to form positive relationships, work-teams, and effectively cope with conflict. Students who develop on-campus relationships during the first year

of college possess a greater sense of belonging and reduced sense of loneliness (Hurtado et al., 2007; Mattanah et al., 2010). Research suggests that these relationships have an important role in educational attainment (Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006).

As early college students, informants said they were reminded on a daily basis of the importance of effective communication with professors. As a result, informants were able to form productive and even friendly relationships with their professors in the traditional college setting. On a basic level, SW pointed out that “the more comfortable you are with your professor, the more likely you are to answer questions. The more questions you ask or answer, the more you understand the concepts.” SW also acknowledged that professors respect educated and professional communication.

Some students even were able to take relationships with professors to the next level and benefit outside the classroom from the networking opportunities they provided. NW discussed in her first interview the manner in which she ended up the caretaker at a historical property in the city while also working at the museum and the opera house. NW said:

My professor was teaching arts administration 300 or something, and so I took her course. They were needing people in guest services at the museum, and so I submitted my resume. I’ve been working there ever since. Then with my other job, Penny (another professor) knew the executive director there and knew they needed a caretaker. The caretaker just works events basically and on the weekends, so she connected me to that. Then with the opera, Karen, my advisor, gets a bunch of emails from people looking for interns in arts and non-profit and so she sent that to me, and there you go.

NR, who has also benefitted from her college connections stated, “The longer I’m in school, the more connections I get to make. Once I got my foot in the door, I worked and people admired that. They gave me opportunities and I took them.”

Relationships with professors are vital, but so are relationships with college peers. BM stated that, through the early college program, he figured out how to work in groups better for studying. KT used this same set of relationship skills when she moved away from home to attend college. She said:

I left the big city totally and went to a school that was in a more rural area, where only one student from my high school attended. The most difficult part, which I know sounds goofy coming from me, was being able to talk to other people whom had been brought up completely differently than I had. Many of them had grown up together.

While KT found it difficult at first to make friends on campus, she persevered and was able to forge positive relationships with her peers.

Not only was NR able to create positive relationships on campus, but she was also able to maintain these relationships after classes let out. NR described this relationship by saying:

Some of my classmates I kept connections with after classes would let out. For example, one of my culinary peers, we worked right across from each other. Our work benches were right across from each other and she, I believe, dropped out. But she opened her own business, and I’ve been helping her with her business. She has a store in a shopping center enter that has culinary lessons for kids, so that’s really fun.

Early college graduates participating in this study illustrated a collective ability to build positive relationships and work teams that hold benefits both inside and outside the classroom. The informants were able to move effectively from relying on their peers in the early college cohort to relying on members of their college community.

Responsible Decision-Making. Making responsible decisions is vital as students move towards independence from their parents and adapt to the college culture. This independence requires them to avoid the negative temptations often associated with college, all the while learning how to engage in positive activities, such as seeking assistance and support services. Informants in this study credited early college with molding them into individuals who were capable of taking on the responsibilities of college. KT stated:

Early college taught me time management skills because while working full time and taking nine credit hours for college courses and three other high school classes, I knew that time was basically money. How I spent my time would determine how successful I would be. If I wanted the grades, I had to sacrifice something, such as social experiences, in order to ensure that deadlines were met. KT was not the only student to emphasize the importance of learning time management while in early college. SW stressed how important time management skills were once he graduated from high school and began living on the college campus. He had to make responsible decisions in how much time he delegated to studying versus interacting within the campus environment. As a football fan, he had the opportunity to attend one of the games. However, he had to weigh the pros and cons because the game was timed right before an important exam. Because he wasn't prepared for the exam, he opted to

pass on the game. He said, “As hard as that decision was, because I’m a college football fan, I had to do it.”

NR stated that the hardest part of acclimating to the traditional college environment wasn’t the classes, it was learning how to manage her schedule and be responsible with her time. She said that in high school students are confined to the high school building all day, and the bells told students when to transition to different classes and different tasks. In college that wasn’t the case. She commented, “The hardest part was when professors canceled class. There I was on campus with nothing to do for the next 90 minutes. You have to adjust and figure out how to use your time responsibly.”

Outside of managing time responsibly, success in college also requires students to seek support and advocate for the assistance they need. Early college faculty explicitly taught these lessons to students while in the program. NR said her cohort was told repeatedly by teachers and program administrators that it is vital to advocate for the help you need, whether from professors, administrators, counselors, etc. NR stated:

If you are brave enough to go out and ask for help, your support system will find the answers for you and help you work through whatever issue you’re going through. That could be academic or personal issues. They’re people that are there to help you and it’s not like asking a favor, they just want to help.

NR went on to say:

Now I’m that person that will stand there in the middle of the room and be like, “Hey, where do I go?” As a matter of fact, I was in the bookstore, and I was buying a shirt or something, and I was like, “Where do I go to get a parking

pass?” I just asked a random person in the room. They were like, “Oh, you go to this office.”

NR stated that students cannot be bashful in reaching out for help. She said that as a new student on a college campus, students inevitably won’t know where to go for everything. But if they aren’t scared to ask, people will usually direct them where to go.

Not all students are comfortable standing in the middle of the room and demanding help like NR. BM is one of these students. During his first interview, BM shared a story about his first semester as a traditional college student at the local community college. Like many students, BM had no assistance from his family in financing his degree. Not long after the semester started, he received a bill for a large sum of money that he knew he could not pay. He contacted the financial aid office and UPS, and each office suggested he contacted the other. He said he felt like he was getting the run-around. Not knowing where to turn next, he considered dropping out until he could save enough money to pay his tuition. Later that night he decided to reach out to Mrs. L, a contact from early college, via Facebook. He said he feared he would be bothering her since he was no longer one of his students, but with nowhere else to turn, he hit “submit” on his Facebook message. Moments later he received a response that simply said, “Call me.”

After explaining the predicament he was in, Mrs. L said she had an idea and would call him back shortly. When she called back, she had enrolled him in an online Spanish classes through the virtual university system. Despite being taught at another campus across the state, the online nature would allow BM to work on the course during his free time between work and currently scheduled classes. Most importantly, the class

fulfilled his degree requirements and would allow him to graduate at the end of the semester. In the case of BM, being responsible and resilient enough to reach out for help when help seemed unavailable is a huge step in college success. For college students, the first few weeks and months pose the greatest decision-making challenges (Mattanah et al., 2010). BM could have easily given up, as many college students do when facing adversity. Luckily though, he remembered the lessons learned in early college and knew he had allies to depend on.

Contextual Skills and Awareness

The final dimension of Conley's (2007) framework for college readiness is contextual skills and awareness, which include being able to function within the postsecondary system that may be unfamiliar and may create social and communication challenges. This dimension requires students to understand and successfully navigate the culture of college. Conley (2007) stated:

Contextual factors encompass primarily the privileged information necessary to understand how college cooperates as a system and culture. It is this lack of understanding of the context of college that causes many students to become alienated, frustrated, and even humiliated during the freshman year and decide college is not the place for them (p. 17).

These factors are frequently referred to in the literature as "college knowledge" and represent a student's understanding of the college culture and norms as well as his or her ability to navigate the application and financial aid process. The structure of the early college model is designed to ensure that students who attend an ECHS have the

opportunity access and acquire this “college knowledge” to order to improve the likelihood of successful transition and persistence to degree completion.

College differs from high school in the ways in which adults view students and the way in which students see themselves. Graduate informants noted that not only are the expectations of college different, but so are the relationships between students and their professors. The college environment requires students to be self-motivated, intrinsically motivated, and to monitor their own time and progress. The academic, behavioral, and social roles learned in the K-12 system are no longer valid. The early college model reinforces these differences and the importance of establishing meaningful relationships and connections with adults while they are in high school. The informants in this study shared that the relationships they had with teachers, mentors, professors, and administrators all proved beneficial in helping them learn how to navigate the college culture and understand the new set of expectations inherent in postsecondary.

NW stated of her experiences in early college, “Being at WECHS introduced me to a social culture that was new to me. It taught me how to interact with people, which is probably the most important skill one can have while in college.” For NR, she learned about the college culture and the expectations of college from the people she encountered at WECHS, both on the high school and college side. She said early college provided her with a wealth of resources to help her navigate the unknown college culture. When asked what it meant to be an early college student, NR replied:

To me, it means you get an extra support system. My boyfriend wasn’t in early college, and he did a semester at an in-state university when he first graduated in 2013, and he didn’t do really well; he got all Cs. Then ever since he’s been on

and off with the local community college, and he's fallen into the category of where he doesn't meet his SAP [satisfactory academic progress] requirements, so he's not eligible for financial aid right now, so he can't go to school. He tells me all the time that if he had a support system like I did, then he would probably be more successful in school. He would know who to talk to when he had to do the SAP appeal and things like that, as opposed to having to try to go through me and use my connections. I think that having that support system from early college, it just really helps you feel more confident in navigating the new experience and you don't feel like you're just thrown into the pool.

When asked what other types of support she received in early college, NR added:

Resources, I guess is what I would say. Of course, your human support team would direct you to those things. Just having access to tools like libraries, learning commons, things like that are really important in being successful in school. Just knowing what's around you, what's there to help you. If there's a room with a free printer, although the school probably doesn't have free printing, but there's a certain office that's got free printing, and you're aware of that tool, that's a great support 'cause printing sucks.

From the informants' statements, it was evident that having the experience of taking college classes in high school and participating in the early college program translated into higher levels of confidence, a better understanding of college requirements and expectations, and a greater familiarity with the college culture. Each of these elements led graduates of WECHS to a smooth transition from early college to the traditional college environment.

Summary

In this findings section, I presented the findings from this study of early college high school graduates' perceptions of their early college experience and their preparedness for the traditional college environment. I used data from qualitative interviews conducted with six graduates from WECHS to describe how the graduates perceived their experience as early college students and as traditional college students. The findings were presented as they related to two key findings: (a) the early college as foundation for tradition to college and (b) college readiness in the postsecondary environment. I discussed each topic using the voices of graduate informants to illuminate the factors that developed and challenged them as high school and college students. The discussion section offers conclusions and implication of the study results, as well as suggestions for future research.

STUDY ONE: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents a discussion of the research findings and is divided into four subsections. The first subsection provides an overview of the study. This section reiterates the nature of the problem, restates the purpose of the study and research questions, reviews the methodology, and highlights major findings. The second subsection discusses the results in light of the study's research questions, literature review, and conceptual framework. The third subsection focuses on implications for policy and practices and includes recommendations for change in educational policy and practice based on results/findings. The final subsection outlines recommendations for future research and describes topics that need further study.

Overview of the Study

This study builds on the small number of empirical studies directly exploring the perceptions and experiences of students who lived the early college high school (ECHS) experience. Hoffman et al. (2008) called for additional research to examine the benefits associated with the ECHS models thoroughly. A majority of existing studies on ECHSs are quantitative and measure the effectiveness of ECHS programs in terms of test scores. Few studies qualitatively address if, how, and why ECHSs are effective in building college readiness and helping students transition effectively (Ramsey-White, 2013). Woodcock and Beal (2013) stated, "A growing body of research offers meaningful

conclusions about the ECHS model, yet an emphasis on ECHS student experiences is lacking” (p. 71). In this capstone, I examined college readiness from the perspectives of graduates who participated in one ECHS reform model in one southeastern state.

Allowing graduates to share their experiences is vital to ensure a well-rounded body of literature on ECHS programs. Partnering with students also reminds teachers and administrators that students possess unique knowledge and perspectives about schools that adults cannot fully replicate (Mitra, 2004).

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate how ECHS graduates described their high school experiences, as well as how those experiences contributed to their college readiness and transition to college. Unlike other studies on ECHSs, this capstone utilized student experiences to better understand the nature of early college. The design of this capstone also addressed a deficit in the literature by analyzing if, how, and why the ECHS model is effective in building college readiness. This research design utilized graduate experiences to guide school reform and next steps for the ECHS model. This study sought to answer the following research questions: (1) How do early college graduates perceive their preparation for collegiate success? and (2) How do early college graduates perceive their transition to the traditional collegiate setting in terms of college readiness skills and access to social supports?

Summary and Discussion of Major Findings

This study revealed that students who attended WECHS had a high school experience that challenged them academically, socially, and emotionally. Furthermore, graduates saw their high school experiences as ones that contributed to the development of the college readiness skills they needed to draw upon as they began their traditional

postsecondary experiences. Informants in this study provided reflections on the impact early college had on their academic, social, and personal development in the context of their preparation for college. During informant interviews, four themes emerged across both research questions: (a) faculty support, (b) the impact of student peer group support, (c) early college as a foundation for the college experience, and (d) navigating the college culture. These findings were presented as they relate to Conley's (2007) four key characteristics of college readiness: (a) key cognitive strategies, (b) key academic content, (c) academic behavior, and (d) contextual skills and awareness. Additionally, findings were examined as they related to the role of social emotional learning in the development of the students' academic behaviors.

This study utilized the CASEL (2015) Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Logic Model to provide a conceptual framework to discuss the direct and indirect benefits of SEL instruction within early college. SEL, rooted in emotional intelligence and emotional literacy, is defined as "the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply knowledge, attitude, and skills necessary to understand emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions" (CASEL, 2015). The SEL Logic Model describes the process by which SEL works to produce a wide range of positive outcomes for students. This model proposes that specific SEL interventions do two things. First, they create school and classroom climates that are well-managed and participatory where students feel safe and cared for. Second, the core elements of SEL have direct and indirect effects on school and life outcomes for students. SEL instruction directly improves students' ability to work with others, as well as improves academic

scores. Additionally, SEL creates a greater sense of attachment to school, reduces the likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors, and improves adaptive behaviors - all of which improve school climate and therefore indirectly improve academic performance (CASEL, 2015).

SEL instruction and support appear within the fourth core principle of the early college model and guide its development and implementation. This core principle states, “Early college schools engage all students in comprehensive support system that develops academic and social skills, as well as behaviors and conditions necessary for college completion” (Berger et al., 2010, p. 341). The support structures discussed in core principle four of the ECHSI are vital to the success of the early college model and account for why early college students are often more successful persisting through college than traditional high school students (AIR, 2009; JFF, 2011). Hoffman et al. (2008) cite one of the reasons for success of the early college initiative is that ECHSs do well at providing social, emotional, psychological, and financial supports to students. Lieberman (2004) notes that combining academic and emotional counseling in ECHSs works better than a single focus on academics because problems often overlap. To enhance successful outcomes, ECHS administrators must align high school and college expectations and provide academic and social emotional learning (SEL) supports (JFF, 2008).

Early colleges meet the needs of under-represented students who are highly motivated to succeed in high school but may not have the necessary academic preparation to do so. The adult partners in the early college initiative must ensure that students are not only academically and emotionally prepared, but also that they have developed the

necessary SEL skills associated with college readiness. The informants who participated in this study presented varying perspectives and experiences related to how their ECHS education met the expectations of the SEL Logic Model and core principle four. The results of the analysis of qualitative data revealed the following answers to the research questions that guided this study.

Research Question 1:

Research question one asked, “How do early college graduates perceive their preparation for collegiate success?” Informants within this study were asked the questions, “How prepared do you feel to continue your college education?” and “How has being an early college student influenced your future plans about college?” Informants indicated that participation in early college resulted in improved confidence and commitment to degree completion. Informants revealed that faculty support, peer support, the ability to navigate the college culture, as well as the ability to set a foundation for the collegiate experience helped them build an academic identity as college students. While their academic identities (high school self versus college self) were often difficult to manage, informants agreed that the early college program allowed them to build self-confidence, educational self-efficacy, and future orientation – all of which prepared them for college.

Faculty support was the most consistent theme to emerge from the interview data. All informants in this study attributed their self-confidence and preparedness for college to the supportive teachers and faculty they encountered while in the early college program. Informants shared candid experiences with staff members that depicted positive relationships and the provision of supports that aided students academically,

socially, and emotionally. It is important to note that every informant identified multiple adults who supported them while in the early college program. The adults ranged from high school teachers, early college faculty, and school-level administrators. Informants also shared narratives of how early college faculty supported them after they graduated from high school. True to the SEL Logic Model, caring learning environments create better attachment to school and, indirectly, lead to greater academic performance (CASEL, 2007). As demonstrated in previous studies (Berger et al., 2010; JFF, 2008; Lieberman, 2004), supportive relationships with faculty is a vital component to the early college program and student success.

The second finding that supported self-confidence and feelings of preparedness for early college students was peer support. Cohorts are central to the early college model as they significantly influence the promotion of student learning (Lerner & Brand, 2007). Students acknowledged that when they first began the early college program that they lacked the self-confidence in their ability to perform academically. During the first semester of college courses, informants showed an appreciation for having a familiar face to sit with in their college classes. This appreciation eventually grew into reciprocal relationships and opportunities for peer tutoring, peer revision, and the development of study groups. Throughout their time in the program, these relationships turned into genuine friendships where students affectionately referred to each other and their teachers as “family.” The literature supports these caring relationships with peers (Edmunds et al., 2013; Thompson & Ongaga, 2011; Woodcock & Beal, 2013) as helping students navigate through and successfully complete early college. The SEL Logic Model (CASEL, 2007) accredits relationships and effective relationship skills as creating greater attachment to

school for students which indirectly leads to greater academic performance. Findings in this study corroborated that of existing research.

The third finding to emerge from interviews that supported student confidence and preparation was learning to navigate the college culture. As first-generation college-goers, informants did not have the luxury of learning college norms and customs from their parents. According to informants, they learned information and strategies related to college success from older early college peers and through explicit lessons learned while in the program. All the study's informants shared that their participation in early college allowed them the opportunity to experience college and gain an understanding of college culture, which is not afforded to most high school students. Informants discussed how, as early college students, they developed the confidence and knowledge necessary to become independent and self-reliant, therefore helping them feel prepared for traditional college experiences. Developing the confidence and knowledge necessary to access and utilize college resources is a key foundation of college readiness (Conley, 2007). Much of this confidence came as informants learned college expectations, gained college exposure, and experienced college-level challenges both academically and socially (Nakkula & Foster, 2007).

Using the structures of the early college program, teachers and administrators worked directly with students to learn the importance of time management and adhering to deadlines in order to equip students with knowledge of collegiate expectations (Nakkula & Foster, 2007). With the support of faculty and peers, students learned confidence as they overcame obstacles associated with the differences between high school and college and the pressures of being an early college student. The SEL Logic

Model points to the safe, caring learning environment of early college and the direct instruction focused on social and emotional competence as reasons students acclimated to the college culture and found success in an unfamiliar environment (CASEL, 2007).

The final finding from this study that supported self-confidence and preparedness was setting the foundation for the collegiate experience. In accordance with the core principles of early college, informants believed their high school experiences prepared them academically, socially, and emotionally for college-level work and learning (Howell, 2001). Early college faculty taught informants how to navigate collegiate requirements; adapt to new expectations, learning styles, professors, and surroundings; utilize good study habits and time management skills; and engage in new types of social relationships (Karp, 2011).

In their study of academic identity development in early college students, Nakkula and Foster (2007) corroborate the benefits that early college participants had on students' confidence and "knowing" versus "believing" that they could succeed in postsecondary environment as traditional college students. Early college faculty not only taught informants how to be college students, but they also had the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities in a safe, caring environment. This contributed to the idea of "knowing" that they could be successful and contributed to their self-confidence and sense of self-efficacy. Research reveals that success in college-level coursework positively influence students' view of themselves as learners and as future college students (Nakkula & Foster, 2007). This is consistent with findings from this study wherein informants reported learning a commitment to degree completion and discovering their academic identity. Two informants claimed that, were it not for early college, they would not have

aspired to go on to college after high school. Two other informants stated that participation in early college gave them the confidence to pursue a four-year degree rather than stopping at an associate's degree. This confidence and sense of "knowing" transitioned with students as they joined the ranks of traditional college students.

Research Question 2:

Research question two asked, "How do early college graduates perceive their transition to the traditional collegiate setting in terms of college readiness skills and access to social support?" Traditional definitions of college readiness center on standardized test scores such as the ACT; however, modern definitions include indicators that extend beyond an examination of the content knowledge needed for college success. Conley (2007) defined college readiness as "the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed – without remediation – in a credit-bearing general education course at a postsecondary institution (p. 5).

Guided by the college readiness framework of Conley (2007), informants provided accounts of how prepared they were in the areas of (a) key cognitive strategies, (b) key academic content, (c) academic skills and behaviors, and (d) contextual skills and awareness. Research on the impact of remedial course on educational outcomes reveals that freshmen who have to take remedial courses in their first year of college have lower persistence rates and lower credit accumulation (ACT, 2010; Wiley et al., 2010). One of the goals of early college is to help students in meeting more than just the academic benchmarks associated with college readiness. The graduate informants in this study did not have to take remedial classes upon enrollment as traditional college students. Informants attributed this to the structures of the early college program, particularly the

themes discussed earlier in this section: faculty support, peer support, the ability to navigate the college culture, as well as the ability to set a foundation for the collegiate experience.

The accounts that informants gave in regard to their preparedness for college indicate that their early college experience had the most profound effect on Conley's (2007) components of academic behaviors (including SEL) and contextual skills and awareness (college knowledge). Preparation in this area of Conley's (2007) model stem from social, emotional, and psychological support embedded within the support structures of the ECHS model, particularly within core principle four. In the section below, I briefly discuss study findings as they relate to Conley's college readiness model and the SEL framework.

Self-awareness. According to Robins et al. (2004), academic self-awareness is the strongest predictor of academic achievement (GPA) and student retention in postsecondary. While participating in early college, students were required to self-monitor their academic performance (Weinstein, 1994) and engage in meta-cognition (Weinstein & Underwood, 1985) to adjust study habits to fit the demands and rigors of specific courses. Through participation in the early college program, informants stated that they learned to assess their own academic strengths, interests, and values in order to find passion within a major and/or degree program. These academic strengths allowed informants to develop a sense of self-awareness for who they were as college students. This self-awareness improved self-confidence related to coursework and helped students develop an academic identity as college students.

Social-awareness. Successful college students not only possess an awareness of themselves, but they must also possess an awareness of the social world around them. College success is higher for students who possess an understanding of interactions in a college environment (Conley, 2007). The SEL Logic Model suggests that academic success is indirectly influenced by the environment in which students are educated. Informants in this study described their early college peers and faculty as “family,” and therefore, this safe and caring environment helped students navigate the world around them. Informants admitted they learned how to interact in a college environment by observing and learning from traditional college students.

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found that students who become socially immersed with other members of the college community are more likely to complete their first year of college and continue to complete their postsecondary degree. Cuseo (1993) also found that student success is enhanced by human interaction and collaboration, which was a theme highlighted by all informants during the interview process. Informants cited study groups and peer support as major contributors to their academic success during early college. Support from this peer group (and faculty) continued as students transitioned to the traditional college environment, which served to lower anxiety. Research found that feelings of isolation and alienation likely contribute to student attrition (Tinto, 1993).

Self-efficacy. High expectations of self and higher levels of self-confidence in academic abilities increase performance and a student’s willingness to persevere (Bandura, 1997). Informants in this study indicated they had high expectations for themselves academically, which is what led them to join the early college program.

Informants were motivated by wanting to achieve more than “being the norm.” This motivation led to an increased performance and willingness to persevere both in early college and as traditional college students. This is consistent with studies on self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986, 1997). Ramos-Sanchez and Nicholas (2007) found that overall confidence in academic ability was related to better adjustment in college and was seen as a resource in regulating first year transitions.

While not making a specific reference to the term “self-efficacy” in their interviews, students referenced this quality through an understanding that study habits and hard work directly led to good grades and an overall level of success in college. Informants also recognized that risky behaviors, such as procrastination, led to poor grades and poor overall performance. The SEL Logic Model points to social emotional competence skills as helping students avoid risky behavior, such as blaming others and helping them to engage in more positive behaviors, such as taking responsibility for their actions. These attributes of the model lead to greater academic performance. Informants admitted that success in collegiate coursework required them to take responsibility for their actions.

Relationship skills. The two foremost themes that emerged from this study were the importance of faculty and peer supports within the early college program. These supports were rooted in strong and productive relationships. Informants in this study indicated that they learned how to form positive relationships, work in teams, and effectively cope with conflict during their participation in early college. Research shows that students who develop on-campus relationships during the first year of college possess a greater sense of belonging and reduce the sense of loneliness (Hurtado et al.,

2007; Mattanah et al., 2010). Research also shows that relationships have an important role in educational attainment (Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006). Informants in this study recognized that the more comfortable they were with professors, the more comfortable they were asking and/or answering questions. Informants also stated they engaged with professors more during office hours when they had a positive relationship with that professor. Once again, the safe, caring environment described in the SEL Logic Model combined with direct instruction on social emotional competencies (in this case relationship skills) helped informants reach greater levels of academic success both in early college and as traditional college students.

Responsible decision-making. As students move toward independence from parents and adapt to college life and culture, decision-making becomes vital. Decision-making requires college students to negotiate the temptations of the college environment, as well as know how to seek assistance from college faculty (Dymnicki et al., 2013). Informants in this study discussed the lessons learned while in the early college program that helped them learn to make responsible decisions. Many of these lessons, such as the importance of building good study habits and of attending class, were explicitly taught by early college faculty. Some informants even referenced some of their early cohort members who failed to make responsible decisions and the negative outcomes many of them incurred. Other informants watched as their peers were removed from the program for failing grades and/or poor attendance. The importance of making responsible decisions was therefore learned both directly and indirectly.

For most college students, the first few weeks and months of college pose the greatest decision-making challenges (Mattanah et al., 2010). Research, however,

supports the notion that SEL instruction in a caring and supportive environment can enhance students' academic and social development and improve overall college readiness. This corroborates CASEL's (2003) findings as indicated in the SEL Logic Model. Informants stated that the lessons they learned while in early college transitioned with them into the traditional college setting. While they now have more freedom as true college students, they still harbor the lesson learned while in early college.

While informants indicated they were prepared in many ways for the academic, social, and emotional challenges of the college environment, they also shared several challenges they incurred once they graduated from the early college program. Consistently, the informants discussed the challenges they faced in collegiate courses, particularly science and math. Many of the informants were shocked by their academic struggles because they had expected to excel based on the preparation and successful completion of those courses at the high school level. Present day emphasis in the area of high school reform and access to college focuses on the misalignment of academic content between secondary and postsecondary. Historically, there has been a push for high school students to take a certain core curriculum to ensure they are prepared to engage in college-level work (ACT, 2010). However, more recent policy efforts have emerged that recognize it is not the number of courses that students take in high school that increase the success in college; instead, it is the rigor of those courses that creates a greater likelihood of academic success in college (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006). The academic incongruence between high school and college is directly reflected in the percent of students who are required to take remedial or developmental courses in college; thereby reducing the chance students will persist on and graduate from college.

The early college initiative, based on its design and core principles, is situated to have a sizable impact on the number of under-represented students who can not only access the postsecondary environment but also persist on and graduate from college. The informants in this study provided data that can assist educators, administrators, and policymakers with evaluating and refining college readiness strategies and embedding SEL as a support structure to ensure greater academic success for early college students both while enrolled as high school students and once they graduate and become traditional college students.

Trustworthiness and Validity

Within any study, it is vital to maintain validity and trustworthiness. In phenomenology, researchers discuss validity in terms of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure validity and maintain the quality of this study, I established credibility, dependability, and confirmability by maintaining internal consistency, bridling my own knowledge, and engaging in member checking with participants. I enhanced transferability through a detailed description of the research context and the assumptions that are essential to the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The first method used to maintain validity was the use of the three-interview structure, which allowed me to ensure internal consistency. Internal consistency allowed me to connect the experiences of the participants and check the comments of one participant against those of another (Seidman, 2013) and to trust that participants were not lying (Glesne, 2014). Sustained engagement also allowed me to remain open and

sensitive to the phenomenon under investigation throughout all phases of the study (Dahlberg et al., 2008; Van Manen, 2013).

The second method used to maintain validity is the use of bracketing. Phenomenology stresses the importance of bracketing past knowledge about the phenomenon encountered to remain open to the phenomenon and the way in which participants experienced the phenomenon. Maintaining transcripts of interviews aided in creating validity as it allows readers to see that I remained quiet and did not interrupt participants. Readers can also see that I did not redirect the participant's thinking while he or she was developing it. Even though I knew students firsthand, I did not use my knowledge of the students or their experiences beyond what we discussed during interviews. In this way, I preserved the participants' thoughts, making sure my inside knowledge did not influence their perceptions. The audit trail serves as evidence of the research process (Glesne, 2016).

Another method used to maintain validity involved the process of member checking with all participants following each of the three interviews. Member checking involved taking the interview transcripts and preliminary interpretations back to participants and allowing them the opportunity to read and discuss the data collected. Participants were encouraged to correct any misconceptions. Additionally, during data analysis I also engaged in peer examination wherein I elicited the insight of a cohort peer to provide feedback on findings as they emerged. Glesne (2016) urges qualitative researchers to obtain external reflection and input on their work. Following initial coding and the identification of themes, my colleague reviewed my coding and themes for

potential bias. In this way, I maintained internal validity by ensuring research findings matched reality (Merriam, 1998).

Because of the small sample size of this study, I acknowledge the limited generalizability. However, I did attend to the notion of transferability by providing a detailed description of the research context and the assumptions that are central to the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By writing descriptively, I sought to address the issue of external validity (Glesne, 2016). External validity affects the extent to which findings from the study may be generalizable. By using verbatim quotes to substantiate the themes and by providing enough descriptions of the issues and context, readers can determine how closely their situations match the research situation, hence whether findings can be transferred (Merriam, 1998).

Implications for Policy

The transition from high school to college is a critical step in the establishment of a foundation for educational attainment, career options, and social mobility for all students, but particularly for under-represented students (Contreras, 2011). The early college initiative is positioned to not only facilitate a seamless transition that fuels the secondary to postsecondary pipeline, but it also stands to create collaboration and alignment between high school and college standards. Informants in this study indicated the need for better alignment of expectations between high school and college. Navigating this misalignment posed challenges for informants and was a source of stress as they maneuvered through the dual identities (high school versus college student) and sets of academic and behavioral expectations.

In order to align secondary and postsecondary environments, educational policy must link high school exit expectations with college entrance expectations (Holowitz, 2011). College admissions personnel must explicitly state what they expected of entering students. It is not enough to merely require a certain number of math courses, for example, or to state that students must receive a passing grade in Algebra II. Colleges must state the specific knowledge students need to be successful in college-level math.

The alignment of standards leads directly to the next policy implication prompted by the current study; that is, the need for formal structures that link a high school to a partner college. In the early college model, high schools are affiliated with a particular college or university. This partnership creates a natural feedback loop to high schools from postsecondary on student success. The partnership also provides faculty at both institutions the opportunity to talk to each other on a local level. This partnership allows faculty to meet and engage in a process of discovery that encourages them to look at evidence, such as course repetition and remediation rates; compare curricula, evaluate scope and sequence; devise assessments to measure progression to college readiness; and identify solutions to implement (Horowitz, 2011). These partnerships are valuable even outside of the early college initiative. High school students all over the country progress into college each year and these partnerships and the feedback that follows would allow high schools to better prepare students for collegiate expectations.

Once officials establish policy that links secondary and postsecondary institutions in a partnership, a clearer picture of early college participation and outcomes should emerge. If, then, those results support the effectiveness of the early college model in contributing to better postsecondary outcomes for students, including persistence to

degree completion, policy should allow the reach of this initiative to be expanded to include additional high schools. This is the next implication - create policy to allow for the expansion of the early college model. Providing early access to college for students not in the top tiers of their classes is a relatively new approach. Typically, officials offer these opportunities only to high-performing students in high-performing schools. Should sufficient data become available to support the long-term effects of early college on degree attainment by under-represented students, the initiative becomes a valuable reform model to improve outcomes for underperforming schools and for students at-risk for remedial and developmental courses.

While the ECHS initiative provides a logical alignment between secondary and postsecondary content and expectations, the partnership does not exempt early college participants from meeting definitions of college readiness. Even though recent research on college readiness has revealed that traditional indicators such as achievement scores, course taking, class rank, and high school GPA do not tell a complete story of how a student is ready for college (ACT, 2005; Adelman, 2006; Conley, 2007; Wiley et al., 2010), few systematic attempts have been made to integrate other components. Conley's (2007) definition of college readiness incorporates key cognitive strategies, or foundational skills, that apply to the broad intellectual skills that students must develop in order to be successful in college. In order to reduce the number of students relegated to remedial courses, policymakers must explore and remain open to adopt a better system for defining college readiness that aligns with postsecondary expectations.

Implications for Practice

The issue of college readiness is receiving increased attention and financial backing from private and public institutions across the nation. According to Conley (2010), a growing number of states' initiatives are emerging to reduce the number of students enrolling in remedial coursework by working to align high school graduation requirements with college entrance expectations. While much of the work to improve college readiness is taking place at the state and national level, this study has implications for practice at the school level as well.

One of the goals of early college is to support students academically for the rigors of college (JFF, 2013; Woodcock & Beal, 2013). This aligns with Conley's facets of college readiness, particularly the component of key content knowledge. For the six informants in this study, early college helped prepare them for the academic rigors expected in college. However, not all informants were successful in all subjects. Five of the six informants struggled in math while enrolled in early college. As for the other informant, while she did not struggle in early college, she did struggle once she enrolled as a traditional college student. During interview three, informants stated that while they were ultimately prepared for the expectations of college, they were ill-prepared for the rigors of math coursework and how to effectively study for such courses. These statements are consistent with the number of students enrolled nationally in remedial math courses. Academic rigor is often absent in underperforming schools and, oftentimes, school officials offer rigorous coursework only to top tier students in top tier schools (Edmunds et al., 2010). Practitioners at the school level must ensure students are receiving rigorous instruction in all content areas, but particularly in math.

While it is important for teachers to utilize rigorous teaching practices in their classrooms, it is also vital for teachers to help students learn to handle the rigorous workload expected in college. Each of the six informants in this study confessed that, prior to taking classes in early college, they were unaccustomed to homework and having to study outside of class. Implications of this finding are that high school teachers must not only increase dialogue regarding expectations in college (Thompson & Ongaga, 2012) but also increase workload exposure as early as freshman year. This practice has potential to improve performance of students transitioning into both early college and the traditional college setting.

Students are not the only ones who require education about the rigors of college coursework. All informants in this study stated that, because they were first-generation college-goers, their parents did not truly understand the demands of early college and the rigorous course load they were expected to endure. Informants stated in interview three that they tried to explain to their parents the expectations and the differences between high school and college coursework, but their parents could not understand. For two of the informants, this was an area of stress.

The implications for teachers and administrators is to advise families of the rigors of college coursework and keep lines of communication open for concerned parents. Parents need to know that their child might not be able to participate in early college if they need to work, need to watch younger siblings, or if they play sports. Parents also need to understand how to help their child manage their time efficiently if they are struggling. For parents who never attended college firsthand, this is a skill in which the school must support.

In addition to improving rigorous instruction and preparing students for the rigors of the college workload, this study suggests that implementing direct SEL instruction may be the missing piece in the quest to help under-performing students in under-performing schools reach college readiness. School-based promotion of SEL leads to a range of positive outcomes for students, including increased social and emotional competence, improvements in academic attainment, better behavior, and reduced mental health problems (CASEL, 2007; Durlak et al., 2011). I note many of these outcomes within the findings of this study. SEL interventions incur significant investment of time and resources (human, financial, and material) on the part of schools and teachers (Humphrey, 2013). For this reason, teachers need reassurance that such an undertaking is worth their while. They need to know there is strong evidence that a given intervention is likely to produce a set of desired outcomes. School administrators need to ensure teachers have appropriate training on implementing SEL and that the interventions used have a robust evidence base linking practice to outcomes (Durlak & DuPre, 2008).

For informants in this study, the power of faculty relationships emerged as the most prominent theme that supported success in early college and as traditional college students. As a result, this study suggests that schools emphasize relationship-building as a means of enhancing students' abilities to navigate the academic and social expectations of college. Relationship building falls under Conley's (2007) facet of contextual awareness of "college knowledge." Relationships with faculty reinforce appropriate ways for students to interact with professors and peers and how to participate successfully as a member of an intellectual community. Attention to this area is critical given the reduced quality of relationships with teachers in high school (Humphrey &

Ainscow, 2006) and greater emphasis on ability and completion. Positive and lasting relationships need to exist for not only early college students, but all students.

An implication of this study is to mimic the small, cohort model of learning in a larger school setting to provide similar benefits. Informants in this study were part of an early college cohort for one or more years while in the program. In this model, informants formed positive bonds with early college faculty and felt comfortable asking for help, seeking advice, and even welcomed critical feedback at times. Informants shared that these relationships did not end once they transitioned to college. Students reached out from their college campuses to these same individuals because they knew they were willing and able to assist them. Forming these relationships with faculty also taught the informants how to seek similar relationships on the college campus where they could advocate for help.

In this section, I discussed implications for practitioners concerning both academic and social support for all students, not just those in early college. These implications focused on improving rigorous teaching, setting and reinforcing the expectation of rigorous collegiate coursework, embedding direct SEL instruction into schools, and creating structures to help build positive relationships between students and faculty. Each of these implications emerged from interviews with the informants and, in alignment with existing research, post great benefits to improving college readiness for underperforming students.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study hold many implications for educational policy, as discussed above. However, findings from this study indicate a continued need for

research in the areas of (a) curriculum alignment between secondary and postsecondary, (b) expanding college knowledge, (c) defining college readiness, (d) expanding this study to include additional change agents. The section below outlines my recommendations for future research based on existing literature and findings from this study.

Most poignantly, informants' perceptions and experiences illuminated the need for better coordination and alignment between the secondary and postsecondary environments. Mason (2009) makes the case that lack of alignment between the secondary and postsecondary environments directly affects the need for students to enroll in remedial or developmental courses in college. Remedial courses are both costly in the sense of economic outlay (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011) and the toll they take on the likelihood students will graduate from college. Students of color and first-generation college-goers disproportionately represent the ranks of students who require remedial courses as entering freshmen (Wiley et al., 2010). Given that early college targets this population of students, the importance of better alignment seems paramount. Informants in this study cited the need for the high school curriculum to better reflect the rigor and expectations of the college environment. While 47 states adopted and implemented the Common Core State Standards (Achieve, 2011), continued research should be conducted with early college students to determine if there is a marked improvement in the alignment of high school and college standards. This research is vital because of students' dual enrollment as high school and college students.

Future research on early colleges needs to investigate whether the location of ECHSs matters in terms of effectiveness and student outcomes. Most ECHSs are physically located on the campuses of the partner college. However, as in the case of

WECHS, students commute to the campus during a portion of the school day. Future research needs to investigate whether students attending these ECHSs exhibit stronger student outcomes than students who attend ECHS located off-campus. Research finds that when students take classes on campus, utilize college facilities and actively engage with other college students, they can see themselves as college-goers who are capable of being successful in the postsecondary environment (Hooker & Brand, 2009; Lieberman, 2004). This sense of identity and self-efficacy can be instrumental in the development of social networks that may influence a student's access to and success in college. This can be an influential aspect of college readiness and the acquisition of "college knowledge," which includes the information and skills high school students need to traverse the complex process of transitioning to college, as well as their ability to develop an understanding of college norms and culture (Conley, 2007; Roderick et al. 2009). While findings from this study indicate that informants gained an advantage in the area of college knowledge from their experiences in early college (compared to traditional high school students), additional research is needed to evaluate the ways in which students develop college knowledge skills.

While efforts exist with the goal of increasing college access for all students, this increase has not resulted in a rise in the college completion rate for low-income, minority, and first-generation college-goers (Adelman, 2006; Brand, 2005). As discussed in the implications section above, there is still a disparity between high school exit requirements and college entry expectations (Conley, 2007). Improving college readiness measures must continue to have prominence in the educational reform arena and Conley's work offers a promising agenda to moving this reform forward. Current definitions of college

readiness focus primarily on assessment-driven mandates, primarily the ACT or SAT, to ensure high school graduates are prepared academically to succeed in college.

Unfortunately, 31% of the tested population are not meeting any of the benchmarks, which makes it difficult for them in their post-secondary experience (ACT, 2015a).

Additionally, these assessments do not measure graduates' ability to succeed socially.

Contrary to the academic-only definitions of college readiness, Conley's (2007) definition also incorporates attitudes and academic behaviors of successful students, as well as knowledge about navigating the world of college.

While inquiry into non-cognitive measures as a determinant of college readiness has risen (Thomas et al., 2007), additional research is needed to determine if these definitions of college readiness are accurate predictors for college success (Ramsey, 2008). Researchers need to look to explore ways to broaden the indicators used to evaluate the cognitive skills that will reflect the skills needed for success in the 21st century college environment. Until a better system for defining college readiness is developed that aligns with college expectations, students will continue to face the risks associated with remedial courses (Conley, 2007).

My final recommendation for future research is an expansion of this study to include the perspectives of parents, teachers, counselors, school administrators, and college faculty. All these adults play an integral role in the implementation of the early college model. Each of these individuals are also change agents who support students academically, socially, and emotionally. The most salient theme emergent from this study was the value of faculty support. Informants credited the early college faculty with helping them acclimate to their role as early college students and learning the

expectations of college. Since these individuals were on hand during the informants' tenure as early college students and actively supported the informants even after they graduated high school, they are vital perspectives to understanding the social emotional supports students and graduates need most. These perspectives can also provide a well-rounded understanding of students' levels of preparedness for college.

STUDY TWO: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL EXPERIENCES OF FOUR EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

INTRODUCTION

Everyone enjoys a good story. Whether it is fiction or nonfiction, scary or funny, extraordinary or ordinary, most of us are mesmerized when we are introduced to characters, setting, action, conflict, turning points, and resolutions if the story is carefully constructed and skillfully delivered. According to Hardy (1968), “We dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate, and love in narrative” (p. 5). Narrative is a part of us. We all have a story to tell, and the early college high school (ECHS) student is no exception. Imagine being a junior or senior in high school, but instead of spending the day at the high school with peers, the student spends the day on a college campus in rigorous courses and experiencing college life for the first time. Imagine, too, attending college classes while high school peers are enjoying a snow day or spring break. Such is a day in the life of select junior and senior ECHS students in one large urban school district in the southeastern United States.

Willow Early College High School (WECHS) became an early college high school in 2010. Since the inception of the model in 2002, ECHS programs have grown from three schools to more than 280 schools across 32 states in 2014 (Jobs for the Future [JFF], 2014). The number of ECHS programs in this southeastern state has risen from only two in 2010 to six in 2016 (JFF, 2014). The increase is due in part to the model’s

producing positive outcomes, such as improved graduation rates, college attendance, and achievement for traditionally under-represented first-generation college students, students of color, students from low-income families, and students who are second language learners (JFF, 2013; Muñoz, Fischetti, & Prather, 2014). In addition, this reform model has grown due to its offering greater support, access, and opportunity for expedited degree completion than traditional secondary institutions (JFF, 2013; Webb & Gerwin, 2014). The United States Department of Education praised the ECHS model as “innovative ... with a proven record of improving student outcomes and closing achievement gaps for high-need students” (Webb & Gerwin, 2014, p. 1). Webb (2013) reported “..., 30% [of early college high students] earn an associate degree or other postsecondary credential with their [high school] diploma” (p. 33).

Background and Statement of the Problem

Similar to many states, this southeastern state is facing challenges in educating its youth. According to 2016 state data, high school graduation rates, college enrollment, persistence, and degree completions are not sufficient to meet its educational and economic goals. While policymakers and practitioners debate how to remedy these issues, students’ voices have “rarely been heard in the debates about school failure and success, and the perspectives of students from disempowered and dominated communities are even more invisible” (Corbett & Wilson, 1995, p. 15). Despite this call back in 1995 for more student voice in debating school failure and success, “hardly any studies exist that examine student experiences and outcomes when they participate in school wide decision-making and change efforts” (Mitra, 2004, p. 653). Teens frequently feel that nobody listens to them or that nobody cares about them. There is a

need for more qualitative research because quantitative research dominates the analysis of ECHS programs (Kisker, 2006; McDonald & Farrell, 2012; Woodcock & Beal, 2013). Wiggan (2007) confirms the problem when he notes that programs based in reform initiatives (such as the ECHS model) often fail to assess the ways in which the students themselves experience these initiatives.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

Through this narrative inquiry based in social constructivism, I sought to understand the lived experiences of students currently enrolled in an ECHS. Axiological beliefs of social constructivism call for researchers to honor individuals, and methodological beliefs call for a literary style of writing (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). With this study, I filled part of the void in research literature by offering new analysis to the small body of qualitative studies of ECHS programs and students. I sought to answer the following research questions: (1) How do early college high school students describe their academic experiences while enrolled in the early college high school program? (2) How do early college high school students describe their social experiences while enrolled in the early college high school program? By analyzing participants' answers to these questions and through document analysis, I sought to gain insight into students' experiences of empowerment versus disempowerment, engagement versus disengagement, connection versus disconnection, reciprocal caring and reciprocal dialoging. I also sought to capitalize on students' lived experiences to inform, improve, and involve students regarding goals, practices, and policy to create better pathways to success.

Theoretical Framework

Nel Noddings' ethics of care theory framed the study. Rooted in feminism and central to moral education, ethics of care theory follows four major components: (a) modeling, caring by example; (b) dialogue, a method by which attempts to care are discussed and evaluated as a community; (c) practice, opportunities for practicing care and reflecting on that practice; and (d) confirmation, affirming and encouraging the best in others (Noddings, 2012). Also central to ethics of care theory is the carer (teacher), the one who initiates and builds connections with students, and the cared-for (student), the one who is responsible to and accepting of such caring (Noddings, 2012). In addition, caring-for (natural caring) describes an encounter or encounters characterized by direct attention and response and requires establishment of a caring relationship with person-to-person contact. Caring-about (ethical caring) means to express some concern about a matter but that concern does not guarantee a response to the one who needs care (Noddings, 2012). For example, a person could *care about* the conditions in a war-torn nation but not take action on those expressed concerns, whereas a person who *cares for* the conditions in a war-torn nation might buy a plane ticket and travel there to lend a helping hand. The person who cares about those war-torn conditions might merely put a check in the mail and promptly forget about the topic altogether. As Noddings (2002) put it, that person has a certain "benign neglect" (p. 22). As the researcher, I argue there is no room for neglect of any type within a school, particularly an ECHS where typically under-represented students need abundant care and support.

Because we live in an increasingly globalized world and are more likely to encounter people whose values vary from our own, teaching our youth to engage

successfully in caring relations has a place in the curriculum (Born, 2006; Noddings, 2012). Nineteenth century philosopher and educational reformer Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi believed that poor children who were well cared for and expertly taught could learn as much as wealthier children do. Centuries later, some people question his work, and those who support his work, question the inequalities in poor schools (Noddings, 2012). As the researcher, I argue that the ECHSI supports caring within its 3R curriculum, particularly the R that represents relationships (JFF, 2009; JFF, 2013; Wolk, 2005). Because of this, I chose to use ethics of care theory to underpin my study and to shape interview protocol around questions of care and support embedded in the ECHSI design.

Context of the Study

This study took place at an ECHS located in the southeastern United States. Willow ECHS sits in a large urban school district that serves over 100,000 students and has a high percentage of at-risk students (e.g., first-generation college-goers, minorities, economically disadvantaged students) (Muñoz et al., 2014). The district utilizes a student assignment plan based on managed choice and has typically struggled to meet district, state, and national measures over the past 20 years due in part to faculty turnover and changing demographics (Muñoz et al., 2014).

District personnel selected the ECHS model as a treatment to help bring the school out of priority status. A school becomes a priority school when it falls into the bottom 5% of performance objectives. The ECHS in this study is the only ECHS in the district, established as such in 2010, and is one of few ECHSs in the state. The school's website describes it as being innovative and offering students five different ways to earn

college credit: (a) classes taught through a co-teaching model, where a high school teacher and college professor work together; (b) classes taught in an online setting; (c) classes taught by college-certified high school teachers; (d) classes where credit is awarded for successfully passing an industry/technical certification assessment; and (e) classes taken on the community college campus. Enrollment for the on-campus option is by application, and seats are limited to 40.

The school's design for on-campus juniors and seniors features co-locations. Students attend college classes on the community college campus Monday-Thursday from 9:00-12:00, returning to the high school for lunch and afternoon classes and activities. On alternating Fridays, students remain at their home school for such things as seminars, workshops, mentoring, tutoring, job shadowing, and field trips to four-year universities. Unlike the majority of ECHS models that provide few extracurricular activities (Cravey, 2013), this school incorporates time for afternoon high school classes and extracurricular activities.

School officials intentionally designed this co-location concept for the on-campus cohort in order to expose students to college life while at the same time provide support from familiar adults and surroundings. This structure also provides ample time for conferencing with professors, as well as transportation to and from both sites. ECHSs provide more than just earning college credits; they provide a comprehensive experience (American Institutes for Research & Stanford Research Institute International [AIR & SRI], 2013). Together, the ECHS design coupled with new leadership has the school on target to exit priority status this year.

Rationale and Significance of the Study

This study was significant because narrative inquiry of ECHS students is largely unexplored. More specifically, narrative inquiry of ECHS students in this southeastern state is absent from the literature. This study therefore added to the small inventory of ECHS qualitative studies. It brought meaning to the field because the foundational goals of the ECHS model are to support and prepare students academically and socially (JFF, 2013; Wolk, 2005; Woodcock & Beal, 2013), and it is time to understand what those academic and social experiences look like. If we do not provide empirical research, people will turn to bloggers for their news and insights about education and reform movements, such as online bloggers Mason Phillips (2016, May) and Ted Huff (2016, June), who both recently published online exposes about student voice, for example.

The study may have implications for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners alike. According to Xu and Connelly (2010), “A researcher’s task is how best to become part of the life space of those studied and how best to enter into their daily work” (p. 351). Because narrative inquiry involves close collaboration between researchers and participants, it is one of the best ways to understand the lived experiences of students (Milner, 2007; Singer, 2016). Milner (2007) calls for “giving voice to people who have often been silenced, misinterpreted, misrepresented, and placed on the margins” (p. 397). *How* researchers conduct empirical studies is just as important as *what* researchers study (Milner, 2007; Xu & Connelly, 2010).

Regarding policy, this study has potential to benefit the cooperating school and district, as well as other districts considering the implementation of an ECHS model of their own. For example, policy change regarding more autonomy over curriculum

matters for ECHSs would allow flexibility as high schools juggle the duality of meeting state high school graduation requirements while also meeting academic program plans at the collegiate level. Debate frequently surrounds policy discussions. Noddings (2012) affirms, “What constitutes legitimate educational research is heated at the policy level” (p. 145). She goes on to say the relationship between teachers and students is very different from the relationship between doctors and patients. The doctor and patient share one goal—treat or cure the patient. In contrast, participants in education have various purposes, different aptitudes, different personalities, and different backgrounds. To understand students’ myriad experiences, educators should listen to student voice to discern how to build strong relations. Noddings suggests that “policymakers give far more attention to the ways in which teachers connect with students as individuals—to what teachers can mean to students and not simply to the academic material teachers are supposed to get students to learn” (2012, p. 192).

With regard to practitioners, student narratives can bring awareness of the benefits and challenges associated with the ECHS model. Practitioners can use that knowledge to better staff schools and build relationships between the high school faculty and college professors who work with ECHS students. Additionally, the study was significant because it addressed the “so what” and the “who cares” (Clandinin & Caine, 2008, p. 545) about ECHSs, creating potential for dialogue among researchers, practitioners, and policymakers, and most importantly, students whose voices are frequently quieted.

Overview of Method and Design

Given my desire to capture the voices and experiences of ECHS students, this qualitative study utilized a narrative inquiry methodological design. According to Denzin

and Lincoln (2005), qualitative research is a “situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world” (p. 3). Connelly and Clandinin (2006), researchers who first coined the term, best define narrative inquiry. They uphold its use because it comes “out of a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives” (p. 477). I used this qualitative approach because my task was to gather, document, analyze, and construct meaning from the thought processes that are “difficult to extract or learn through more conventional research methods” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 11). Additionally, I chose a qualitative approach because “to level all individuals to a statistical mean overlooks the uniqueness of individuals in our studies” (Creswell, 2013, p. 48).

I used purposeful sampling to collect data about participants’ storied lives from the following sources: one-on-one, open-ended interviews, follow-up emails for member checking, participant journaling, self-reflection logs, and document analysis. In order to assess the data, the researcher must first gain entry to the site. Gaining entry was not problematic for me because I worked at the ECHS in this study. Before I initiated the study, though, it was important to situate myself in context.

Because narrative inquiry uses the researcher as the instrument, it was not possible to bracket myself out of the research; instead, I exercised reflexivity. Reflexivity refers to “how the researcher’s self-location (across gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, and nationality), position, and interests influence all stages of the research process” (Pillow, 2003, p. 178). In other words, I positioned myself in the writing. I remained keenly aware of any biases, values, and experiences that I brought to

the study, and I made those known explicitly (Glesne, 2016). I kept a reflective journal during the research project as a method of self-checking and analytic noting. Last, I analyzed the data by means of first and second cycle coding to find emergent themes as I looked for “salient, essence-capturing portion[s]” (Saldana, 2012, p. 3) of students’ narratives.

Definition of Key Terms

For the purpose of this study, I defined key terms as noted below:

Early College High School (ECHS): A small school design birthed from the Early College High School Initiative to bridge the gap between secondary and postsecondary education for students traditionally under-represented in higher education. These schools provide an opportunity for students to earn a high school diploma and an associate’s degree simultaneously or up to two years of credit toward a bachelor’s degree tuition free with the goal of improving graduation rates, attendance, and achievement (JFF, 2013; Wolk, 2005).

Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI): The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation launched this initiative in 2002 and provided funding to develop ECHSs (JFF, 2005; JFF, 2009; JFF, 2013).

Intermediaries: Partners who work directly with ECHSs, school districts, and postsecondary institutions. They provide start-up and ongoing technical support, guidance, and professional development for their networks of schools (Born, 2006; JFF, 2013).

Under-represented students: Students who might be first-generation college-goers, economically disadvantaged, minorities, and/or English language learners (AIR & SRI, 2013; Kaniuka & Vickers, 2010).

Narrative inquiry: The term for a way of understanding and inquiring into experience through collaboration between researcher and participants, using field texts such as stories, journals, letters, interviews, family stories, and other artifacts as the unit of analysis to research and understand the way people create meaning over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interactions (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Creswell, 2013).

Student voice: The term asking educators to understand sound, specifically speaking, as representative of presence, participation, and power of students in their relation to other people, institutions, and practices; a tool by which students can make themselves known, name their experiences, and participate in decisions that affect their lives (Bahou, 2011; Cook-Sather, 2002 & 2009; Mitra, 2001 & 2004).

Ethics of Care: Feminist philosophical perspective for focusing on basic human relationships. Though first coined by Gilligan (1982), I used Noddings' (1984) definition, which calls for understanding of natural care (care for) and ethical care (care about), both defined below, and using care as the foundation of morality. For the purpose of this study, I used ethics of care theory, care theory, and caring synonymously.

Carer and Cared-for: Labels for the parties in an encounter or in a series of encounters in a continuing relationship (Noddings, 2012).

Caring about: Ethical caring; a response that has to be summoned; the "I ought but I don't want to" (Noddings, 2012).

Caring for: Natural caring; a spontaneous response; the “I ought” (Noddings, 2012).

Summary and Organization of the Study

I organized this study into five sections. In the introduction, I present an informal scenario asking readers to imagine the day in the life of an ECHS student, and then I briefly describe the growth of ECHSs, the impetus of that growth, and the target population. I include background of the problem, statement of the problem, purpose of the study and research questions, theory, context of the study, rationale and significance of the study, overview of method and design, and finally, definitions of key terms. In the literature review, I include a review on the ECHSI, ethics of care theory, narrative inquiry, and student voice. In the methodology section, I include a short introduction followed by restating the research questions and presenting a broad overview of narrative inquiry as a methodological design. I discuss positionality and ethical considerations. After that, I describe and rationalize data collection procedures and data analysis procedures. I conclude the methodology section with assumptions, limitations, and delimitations, as well as briefly foreshadow future findings. In the next section, I present and analyze findings, and finally, I give a summary of findings, recommendations, and implications for the future research in the field.

STUDY TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, I review literature on Early College High Schools (ECHSs) and the existing research on student voice, more narrowly on the narratives of students in ECHSs. I present an overview of the origin and design of ECHSs, as well as literature firmly concluding success of the model as a reform initiative. I also review both quantitative and qualitative studies. Next, I present the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that shaped this study. In addition, I provide a review of literature about narrative inquiry as a qualitative research design and student voice as the vehicle to understanding students' lived experiences. I conclude the literature review with statements of practical and scholarly significance of the study and implications for further research.

First, I begin this section with a restatement of the two overarching research questions that informed the study: (1) How do early college high school students describe their academic experiences while enrolled in the early college high school program? (2) How do early college high school students describe their social experiences while enrolled in the early college high school program?

Introduction

A well-educated society strengthens our economy and democracy. Some estimates predict a four-year college graduate will earn as much as \$1 million more over a working lifespan than those who receive only a high school diploma and as much as \$500,000 more than those who attend some college and/or earn an associate's degree (College Board, 2007). The United States Census Bureau (2008) released figures

showing people with more education earn more money. Annual earnings based on degree earned is as follows: high school diploma, \$33,801; associate degree, \$42,046; bachelor's degree, \$55,656; master's degree, \$67,337; and doctoral degree, \$91,920. Without a postsecondary credential, the economic impact to both individuals and society will continue to be stratified (Perna, 2007; Webb & Gerwin, 2014).

Between 2014-2015, data from this southeastern state showed the percentage of the population 25 years and older with a bachelor's degree or higher increased 1.1%, going from 22.2% in 2014 to 23.3% in 2015. The county that houses Willow ECHS saw an increase in the percentage of bachelor's degree holders between these same years. The secretary of education and workforce development cabinet in this southeastern state reported to the state school board association that during the recovery period from 2010 to 2016 over 11 million new economy jobs were created, and 99 percent of those were filled with people who had some education past high school (Hughes, 2016). Employment projections for 2020 show 57% of this state's jobs will require a career certificate or college degree (Complete College America, 2011; Recovery 2020, 2013). To meet this need, officials must close the skills gap and provide access to postsecondary education and training.

Educators have made progress in recent decades to assure access to postsecondary opportunities for all students; however, such progress has not eliminated disparities in college enrollment and completion in the United States. Even though the United States claimed one of the highest participation rates in the early part of the 21st century (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2007), differentiated outcomes remained in terms of access and success in college, especially for

low-income, minority, and first-generation students (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Kao & Thompson, 2003; Perna, 2007; Ross et al., 2012). Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2007) revealed low-income, first-generation students fared worse than their more advantaged peers fared. For example, they were four times more likely to leave postsecondary institutions after the first year than peers who were not termed disadvantaged. In addition, almost half of low-income, first-generation students had withdrawn from postsecondary institutions without earning a degree, and only 11% had earned a bachelor's degree compared to 55% of their more advantaged peers (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

This disparity holds true for all institution types: public or private, two-year or four-year (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Not all students who attend postsecondary institutions aspire to earn a bachelor's degree (Barnett, McClutsky, & Wagonlander, 2015). Many complete certificates and associate's degrees. However, Engle and Tinto (2008) found 63% of low-income, first-generation students attending two-year institutions planned to go on to earn a bachelor's degree, but only 5% of them earned a bachelor's degree within six years. These statistics show the chances of attaining an increasingly important bachelor's degree for low-income, first-generation students are limited. In other words, increasing access has not equaled success.

Early College High School Initiative

One reform movement launched in 2002 to aid access and success in attaining a college degree is the Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI). The model has its roots in two earlier alternative schools. First was Simon's Rock Early College in Massachusetts, which opened in 1966. The school targeted high achievers, and most

graduated with an associate's degree (Webb & Gerwin, 2014). The school no longer offers high school classes; instead, it is part of Bard College, which enrolls high-achieving 16- and 17-year-olds ready to begin college. Second was Middle College High School, founded by Janet E. Lieberman (Lieberman, 2004; Webb & Gerwin, 2014).

Opened in 1974 with a targeted audience of at-risk students, Middle College High School placed high school students on a college campus. Located at LaGuardia Community College, New York, the model saw dropout rates fall and college attendance rise (Lieberman, 2004). Middle College leaders observed many students had completed all secondary requirements in fewer than the usual four years of high school and were academically and socially ready to take college courses (Lieberman, 2004). In 2000, Middle College leaders received a grant from the Ford Foundation to pilot a new design: Early College, now commonly known as Early College High School (ECHS).

Design and benefits. The ECHS model retained some of the distinguishing features of the original concept, such as small size, with new structural interventions, new goals, more collaboration between secondary and postsecondary stakeholders, and an accelerated academic trajectory (Lieberman, 2004). The ECHSI's primary goal was to open opportunities for typically under-represented students (low-income, minority, first-generation, English language learners) to earn a postsecondary credential. In 2008, researchers at Jobs for the Future (JFF) stated that ECHSs seek to “engage all students in a comprehensive support system that develops academic and social skills as well as the behaviors and conditions necessary for college completion” (p. 2). Sponsored by The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and other foundations (e.g. Carnegie Corporation, Ford Foundation, W. K. Kellogg, Walton Family Foundation, Lumina Foundation, and

the Dell Foundation), the movement grew from three schools in 2002 to more than 280 schools across 32 states in 2014 (JFF, 2014). These ECHS programs have served more than 80,000 students since the initiative began (Ndiaye & Wolfe, 2016; Webb & Gerwin, 2014). Not only have these schools served more than 80,000 students in the span of 15 years, but they have also experienced significantly positive outcomes (e.g. increased college credit completion, high school graduation rates, number of first-generation college students, postsecondary persistence, and postsecondary credential attainment). These positive outcomes have fueled the spread of the ECHS design nationwide (Berger, Turk-Bicakci, Garet, Knudsen, & Hoshen, 2014; Kaniuka & Vickers, 2010; Ndiaye & Wolfe, 2016; Webb & Gerwin, 2014). Twenty-five of all 50 states boast at least one ECHS with California, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, and Texas comprising two-thirds of total enrollment (Webb & Gerwin, 2014). In the southeastern state that situates this study, there are six ECHSs, which I detail below.

ECHSs offer students the chance to earn an associate's degree or up to two years of college credit toward a bachelor's degree during high school at no cost to them. Each ECHS partners with a postsecondary institution. According to Ndiaye and Wolfe (2016), "By locating in or near a college campus, early colleges first introduce, gradually expose, and then immerse students in the college experience" (p. 34). The underlying assumption asserts that engaging under-represented students in a rigorous curriculum connected to the incentive of earning college credit will motivate them to succeed. Linking rigor and relevance with supportive relationships creates the foundation of the ECHS reform initiative (Born, 2006; Lieberman, 2004).

To monitor ECHS outcomes, the Gates Foundation funded three large institutions to produce research: Jobs for the Future (JFF), American Institute for Research (AIR), and Stanford Research Institute (SRI). All nonprofits, these institutes perform client-sponsored research. JFF, strategic national coordinator, managed the initiative and helped create its vision, mission, and strategy (Berger et al., 2014; Webb & Gerwin, 2014). JFF also developed a Student Information System (SIS) to track progress (Webb & Gerwin, 2014). In addition, intermediary organizations collaborated to establish a network of schools anchored by the ECHSI's common principles. The 13 intermediaries range from the Middle College National Consortium, the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Program, and the Center for Native Education (Berger, Adelman, & Cole, 2010; Webb & Gerwin, 2014).

Following is a review of literature highlighting beneficial outcomes of ECHSs and the students who attend them. I first present literature from three longitudinal studies and then from smaller scale studies. I organized this section by topic.

The start-up years. In 2005, AIR and SRI published the first nationally focused study examining ECHSs. Largely descriptive, it combined quantitative and qualitative methodologies to examine the start-up years of 22 ECHSs in 12 states and reported demographics, structures, organization, and instructional characteristics. Researchers found that the initiative achieved much in a short time by serving approximately 3,500 students from typically under-represented backgrounds. Jobs for the Future served as the initiative manager and developed an accountability plan. Most ECHSs strove to follow all core components of the model (AIR & SRI, 2005), which I discuss later in this

literature review. The study concluded with presenting year-by-year plans for further study of the model. Below I discuss the second large-scale report.

Graduation, college enrollment, degree attainment. In 2013, AIR and SRI released the second nationally focused study examining ECHSs. Spanning 2005-2011, it examined 10 ECHSs. Researchers conducted a lottery-based randomized experiment (Berger et al., 2014). They examined whether ECHS students have better outcomes than those of students who attend other high schools and whether the outcomes vary by student background characteristics. ECHS students were significantly more likely to graduate from high school than comparison students (86% versus 81%), were significantly more likely to enroll in college than comparison students (80% versus 71%), and were significantly more likely to earn a college degree than comparison students (22% versus 2%) (Berger et al., 2014).

Impact on high school graduation and college enrollment generally did not differ by subgroups (gender, race/ethnicity, family income, first-generation, or pre-high school achievement). In fact, ECHS students' enrollment in college exceeded that of middle-income students, as well the overall national average. Nationally, only high-income students enrolled with a higher percentage (U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2012). The impact on college degree attainment did not differ on first-generation status, but the impact did favor females, minorities, and low-income students per degree attainment. In other words, the impact favored the typically under-represented subgroups, the very students ECHSs hope to reach. DiMaria (2013) stated that "Early College High Schools don't just demystify the college experience, they get results" (p. 65). In 2010-2011, for example, ECHSs nationwide had a median four-year graduation

rate of 93% compared with 76% for their respective districts, and 56% of those graduates earned two or more years of credit (DiMaria, 2013).

In addition to the two national longitudinal studies critiqued above, I now highlight a third longitudinal study that focused exclusively on ECHSs in North Carolina. Members of the SERVE Center, a research organization affiliated with the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, conducted an experimental study of implementation and impact of the ECHS model.

Enrolling and progressing in college preparatory courses. In 2010, Edmunds et al. reported on the performance of ninth-grade students at two sites in North Carolina, the state that boasts the largest number of ECHSs in the United States at over 70 (JFF, 2014). Participants from ECHSs using a lottery admission served as the treatment group; students who did not gain admission through a lottery-based system served as the control group. Most studies prior to this one did not have access to students' historical achievement data. The experimental design allowed researchers to control for selection bias.

Researchers found significantly more students were enrolling and progressing in college preparatory courses. Passing rates, however, were somewhat lower in those courses, suggesting more need for academic support in more rigorous courses. Researchers also examined the extent to which the ECHSs were implementing the required components of the model and found that one of the two schools successfully implemented the model's components. North Carolina's model aligns with national ECHSI components but does use its own version.

The SERVE team also found that small schools starting from scratch performed better than schools that tried to implement the ECHS model from existing schools. The implication is that simply breaking into small schools is not enough; all structural components of the ECHS model are essential for student success.

In addition to the above referenced longitudinal studies, there is a small but growing body of literature likewise documenting favorable outcomes of the ECHS model. I continue this literature review with presentation of several of those studies. Though not an exhaustive compilation, I present ones of interest to my study and me. I close this section of the literature review with counterpoints of the ECHS model and the status of ECHSs in this southeastern state.

Self-efficacy, credit accumulation, college readiness. McDonald and Farrell (2012) used grounded theory in their qualitative study to understand student perceptions of college readiness. Utilizing focus groups, they found much of ECHS student success attributable to students' ability to self-monitor and develop autonomy as college-goers, skills honed by the ECHS core principles. In a mixed methods case study, Kaniuka and Vickers (2010) found student success traceable to earning college credits early, embedding high academic expectations, focusing on the future, and developing an environment conducive to developing an identity of success. Hoffman, Vargas, and Santos (2009) agreed, "If credit accumulation is indicative of eventual degree attainment, the ECHSs have put many graduates on a promising path toward a degree" (p. 55). In fact, records show 80% of ECHS graduates earned college credits in 2007, 88% earned college credits in 2008, and 91% earned college credits in 2009 (Webb & Mayka, 2011).

Improved attendance, reduced suspensions, on track. Preliminary studies show that ECHS models lead to enhanced attendance, reduced suspensions, and increased numbers of students on track for college (Edmunds, Willse, Arshavsky, & Dallas, 2013; Edmunds et al., 2010). In addition, ECHS students remain in school and progress in college preparatory classes more often than students who do not enroll in ECHSs (Edmunds et al., 2012). Researchers at The National High School Center (2007) found traditionally under-represented students benefit from the ECHS model and show improved attendance.

Support strategies. Former principal and now coach for the Middle College National Consortium, Born (2006) writes of the importance of a personalized, supportive environment in the “blended institutions” (p. 50) known as Early College High Schools. Born (2006) advocates carefully building a system of supports to ease the transition from high school to college and building relationships between caring adults and the students they teach. The ECHS model replaces the traditional curriculum of reading, writing, and arithmetic with a new 3R curriculum: rigor, relevance, and relationships. I discuss the new curriculum trifecta later in this literature review. Of the new 3Rs, relationship building especially supports students in the shift from high school to college; however, all components are necessary for disadvantaged students to succeed (Berger et al., 2010; Born, 2006; Lieberman, 2004). Born (2006) outlines many support strategies, such as advisory sessions and seminar sessions to enhance success of ECHS students. With strong relationships and support systems, ECHS students can accelerate their personal and academic development in paving their way toward future success. Fruitfully

blending secondary and postsecondary education can only happen when caring adults help create experiences for student success (Born, 2006; Noddings, 1992).

In a mixed methods study, Edmunds et al. (2013) used multiple regression and information from surveys, focus groups, and interviews to conclude the successes of North Carolina ECHSs were attributable to “mandated engagement” (p. 2). While mandated engagement cannot be legislated, researchers found it an essential component to the experimental ECHS design used in North Carolina, which has resulted in the increased proportion of students staying in school and progressing in college preparatory classes (Edmunds et al., 2013). When students engage behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively, success usually follows (Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Jimerson, Campos, & Greif, 2003; National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine [NRCIM], 2004; Yazzie-Mintz, 2010). Research reveals that engagement is paramount to supporting underserved, under-represented, at-risk students (Born, 2006).

While the small size of ECHSs alone does not necessarily lead to engagement, some researchers state that caring relationships supported by small schools make the difference (Lee & Burkham, 2003; Visher, Teitelbaum, & Emanuel, 1999). In a 2011 case study, Thompson and Ongaga found ECHSs to be personalized, caring learning environments that lead to student success, and Bruce (2007) found them to provide care, support, and high expectations. Caring relationships also surfaced in McDonald and Farrell’s (2012) study, with words such as *love*, *care*, *relationship*, *understanding*, and *support* frequently appearing in transcripts. The studies above indicate that increased expectations accompanied by support in a nurturing ECHS setting lead to success.

Professional development, diversified staffs, and culturally responsive

pedagogy. Thompson and Ongaga (2011) argue if an ECHS is truly to differ from a traditional high school then adequate professional development for teachers and administrators is necessary in terms of teaching and learning opportunities. They call such a move offering “professional currency” (Thompson & Ongaga, 2011, p. 53). Teachers in their study said they felt bound and constrained by conventional standards and procedures when they wanted to provide an environment with greater thoughtfulness and creativity. Such constraint is a distraction from the intended care perspective with which I undergirded this study. As Darling-Hammond (2010) and Thompson and Ongaga (2011) support, success of reform initiatives lies in the “creation of new opportunities for teacher and school learning, new modes of accountability, and new kinds of incentives for continual improvement and problem solving” (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 238).

Thompson and Ongaga (2011) also call for culturally responsive teachers and culturally responsive pedagogy as important elements for any learning environment but especially for the small school design of the ECHS, where relationships and relevance are part of the curriculum. Students in their study noted the need to hire more teachers of color. Jordan and Cooper (2000) avow that the issue of “race and culture within the context of comprehensive reform has been largely ignored” (p. 8), and since 1995, Ladson-Billings has called for meeting the learning needs of students by building relationships anchored in culturally responsive teachers and pedagogies. In addition, Milner (2007), a black professor, calls for cultural diversity training to curtail possible encounters such as those he experienced when he walked into a school building and an

administrative assistant asked him, “Are you the janitor?” (p. 596). While Milner (2007) was not degrading or devaluing the janitorial staff, he perceived that the question might have resulted from racial stereotyping despite his professional attire.

ECHS Counterpoints

As presented above, most ECHS research has shown the reform model to have positive benefits; however, some studies have shown high school graduates not prepared for college and call into question accelerated initiatives like ECHSs that reduce high school from four years to two years (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2004). Similarly, the dean of the School of Education at Indiana University at Bloomington argues that high schools should prepare children for college without replacing college (Wolk, 2005). Yet others say there is too little research on the ECHS design to defend replicating it in large numbers because the model is still in its infancy (Wolk, 2005). In addition, some skeptics contend that secondary and postsecondary systems cannot work together while others indicate that such collaborations are possible (Berger et al., 2010). The lower passing rates among ECHS students in the North Carolina longitudinal study (Edmunds et al., 2010) may raise questions as to whether school personnel offer enough academic support for the more rigorous coursework encountered in ECHS models. Researchers at AIR (2009) and JFF (2011) found ECHS students performed well in their college classes; on the other hand, Fischetti, MacKain, and Smith (2011) found ECHS students to have lower GPAs than traditional college freshmen at their partnering university.

Perhaps the biggest counterpoint calls into question the client-institute affiliations of some research studies. Because sponsoring foundations (Gates, Ford, Carnegie,

Kellogg, Walton, Lumina, Dell) fund organizations and programs (JFF, AIR, SRI, and NCREST) that examine much of the ECHS data, researchers might exercise only partial critique or demonstrate bias by the very political nature of the partnership. For instance, the National Center for Restructuring Education Schools and Teaching (NCREST) works closely with the Middle College National Consortium, one of the grantee organizations, and reports higher numbers each year of under-represented students participating in college coursework (Berger et al., 2010; Kim & Barnett, 2008).

Nonetheless, evidence suggests that the ECHS reform model is successful in helping under-represented students graduate from high school and earn postsecondary credentials (Webb & Gerwin, 2014). Approximately one in three ECHS students earn an associate's degree or other postsecondary credential prior to graduating from high school (Webb & Gerwin, 2014). Further, many researchers have found ECHS students perform as well as or better on state assessments than students in a traditional school (AIR & SRI, 2009; Berger et al., 2010; Fischetti, MacKain, & Smith, 2011).

Early College High School Initiative: Data from One Southeastern State

Unless noted otherwise, I obtained the information below from this southeastern state's 2016 department of education data. Early college experiences take a variety of forms, and not all early college experiences fall under the previously defined Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI). However, this section details not only ECHSs as defined above, but it also mentions other similar programs that offer early college experiences (not synonymous with dual credit) in order to preview the academic landscape of this southeastern state for junior and senior high school students. Until 2012, this state had only two ECHSs under the ECHSI sanctions. The original location

no longer has an ECHS, but the other location is home to Willow ECHS, established as an early college high school in 2010 through cooperation with the partnering community college and the Middle College National Consortium. To date, Willow ECHS has seen 11 students graduate with both a high school diploma and an associate's degree and has grown to an enrollment of 37 in its on-campus program.

In 2011, on the heels of the governor's task force on transforming education in this southeastern state, ECHS A graduated its first students with an associate degree by collaborating with a partnering community college. In 2012, ECHS B collaborated with its partnering community college to establish its program, which initially enrolled 19 students. The ECHS B program is similar to the program in this study as they both utilize co-locations and Friday Seminar, which I describe in the methodology section.

In 2014, ECHS C established a partnership with the local community college and began a program that has competitive admissions, and like ECHS B and the county in the current study, students attend classes on both the high school and college campus. In 2015, ECHS D launched a program in partnership with a local community college, enrolling 10 students in the inaugural year. In 2016, ECHS E began its pilot year in partnership with a nearby community college with 40 students and offers both morning and afternoon classes on the college campus.

Preceding portions of this literature review outlined the origin, design, outcomes/benefits, and counterpoints of the ECHS model, as well as addressed one southeastern state's ECHSs and similar early college experiences. The next portion presents a review of literature about the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that guided this study. There is not a clear consensus of best theories to frame research on

ECHSs. Some researchers have used scholar identity theory (Whiting, 2006), grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1999), schema theory (Wilkes, 1997), communication theory of identity (Hecht, 1993) theory of structuration (Giddens, 1986), social capital theory (Bandura, 1994), and cultural capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986). For my study, I used ethics of care as the theoretical frame (Noddings, 2010), and I used the ECHS model's core principles and 3R curriculum as the conceptual frames (Born, 2006; JFF, 2008; Wolk, 2005), as well as the commonplaces of narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). In the following sections, I begin with definitions, uses in other fields, uses in education, and then uses in education specific to ECHSs.

Theoretical Framework

In this section, I provide an explanation of ethics of care theory, its usage in various fields, and the extent to which research has validated its use in education. Moreover, I build the case why I selected ethics of care theory for my study. Early threads of care theory are in the writings of feminist philosophers, such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Catherine and Harriet Beecher; however, Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984) first explicitly articulated care theory.

Ethics of care theory. For the purpose of this study, I used the views of Noddings (1984, 1992, 2002, 2010, and 2012). She recognizes that caring relationships are basic to human existence: "Relation is ontologically basic ... as we are born from and into relation" (Noddings, 2010, p. 390). This feature of care theory bears importance because care theorists reject the collective and the individual; instead, they choose to focus on relation.

Unique to ethics of care theory is what Noddings describes as *caring about* and *caring for*. In addition, unique to Noddings' (1984) ethics of care theory is her definition of the *cared-for* and the *carer*. Based on definitions presented in the introduction of this study, in order for a relationship to be caring, the cared-for must demonstrate reciprocity. Noddings (2010) noted, "The cared-for generally cannot do for the carer what the carer can do for the cared-for" (p. 391). Regardless of the degree of reciprocity, reciprocity is nonetheless essential in caring relations. Anyone who works in a caring profession, such as nursing, social work, or education, understands the importance of reciprocity. As Noddings (2010) states, "Response completes the relation" (p. 391). Without it, carers can too quickly suffer burnout. In addition to reciprocity, Noddings (1984) argues that educators must follow the four components of care theory: (a) modeling—caring by example, (b) practice—opportunities for practicing care and reflecting on that practice, (c) dialogue—caring by discussing and evaluating as a community, and (d) confirmation—affirming and encouraging the best in others.

Since Noddings (1984) first wrote about caring, interest in care theory has grown. Researchers have utilized ethics of care theory in various fields, such as politics (Engster, 2004), nursing (Allmark, 1995; Fry, 1989), bioethics (Carse, 1991), ecology (Curtin, 1991), animal care (Donovan, 1996; Engster, 2006), and social work with sex offenders (Ward & Salmon, 2011). In education, researchers have utilized ethics of care theory to study teachers and teaching (Owens & Ennie, 2005; Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012) and mentoring programs for Black and Latino males (Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz, & Watson, 2014). Still other scholars and researchers have provided additional support for Noddings' (1984) theoretical framework of the ethics of care in education. For example,

Cassidy and Bates (2005) investigated a school purposely designed to be a place of caring for at-risk students. Among their findings was the staff members' genuine care and respect for students even though many had criminal records or had school files labeling them as troublemakers. Consistent with the literature, teachers and administrators followed the four components of Noddings' (1984) care theory and modeled, dialogued, practiced, and confirmed students through a caring perspective. The caring culture led to fewer dropouts.

As for use of ethics of care theory in an ECHS study, only one study has focused on care theory. Thompson and Ongaga (2011) based their descriptive case study around it. They relied on the four components of care perspective detailed above, and they were interested in understanding how ethics of care either supported or constrained teaching and learning in an ECHS. They collected data in the form of individual and focus group interviews for teachers (carers) and students (cared-for) over a three-month period. Researchers tape-recorded all interviews and transcribed them using NVivo, a qualitative analysis software tool. Iterative coding led to the creation of a matrix display whereby they looked for patterns and themes.

Two main themes emerged from the Thompson and Ongaga (2011) study: caring relationships and teacher constraints. For caring relationships, these scholars discovered that students felt trust, competence, growth, continuity, and support from teachers, peers, and schooling institutions. Teachers indicated that strong relationships with students likened success. Some teachers went so far as to develop relationships with students via social media, and other teachers even gave their personal cell phone numbers to students

to offer opportunities for students to request clarifications on assignments or offer other supports.

Thompson and Ongaga (2011) found challenges of exercising care theory in an ECHS to be no different from those found in a traditional high school. ECHS teachers indicated that they faced classrooms of diverse students and felt the pressure of high stakes testing and accountability just as teachers in traditional settings do. In fact, teachers in an ECHS might experience magnification of these challenges because of the newness of the model and the bureaucratic constraints that necessitated time spent on test preparation instead of time devoted to developing caring relationships, one of the 3R curriculum components of the ECHS reform initiative. Viewing the new reform model through the lens of a traditional educational frame is prohibitive to adhering to the 3R structure (Thompson & Ongaga, 2011).

In sum, Noddings' own words about ethics of care illustrate a valid point: "The relation between doctor and patient may have little effect on the efficacy of a prescribed drug, but the relation between teacher and student may crucially affect the way pedagogical method is received" (2012, p. 145). Noddings (2010) suggests institutions alone cannot directly care for anyone, but they can create conditions for care. As institutions, just like the school in the Cassidy and Bates (2005) study, ECHSs are places that can and should create conditions for care (Born, 2006; Lieberman, 2004).

As evidenced in an earlier discussion of ECHS benefits, caring relationships are paramount to student success (Berger et al., 2010; Born, 2006; Bruce, 2007; Lee & Burkham, 2003; Lieberman, 2004; McDonald & Farrell, 2012; Noddings, 1992; Thompson & Ongaga, 2011; Visher et al., 1999). Even though school officials do not

usually place caring at the center of educational policy and practice (Cassidy & Bates, 2005), the ECHS reform model allows for relationship building as part of its 3R curriculum design, which I discuss in the section below.

Conceptual Framework

In this section, I present pre-established conceptual frames for the ECHS model, which includes its core principles and 3R curriculum. A conceptual framework “explains, either graphically or narratively, the key elements of a study and the presumed interrelationships among them” and “may be simple or elaborate, commonsensical or theory driven, descriptive or causal” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 20). By basing my study around these two conceptual frames, I further built upon the aims of ECHSs as I developed my own conceptual frames throughout the research process. The most successful ECHS models have followed these frameworks (JFF, 2008; JFF, 2012).

ECHS core principles. After several years of ECHS operation, the 13 intermediaries ratified five core principles (See Figure 5) in 2008 (Berger et al., 2010). These include (a) student selection: “Early college schools are committed to serving students under-represented in higher education”; (b) college and community partners: “Early college schools are created and sustained by local education agency, a higher education institution, and the community, all of whom are jointly accountable for student success”; (c) college credits: “Early college schools and their higher education partners and community jointly develop an integrated academic program so all students earn 1 to 2 years of transferable college credit leading to college completion”; (d) supportive systems: “Early college schools engage all students in a comprehensive support system that develops academic and social skills as well as the behaviors and conditions necessary

for college completion”; and (e) intermediaries and advocacy: “Early college schools and their higher education community partners work with intermediaries to create conditions and advocate for supportive policies that advance the early college movement” (JFF, 2008, p. 2). Studies have been conducted on the first four core principles, but the fifth principle has not been studied yet (Berger et al., 2010).

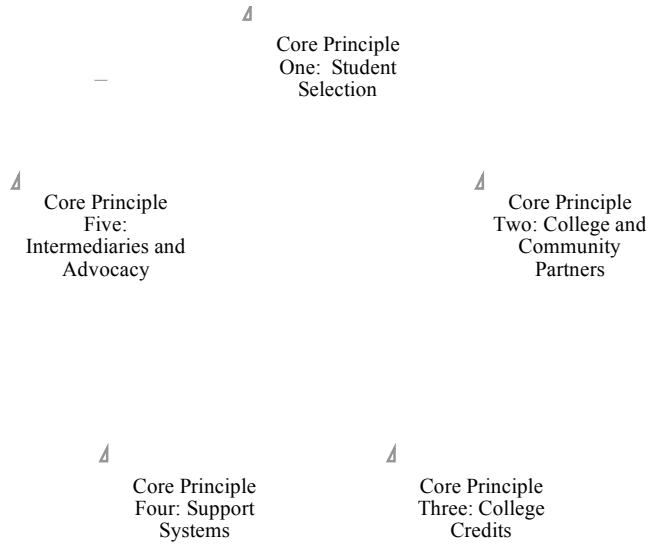


Figure 5. *Five Core Principles of the ECHSI*

ECHS 3R curriculum. As mentioned earlier, ECHSs use the 3R curriculum to guide decision-making (See Figure 6). The three components of this conceptual frame are rigor, relevance, and relationships (AIR & SRI, 2013). Taken together, they form the foundational set of values that ECHSs are “inviting places where students and adults know each other well and pursue a common mission based on high academic achievement for all students and where professional community is collaborative and student focused” (AIR & SRI, 2005, p. 14). When rigor replaces remediation and relevance replaces irrelevance, studies have shown students are more likely to succeed. For example, Jobs for the Future conducted a survey of 2,600 ECHS graduates enrolled

in postsecondary institutions and found only 14% of ECHS students enrolled in remedial courses versus 23% of first-year college students (JFF, 2012). Once students enroll in remedial courses, they rarely move on to credit-bearing classes (Torraco, 2014). According to Shear et al. (2008), combining these 3Rs can inspire students academically and personally. In order to gain insight into those academic and personal experiences, I conducted a narrative inquiry (detailed below).

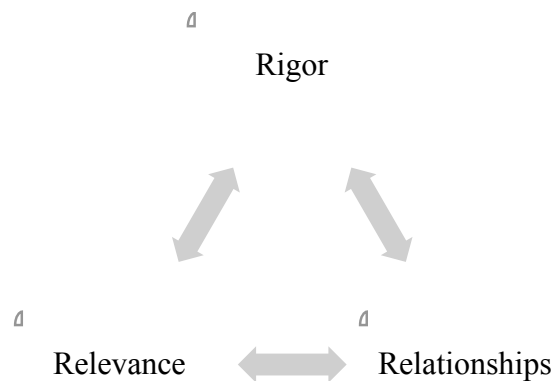


Figure 6. *Visual Representation of the 3R Curriculum ECHSI*

Narrative Inquiry

As a qualitative methodological approach, narrative inquiry begins with “experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals” (Creswell, 2013, p. 70). Leading researchers who provide a philosophical base for narrative inquiry are as follows: Jerome Bruner, psychology; David Carr, philosophy; Mary Catherine Bateson, anthropology; Robert Cole, medical; and D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly, education (Clandinin & Caine, 2008, p. 543). Riessman and Quinney (2005) argue that one simplistic definition such as Creswell’s (2013) does not fit all fields of narrative study. For example, in social history and anthropology, narrative may refer to an entire

life story; in sociolinguistics, a more restrictive definition calls for an answer to a singular question; and in psychology and sociology, narrative consists of long segments of talk in single or multiple interviews (Riessman & Quinney, 2005). The fields of law, medicine, and occupational therapy have also utilized narrative inquiry since its inception in the late 1960s. Researchers in these fields have conducted myriad studies utilizing narrative inquiry. Select examples include female high school athletes in Korea (Han, Kwon, & You, 2016), counselor trainees with eating issues (Dayal, Weaver, & Domene, 2014), patients with Lyme disease (Rebman et al., 2015), young people navigating parental dementia (Hall & Sikes, 2016), workplace stories in human resource development (Grenier & Collins, 2016), personal healing for holistic nurses (Smith, Zahourek, Hines, Engebretson, & Wardell, 2013), female slave narratives (Sanders, 2011), grappling with issues of race and racism (Boske, 2010), and education inquiry using literary elements (Coulter & Smith, 2009). Narrative is no longer the sole province of literary scholarship. In essence, narrative inquiry has entered almost every discipline and profession (Riessman & Quinney, 2005).

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) were the first to use the term *narrative inquiry* although the use of narrative inquiry is an old practice (Clandinin, 2006). Caine, Estefan, and Clandinin (2013) view narrative inquiry as extending beyond the researcher's lens to see experience as "lived in the midst" (p. 575). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) based their conceptualization of narrative inquiry on Dewey's (1938) notion of experience as shaped by social context as outlined in the theoretical frame above. They believe narrative inquiry begins with an interest in experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and thereafter ensues from an ontological position of interest in people's lived experiences.

Caine et al. (2013) said utilizing narrative ontology was “to enter the practice and artistry of lives lived” (p. 576).

In the education field, most narrative research has examined how teachers’ narratives shape and inform their practice (Bell, 2002) while little research has examined how students’ narratives shape and inform their academic and social experiences. Reflective practice has led more focus toward listening to the voice of teachers and hearing their stories, and I argue that reflective practice should lend more focus toward listening to the voice of students and hearing their stories. Even though researchers turned toward narrative inquiry for understanding experience in the late 1980s/early 1990s (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007), the turn has not transferred to listening to student voice as yet (McDonald & Farrell, 2012; Thompson & Ongaga, 2011; Woodcock & Beal, 2013). While some critique narrative inquiry as being the easy kind of research, many researchers continue to call for acceptance of this arts-based approach. Consequently, it is becoming more common in educational research (Woodcock & Beal, 2013).

Although a few researchers entered the lives of ECHS students to listen to their perceptions of the ECHS experience (McDonald & Farrell, 2012; Thompson & Ongaga, 2011), only Woodcock and Beal (2013) exclusively utilized narrative inquiry as the methodological approach to do so in the ECHS setting. Woodcock and Beal (2013) collected three Texas ECHS graduates’ descriptions of events and experiences, synthesized them into narratives, and then analyzed them through a procedure of extracting emerging themes from the rich descriptions of lived experiences. Woodcock and Beal (2013) subscribed to both personal and social conditions of participants, which goes along with the conceptual frame of commonplaces for narrative inquiry as outlined

earlier in this literature review. To honor the creativity inherent in narrative inquiry, researchers wrote the narratives in first person to allow each student voice to materialize. They frequently went back to participants for clarification and follow-up. After coding and noting salient words and phrases from the data, they concluded three major themes: academic preparedness, costs and benefits of ECHS participation, and relationships with peers.

Woodcock and Beal's (2013) findings revealed all three ECHS graduates reported feeling academically prepared for postsecondary coursework, although all three reported having earned a C or below. Though most ECHS literature touts the academic and social benefits of the model, Woodcock and Beal's (2013) study examined the largely ignored sacrifices that ECHS students sometimes make. For example, all three participants said they forewent extracurricular activities because of either rigorous course demands or logistics. They also mentioned ECHS attendance affected their relationships. Participants' answers to questions about support services deviated from previous research. None of these three ECHS graduates mentioned support services from the ECHS model as being part of their successes, nor did they identify any other model design features as being pertinent to their successes. Although they did not form meaningful relationships with adults, they did reference the meaningful relationships they formed with peers.

Overall, participants in the Woodcock and Beal (2013) study agreed that the ECHS positively influenced their academic and social experiences on the postsecondary level while they all attested to sacrifices required to be in the program. A strength of the Woodcock and Beal (2013) study is that they purposefully steered clear of leading

questions. They allowed participants' responses to guide the interview as they answered loosely structured open-ended questions. That could account for the divergent answers on some of the interview questions.

Next, I present the three-dimensional commonplaces of narrative inquiry. By interconnecting temporality, sociality, and place, the narrative inquirer becomes a part of the narrative map, a member of the metaphorical parade (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006) that "proceeds whether we wish it to or not" (p. 161). This relational dimension of narrative inquiry means researchers cannot bracket themselves out of the inquiry; as an alternative, they must find ways to "come alongside participants in the living out of stories" (Clandinin, 2006, p. 47).

Three commonplaces of narrative inquiry: temporality, sociality, and place. In addition to conceptually framing this study around ECHS core principles and the 3R curriculum as previously detailed, I also framed the study around Connelly and Clandinin's three-dimensional commonplaces of narrative inquiry (See Figure 7), not in exclusion but, rather, as simultaneous exploration of all three (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007). Below I describe each of the commonplaces and their use in narrative inquiry.

Temporality. One important element for researchers to consider when conducting a narrative inquiry is temporal space. This idea aligns with Dewey's (1938) notion of situation. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) posit that "events [and people] are in temporal transition" (p. 479), and they have a past, present, and a future. Denzin (1989) says these events and people have a beginning, a middle, and an end. That is to say, researchers should try to understand events, people, and places as they are in process, always transitioning.

Sociality. As well as directing attention to temporality, researchers should likewise direct attention to social conditions surrounding both participants and inquirers. By social conditions, Connelly and Clandinin (2006) mean existential conditions, environmental conditions, and other influences that form an individual’s context. Additionally, personal conditions such as “feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions” are equally important (Clandinin et al., 2007, p. 23).

Place. Last, place is the specific physical boundary where the inquiry and events occur, a crucial aspect of the inquiry process. Place has potential to change as the inquiry process may fall into temporality (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). The narrative inquirer must be mindful that place impacts experience.

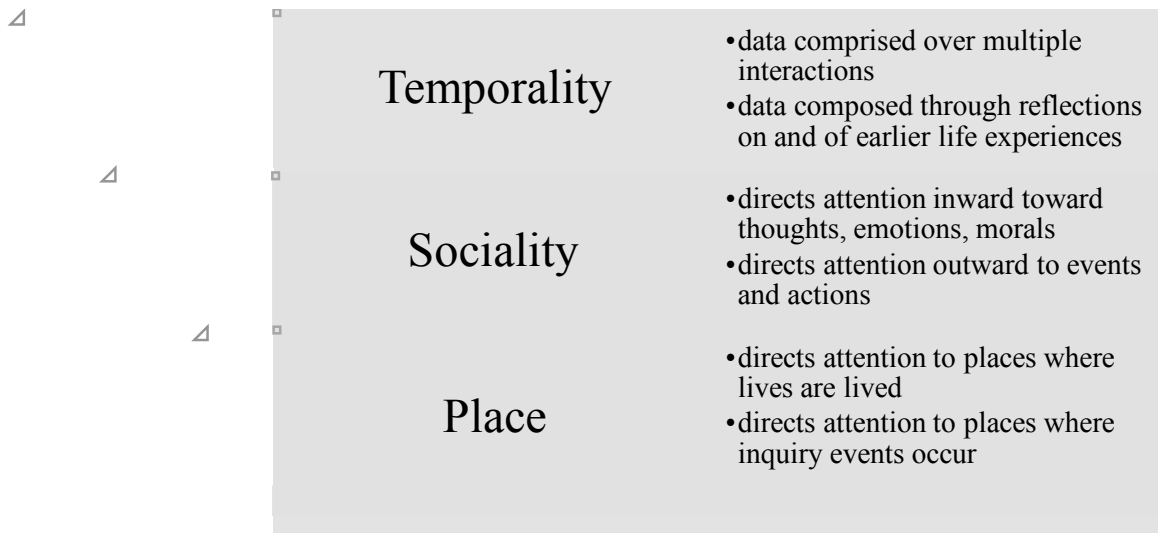


Figure 7. *Visual Representation of the Three Commonplaces of Narrative Inquiry*

This literature review concludes with the call for more student voice. Not only do Woodcock and Beal (2013) call for more research including student voice, but so do many others (Bahou, 2011; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Mitra, 2001). In the early 1990s, Kozol (1991) wrote, “The voices of children ... have been missing from the whole

discussion” (p. 5) of education and education reform. He advocated for the inclusion of student voice. Similarly, Cook-Sather (2006) advocates that adults listen when students speak. Even in this era of standardization and accountability when recognizing student voice might seem countercultural to legislated demands, elevating student voice enhances agency, autonomy, engagement, and authenticity and should be preserved (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

Student Voice

Preservation of voice, the hallmark of narrative inquiry, is essential to understanding human experience and interaction in relationships. The field of student voice has grown in recent years as researchers seek to understand the lived experiences of students (Cook-Sather, 2006), and new definitions of the student voice have been emerging (Fielding, 2007). This reemergence arose based on the rationale that young people have unique perspectives, and their insights call for responses from adults (Cook-Sather, 2006). Furman and Barton (2006) define student voice as having two dimensions: student perspectives toward schooling and student participation. The perspective dimension of voice includes “youth sharing their opinions of problems and potential solutions” (Mitra, 2004, p. 651) and explaining their thoughts on how school might change to be more inclusive and supportive of learning. The participation dimension of voice describes how students choose to act in the context of their perspectives.

Student voice has been used as a frame for attending to students’ perspectives of their learning in many fields, such as medical (Ozoling, Hall, & Peterson, 2008), dental (Subramanian, Anderson, Morgaine, & Thomson, 2012), nursing (Clark, 2008; Thornton

& Chapman, 2000), and psychotherapy (Bady, 1985; Sanchez & Fried, 2010) studies. In the education field, student voice fell out of vogue after its initial surge in the 1960s and 1970s when student power movements advocated for the right of students to have a voice in school decision-making (Mittra, 2004). During the decades when student voice fell silent, many students experienced alienation, disengagement, and the feeling of powerlessness (Mittra, 2004). Other students reported that adults in their schools infrequently listened to their views or involved them in decision-making (Noddings, 1992). While educational professionals have struggled with how to improve student outcomes such as college readiness, attendance, and graduation rates, few have gone directly to the source and asked students themselves (Mittra, 2004).

As a way to reposition students in educational research and reform, leaders in education have begun to go straight to the source and ask students to participate actively in school decisions that will shape their lives (Cook-Sather, 2006). Numerous empirical studies on the effects of student participation in school decision-making processes show this renewed shift toward student voice (Mager & Nowak, 2012). In their review of educational research utilizing student decision-making, Mager and Nowak (2012) conducted an analysis of 32 publications with studies about student decision-making in schools. They defined student participation as more than just taking part or being present; they defined it as when “students have some influence over the decisions being made and actions being taken” (Mager & Nowak, 2012, p. 40). They found different types of student participation in decision-making have different effects, with the exception of improvements in school ethos. Improvements in school ethos surfaced in all types of student participation. They found moderate effect on life skills, self-esteem and

social status, student-adult relationships, and facilities, rules, and policies. They found low evidence of any negative effects of student participation in school decision-making among the 32 studies they synthesized. Furthermore, Mager and Nowak (2012) noted that the effects of student participation in school decision-making are dependent upon conditions of implementation. When stakeholders consider students' voices seriously and not as symbolic participation, their participation in school decision-making can have a positive effect on student-adult relationships (Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007).

Because listening to voice opens the door to developing relationships (Barnett, 2007; Born, 2006; Byrd & McDonald, 2005; Conley, 2005; Tinto, 1987, 1993), a key component of the ECHS 3R curriculum, as the researcher I argue that using student voice is imperative to understanding the lived experiences ECHS students. According to Cook-Sather (2002), researchers must start "re-tuning our ears so that we can hear what [students] say and redirecting our actions in response to what we hear" (p. 4). Listening to student voice runs counter to recent reform movements that focus more toward scores on standardized tests than dialogue (Cook-Sather, 2006). Nevertheless, students have singular and invaluable views on education from which both adults and students themselves can benefit (Cook-Sather & Shultz, 2001). Further, Cook-Sather (2009) advocates listening to student voices because their voices matter.

Without listening to student voice and following dialogical pedagogy (Freire, 1998), reform efforts paint an incomplete picture of student experiences. Freire (1998) also contends that the basis of student learning depends on student experiences, a facet of Dewey's (1938) experiential social theory discuss. Through voice, educators can discern a deeper understanding of the stories, behaviors, and relationships of people (McDonald

& Farrell, 2012). By listening to student voice, researchers can provide schools with information to construct a better future (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004). De La Ossa (2005) backs this approach as a way to understand aspects of school design that support postsecondary preparation and to understand students' secondary experiences compared to postsecondary expectations.

To that end, educational researchers McDonald and Farrell (2012) conducted a study with grounded theory as the underpinning methodological approach to collect stories, perceptions, frames of reference, interactions, and social and relational processes significant to students in an ECHS setting as they transition to college. They utilized student voice in examining three constructs of college readiness: academic preparedness, social preparedness, and personal preparedness. Researchers collected data through focus group interviews and used an inductive, multi-step, constant comparison analysis process. They analyzed each interview response by color coding specific text, which illuminated potential emergent themes. McDonald and Farrell (2012) noted some crossover responses, which indicated saturation of data. They also used a split-screen to cut and copy color-coded text onto a second open document to organize data indicative of each theme.

McDonald and Farrell (2012) reviewed the summative document to interpret meaning and patterns from the data. Findings suggested that the ECHS experience supported students' transition to college level work and significantly influenced their collegiate identity. Through the process, students reported finding their "scholarly self" (McDonald & Farrell, 2012, p. 232). Listening to the voice of typically underserved students and their ECHS experiences can inform stakeholders of critical issues for

improving the ECHS reform model and for improving alignment of secondary and postsecondary sectors (Hoffman et al., 2009). It will not alleviate the problems and constraints that educators currently work under due to legislated mandates, but it can help educators deal with them with better insight and a focus toward conducting research *with* students instead of *on* students (Cook-Sather, 2007).

Summary of Literature Review Findings

The purpose of this literature review was to present my synthesis of the literature on ECHSs specific to their origin, design, and outcomes. I outlined research solidifying that ECHSs have been quantifiably successful, but so far, researchers have conducted few qualitative studies to contribute rich, insightful results about students who attend ECHSs. Among the few qualitative studies, only one peer-reviewed study utilized narrative inquiry (Woodcock & Beal, 2013). By searching the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database, I found several dissertations that utilized narrative inquiry, which signals growing interest in the methodology. Neither the Woodcock and Beal (2013) study nor any of the dissertations using narrative inquiry focused on the voices of students enrolled in an ECHS; instead, all researchers studied ECHS alumni. The intent of this study was to fill the gap by conducting a narrative inquiry to understand the academic and social lived experiences of students currently attending an ECHS.

I described the theoretical framework for the study built on Noddings' (2010) ethics of care theory. I then described conceptual frameworks for the study built on ECHS core principles and 3R curriculum, as well as Connelly and Clandinin's (2006) three commonplaces of narrative inquiry. Specifically, I linked care theory to one of the

ECHS 3Rs, relationships. Ethics of care theory was instrumental in understanding the academic and social lived experiences of ECHS students in my study.

Finally, I highlighted narrative inquiry and student voice as ways to listen to students and probe for deeper meaning of their lived academic and social experiences while in ECHS. Narrative inquiry is more than just telling stories. There are complexities in narrative inquiry that researchers must explore to understand fully the lived experiences of subjects under study. Through narrative inquiry, a story that might seem insignificant to a student can be a rich account as it unfolds, shedding light on details that lead to understanding of lived experiences. Weick (2007) states, “Richness may lie in the eye of the beholder, but there are ways to coax it into view” (p. 14) if researchers are interested in listening to student voice. Soo Hoo (1993) observed that educators listen to outside experts to inform decision-making, but they often overlook the students who are right before them. Students are authentic sources who experience schools firsthand and have much to offer in their perspectives and lived experiences (Soo Hoo, 1993). We must care to listen.

This study’s significance is that it added to the small body of qualitative research on ECHSs. As Woodcock and Beal (2013) discerned, “A growing body of research offers meaningful conclusions about the Early College High School model, yet an emphasis on the Early College High School student experience is lacking” (p. 71). McDonald and Farrell (2012) concurred when they said, “Little qualitative research has been conducted regarding student perceptions, motivations, and knowledge about college as a result of participating in an Early College High School” (p. 222). Likewise, Kisker (2006) echoed that little research on the lived experiences of ECHS students exists.

A review of the literature revealed narrative inquiry of ECHS students' experiences to be largely unexplored among the approximate 80,000 students enrolled in an ECHS; further, no one in the southeastern state where this study took place has explored the lived experiences of its ECHS students. This study was significant because it offered ways for practitioners and policymakers to see the benefits and challenges of the ECHS model. Such insights could assist districts considering implementing an ECHS model of their own.

Although the evidence reviewed in this section clearly showed that ECHSs as a reform model have been successful, it also highlighted the lack of qualitative research and the need for caring, trusting relationships among all stakeholders. Even though there is "evidence pointing to the importance of positive relationships in education, dominant policy and practice continue to pay too little attention to the deliberate promotion of supportive teacher-student relationships" (McHugh, Horner, Colditz, & Wallace, 2013).

Further, the literature review revealed a need for providing professional development for teaching staffs at ECHSs and providing culturally responsive pedagogy through a caring perspective. Moreover, educational professionals need to conduct more studies that require a particular kind of "wakefulness" (Clandinin et al., 2007, p. 21) in order to understand the ECHS landscape. Researchers need to probe into the experiences and perceptions of students who walk the halls of ECHSs, so they can inform practitioners and policymakers of the lived experiences of these young academicians. Last, there is need for further study by researchers unaffiliated with the ECHSI.

In the following section, I describe research design and methodology to guide understanding of the academic and social lived experiences of Willow ECHS students. I

outline systematic procedures for conducting narrative inquiry, including my choices for sampling, data sources, data collection, data analysis, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations, as well as testing for trustworthiness. I draw on existing research as I discuss these factors. Of note, I utilize interview protocol built explicitly upon ethics of care theory that underpinned the study.

STUDY TWO: METHODOLOGY

Before going further, I restate the two guiding research questions that informed the study: (1) How do early college high school students describe their academic experiences while enrolled in the early college high school program? (2) How do early college high school students describe their social experiences while enrolled in the early college high school program?

In this methods section, I detail the methodological and design components of the study. First, I discuss the characteristics of qualitative research in broad terms, and then I look closely at narrative inquiry as the design of choice. I provide a brief justification for each. Next, I address positionality and the researcher's role in situating self and following ethical protocol. Particularly, I discuss what it means to exercise reflexivity. I then outline data collection, data recording, and instrumentation procedures, which I follow with a discussion of data analysis and interpretation. After that, I address assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the study. Finally, I conclude by summarizing the methods section and looking ahead to analysis, implications, and recommendations.

Design Components

To begin, I first discuss the characteristics of qualitative research in broad terms. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) note that qualitative researchers “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings

people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). Creswell (2014) defines qualitative research as “an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). Creswell (2014) adds that qualitative researchers are open to emergent questions and procedures throughout the process of bringing meaning to complex situations. Moreover, Noddings (2012) supports the use of qualitative research because she says the aims of education cannot be determined through use of quantitative research alone. Even with quantitative research to inform us whether the null hypothesis is rejected or not, there is need for qualitative research to see if the results should be valued and how so (Noddings, 2012). Unlike quantitative researchers, qualitative researchers rely on words; “words are assembled, clustered, sub-clustered, broken into segments, and can be reorganized to allow the researcher to compare, contrast, analyze, and construct patterns out of them” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 9). Qualitative research uses the researcher as the key instrument, uses multiple sources of data, and primarily uses inductive data analysis. Qualitative researchers also use coding to discover emergent themes and holistic accounts of participants’ experiences (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Miles et al., 2014). Finally, the process of qualitative research is inferential, interpretive, iterative, and cyclical (Creswell, 2014; Miles et al., 2014). For these reasons, a qualitative approach suits this study based upon social constructivism.

Inside the scope of qualitative research, I placed this study within a narrative inquiry design. Researchers who use narrative inquiry collect stories and documents from individuals’ lived and told experiences. Czarniawska (2004) defines narrative inquiry as a qualitative design in which “narrative is understood as a spoken or written

text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected” (p. 17). Clandinin and Caine (2008) point out that narrative inquiry allows for intimate study of people’s experiences over time and in context. Schram (2006) adds that narrative inquiry emphasizes people’s stories and assumes that they are “a natural, obvious, and authentic window into how people structure experience and construct meaning in their lives” (p. 105). Researchers join with participants to examine place, temporality, and sociality from within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry commonplaces, which were detailed in this study’s literature review. Clandinin and Caine (2008) also note that narrative inquiry emphasizes relational engagement between the researcher and the participant. Narrative researchers re-tell and re-story the spoken or written text often in collaboration with the participants (Creswell, 2014).

Additionally, Clandinin and Rosiek (2006) espouse that “a pragmatic ontology of experience [is] a well-suited theoretical framework for narrative inquiries, [because] narrative inquiry is an approach to research that enacts many, if not all, of the principles of a Deweyan theory of inquiry” (p. 46). This interconnectedness between experience and education leads to stories that researchers should not only tell but should also retell and relive. Dewey’s pragmatic philosophy gave basis for Clandinin and Connelly’s (2006) narrative view of experience. Leaning on Dewey’s theory of experience, they wrote, “People are individuals and need to be understood as such” (Clandinin, 2006, p. 46). Furthermore, Clandinin (2006) contends that researchers should study individuals’ experiences by “listening, observing, living alongside another, writing and interpreting texts” (p. 46).

As the literature review revealed, narrative inquiry is still developing as a methodological approach in the field of education. It shares features with other forms of qualitative inquiry, such as the emphasis on the social in ethnography and the use of story in phenomenology. However, it distinguishes itself from other methodologies in that it “adopt[s] and adapt[s] the conventions of fictional literature to render non-fictional participant experiences in poetic, prosaic, and dramatic forms, as opposed to the traditional and conventional formats of scholarly/academic writing” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 8). Narrative stories may borrow from literary forms and, as Xu and Connelly (2010) express, story is a “gateway, a portal, for narrative inquiry into meaning and understanding” (p. 356).

One advantage of narrative inquiry is that participants often enjoy the comfort that storytelling creates. However, Riessman and Quinney (2005) caution, “All talk and text are not narrative” (p. 393). Those uninformed of the intricacies of narrative inquiry tend to view it as the easy kind of research and assume it is easy to design, live out, and represent in a storied format. In other words, some say utilizing narrative inquiry is merely telling stories, but several scholars in the field disagree (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Miles et al., 2014; Worth, 2008; Xu and Connelly, 2010). In fact, the apparent simplicity of narrative inquiry masks the complexity of this qualitative approach (Miles et al., 2014). Though storytelling and narrative intersect, storytelling is a form of entertainment and communication whereas narrative is a “principle way that human beings order their experience in time ... [and] make coherent sense out of seemingly unrelated sequences of events” (Worth, 2008, p. 42).

Another advantage of choosing narrative inquiry for this study is the interrelation between the ECHSIs 3R curriculum and narrative inquiry, particularly the R for relationships because, as Connelly and Clandinin (2006) say, “Relationship is at the heart of thinking narratively” (p. 189). However, because relationships between the researcher and participants intertwine with narrative inquiry, some critics (Clandinin & Huber, 2002; Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2003) question the role of researcher as instrument and the subsequent trustworthiness of a study. Nonetheless, advantages justify the use of narrative inquiry on both practical and social levels. On a practical level, results of narrative inquiry could lead to modification of practice as educators learn about benefits and challenges of the lived experiences of participants. On a social level, narrative inquiry can be justified because participants’ stories are “not just a means by which human beings make sense of the world around them” (Roney, 1994, p. 120), but “they are also the means by which social change is enacted” (Coulter, Michael, & Poyner, 2007, p. 105).

Even though I contend that advantages outweigh disadvantages of using narrative inquiry as a qualitative approach to research, I acknowledge that the researcher as key instrument of data collection is cause for caution and retrospection. Therefore, I next turn to a discussion of researcher positionality. In the following section, I discuss both reflexivity and the framework suggested by Milner (2007) by which I methodologically explored my own positionality.

Positionality

As briefly stated in the introduction to this study, the narrative inquirer becomes an instrument of data collection and cannot therefore bracket himself or herself out of the

research; consequently, the researcher should exercise reflexivity and be cognizant of positionality. When researchers exercise reflexivity, they position themselves in the study by conveying their background, how it informs their interpretation of data, and what they stand to gain from the study (Creswell, 2013; Hatch, 2002). Self-disclosing throughout the research process removes the danger of “play[ing] God, writing as disembodied omniscient narrators claiming universal and atemporal general knowledge” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 961). According to Milner (2007), seen, unseen, and unforeseen dangers arise when researchers do not “pay careful attention to their own and others’ racialized and cultural systems of coming to know, knowing, and experiencing the world (Milner, 2007, p. 388). I followed Milner’s (2007) four-step framework as a guide to examine my own positionality. The four steps include researching the self, researching the self in relation to others, engaged reflection and representation, and shifting from self to system.

The first step of Milner’s (2007) framework is researching the self. Researchers should engage in critical race and cultural self-reflection by questioning how they know what they know. In this step, I questioned how I negotiate and balance racial and cultural issues, what my historical feelings of racial and cultural identity have been, how I contextualize nuances and realities that shape my knowledge, and how my personal experiences have shaped my decision-making. Pillow (2003) refers to this line of questioning as “researcher know thyself” (p. 181). I understood that my stances might change during the research process, and I remained open to self-reflexivity throughout the process.

The second step in Milner's (2007) framework is researching the self in relation to others. In this step, I reflected about myself in relation to the participants and the community at large, acknowledging that I was an insider researcher and that I played many roles in that position. I negotiated my interests through what critical race theorists call "interest convergence" (Milner, 2007, p. 395). I questioned myself, exploring how I knew the cultural and racial heritage of the participants and community, and how I knew the ways participants' racial and cultural backgrounds influenced how they experienced the world. Furthermore, I explored how I knew what participants believed about race and culture and their place in education, and how the participants' ways of knowing related to my own ways of knowing.

Next, Milner (2007) suggests that researchers and participants engage in reflections together and that race and culture be focal to that engagement. When the researcher and the participants disagree, researchers should present both narratives and counternarratives. With engaged reflection and representation, all interests are more likely to be valued without one privileged over the other. In this step, I engaged, reflected, and responsibly listened to all voices and perspectives in the study in an effort to eliminate dominance of one voice or one perspective over the other; however, when such dominance occurred, that in itself was a form of data.

Last, Milner's (2007) framework calls for a shift from self to system. That means shifting the inquiry from a personal level to one that examines the role of historical, political, social, racial, and cultural ideologies. By broadening the lens of positionality, I asked myself how race, racism, and culture played into the context of my study in terms of both participants and the community. I also asked myself what and how I knew about

the community socially, institutionally, and historically. Finally, I questioned what barriers and structures shaped the participants' and the community's experiences.

Without self-disclosure and reflection of positionality, a researcher might overlook the influence of race and racism, which surface not only in the form of individual racism but also in the form of institutional racism, social racism, civilizational racism, and epistemological racism (Scheurich & Young, 1997). Following Milner's (2007) four-step framework allowed for strategic self-awareness and intentional preparedness as I worked through seen, unseen, and unforeseen dangers that arose during the research process.

Ethical Considerations

Regardless of awareness of positionality, ethical and personal issues can arise. As an insider researcher, I was aware that narrative inquiry is a relational research method and that ethical considerations are central throughout the research process, not just during data collection (Creswell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014). I was also aware that because I was employed at Willow ECHS that the participants could experience confusion when I took on the researcher persona. However, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) say, "Rather than decry the fact that the instrument used to gather data affects this process, we say the human interviewer can be a marvelously smart, adaptable, flexible instrument ..." (p. 107). I was committed to following ethical protocol and adhering to the classic principle of humane conduct: do no harm. Of course, ethical considerations go far beyond those three words. I completed the required Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) through the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB), and I sought formal approval from the local school district to work with human subjects. I followed the

procedural recommendations set forth by the university for research with human subjects. Those recommendations include five basic guidelines: (a) Research subjects must have sufficient information to make informed decisions about participating in the study; (b) Research subjects must be able to withdraw from a study, without penalty, at any point; (c) All unnecessary risks to a research subject must be eliminated; (d) Benefits to the subject or society, preferably to both, must outweigh all potential risks; and (e) Only qualified investigators should conduct experiments (Glesne, 2016).

Because qualitative study is “never value-free” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 61), I followed IRB guidelines for securing permissions, maintaining confidentiality, working with minors, and other legal matters. Even though some elements of this research evolved over the course of the study, I exercised forethought to eliminate ethical breaches (Miles et al., 2014). I handled negotiations of entry, exit, and representations of participants’ experiences with “thoughtful sensitivity” (Clandinin & Caine, 2008, p. 545). For instance, one way to exercise forethought is in selecting the interview site. The teacher-researcher should interview students in a setting other than the classroom as a way to create an unbiased environment (Seidman, 2013). I conducted interviews in the library. In addition, I examined standards for ethical conduct from professional organizations, such as the American Educational Research Association, as recommended by Lincoln (2009). Although ethical dilemmas are not easily resolved, I incorporated ethical considerations throughout the study but particularly during the data collection and instrumentation procedures, and I turned to my dissertation chair and committee for advice when ethical dilemmas arose.

Context of Data

In this section, I first present two types of data sources for the study, and I discuss rationale for use of multiple sources to reach saturation and to practice triangulation. I then define data collection and provide the logistical process by which I collected data. I describe and justify sampling choice for the study, as well as detail interview protocol based on ethics of care theory and the three-interview series used to answer the research questions. In addition, I describe the collection of documents for analysis. Next, I discuss how I recorded, stored, and managed data. Finally, I outline data analysis procedures, focusing on coding, theming, trustworthiness, and data analysis displays.

Data Sources

I used two sources of data for this study—interviews and documents. One of the most important sources of information in qualitative research is the interview (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2016; Miles et al., 2014; Polkinghorne, 1995). By using interviews, as well as multiple documents, I sought saturation, the gathering of enough information to develop my study (Creswell, 2013). Glaser and Strauss (1999) first coined the concept of saturation as an element of constant comparison for grounded theory. According to Morse (2015), saturation is a component of conducting a rigorous study, yet we know little about it. Researchers often have a mistaken idea when they have “heard it all” that saturation is achieved (Morse, 2015, p. 587). Morse (2015) defines saturation as “the building of rich data within the process of inquiry” (p. 587). As such, qualitative researchers keep the marginal data on hand should they deem it significant later. In essence, qualitative researchers realize that “data at the tails of the curve can be equally

important and must be deliberately collected until saturation has been met” (Morse, 2015, p. 587). Without saturation, research results can be uninteresting and reveal nothing new.

In addition to using multiple data sources to reach saturation, I also used multiple data sources to practice triangulation, a way to take a different view on the situation when what people are saying is inconsistent with what they are doing (Gibbs, 2007).

Triangulation supports a finding using at least three independent measures to agree, or “at least not contradict” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 299) with the finding. Triangulation can be by data source (people, times, places), method (observation, interview document), or the use of multiple researchers (Denzin, 2001). Miles et al. (2014) add data type (qualitative texts, audio/video recordings) to triangulating. Triangulation is not a practice to show that participants are not being forthright; instead, it is a practice to “reveal new perspectives of social reality” and to “deepen interpretations and understanding” (Glesne, 2016, p. 45). Multiple data sources aid in gathering rich, robust information and elicit perspectives that are more complex.

Data Collection

Data collection consists of a series of interrelated activities aimed at gathering good information to answer the researcher’s questions (Creswell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014). The unit of analysis includes individuals in the narrative inquiry, and data collection may take multiple forms. Because narrative inquiry bears a more intrusive level of research, researchers must handle data collection procedures diligently and with a “heightened consciousness of potential difficulties” (Glesne, 2016, p. 50). Before data collection began, I made all ownership agreements clear. Participants received a disclosure stating the purpose of my research as a doctoral candidate at the university. I

informed them that I would not share data with anyone other than my dissertation committee. I also informed them that university officials would eventually upload my dissertation into ProQuest, a database specific to storing dissertations and theses, where it would be accessible online in the future.

Data collection was through one-on-one, open-ended interviews, follow-up emails for needed clarification and member checking, and documents, which I describe later in this methodology section. I justified use of these forms of data collection from my sample because they are among the suggested tools for narrative inquiry as outlined by Creswell (2013), Glesne (2016), and Miles et al. (2014).

Sampling. True to qualitative research, and even truer to narrative inquiry, the sample size was small and set in participants' natural setting. I justified the small sample size because Bell (2002) says the time commitment involved in a narrative design makes it unsuitable for working with large numbers of participants. Additionally, Creswell (2013) says that narrative inquiry research consists of "focusing on studying one or two individuals, gathering data through the collection of their stories, reporting individual experiences, and chronologically ordering the meaning of those experiences (or using life course stages)" (p. 70). Likewise, I justified the small sample size by what Malterud, Siersma, and Guassora (2016) call "information power" (p. 1753). They say the more information power a sample holds, the lower number of participants needed. Even though Creswell (2013) and others (Bell, 2002; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Miles et al., 2014; Worth, 2008; Xu and Connelly, 2010) suggest the focus of narrative inquiry is to study only one or two individuals, I found it difficult to complete a mini-study prior to my dissertation work when I had only two participants.

One was a non-talker, and one was not readily available for interviews. For that reason, I included four students in this study.

I used purposive sampling to select the four students. This kind of sampling is a kind of non-probability or nonrandom sampling in which researchers select members of the target population for the purpose of the study if they meet certain practical criteria (Dörnyei, 2007). In my case, I used practical criteria such as proximity, availability, and accessibility, as well as participants' current enrollment in Willow ECHS, completion of at least one year of the on-campus experience, and those in the cohort for whom I did not serve as teacher of record. I relied on Malterud et al.'s (2016) concept of informational power to select participants whom I deemed to possess the ability and willingness to provide information-rich data. By purposefully choosing four students who were in their second year of the on-campus program, I expected to find a balance of maturity, insight, and experience to provide rich descriptions of their lived experiences without neglect of information or credibility. To aid in gathering sufficient data from this small sample, I exercised strong and clear communication. Malterud et al. (2016) posit that strong and clear communication between researcher and participants requires fewer participants. They also posit that "sample adequacy, data quality, and variability of relevant events are often more important than the number of participants" (p. 1759).

The table below presents a snapshot of preliminary demographic data that I expected to compile about the participants. I acquired the information by reviewing school records and by asking participants to complete a demographic questionnaire (See Appendix 2A) during the first interview session. Participants freely and voluntarily signed a Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) form as part of being

involved in the Willow ECHS program, and my name was listed on the form for permission to view academic records. Part of the demographic questionnaire included a brief care perspective survey to gauge students' feelings of being cared for in the ECHS program. I asked participants to select pseudonyms for use in the study. In the early design days, I called them student A, B, C, and D. Specific participants were not known at this time I created this early table, but an updated table is included later as I present an analysis of my results.

Table 4. *Participant Demographics*

Pseudonym	Age	Race	Gender	GPA	College Credit Hrs.	Agreed to Journaling	Household Type	Degree Path: AA/AS
Student A	17-18	W	F	?	?	Yes	?	?
Student B	17-18	B	F	?	?	Yes	?	?
Student C	17-18	W	M	?	?	Yes	?	?
Student D	17-18	B	M	?	?	Yes	?	?

Source: Willow ECHS Students

Note: Associate of Art (AA), Associate of Science (AS)

I personally invited students to participate in the study. In a face-to-face meeting before the interview process began (Seidman, 2013), I discussed the informed consent/assent forms, detailing the study, clearly stating the reasons why I invited the participants, stating procedures and protocols, assuring of confidentiality through use of pseudonyms, and making certain that students understood that participation was voluntary. Since I worked with a vulnerable population of minors, I obtained informed parental consent and children's assent, following regulations set forth by the IRB and using a model letter from Glesne (2016).

Interviewing. Initially, I explored narrative interviewing protocol as outlined by Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2007), thinking I would follow their method of data collection

as was first systemized by German researcher Schütze (1992). However, upon in-depth examination of narrative interview as a method of data elicitation, its use, and potential problems (especially the epistemological problems of unrealistic role and procedural rule requirements), I chose instead to utilize Seidman's (2013) three-interview series.

Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2007) themselves said narrative interviewing procedures "might not work as intended" (p. 66) and that there is "little methodological research beyond a description or a general critique of the technique" (p. 67). Therefore, I chose Seidman's (2013) phenomenological approach based on a design created by Schuman (1982).

The goal of Seidman's (2013) interviewing technique is for participants to reconstruct their experiences within the topic of study; he attests to its successful use in multiple studies over the last 30 years. Most distinguishing of its features is utilization of three separate interviews with each participant. Use of more than one interview is justifiable because those who arrange a one-time interview risk missing context (Patton, 1989; Seidman, 2013). The first interview established context of the experience, the second interview asked participants to reconstruct details of their experiences within the context it occurred, and the third interview asked participants to reflect on the meaning their experiences held for them (Seidman, 2013). Following Seidman's (2013) technique, I sought to gain descriptions of each participant's academic and social experiences of enrollment in Willow ECHS. I began with a set of interview questions (See Appendix 2B) per Seidman's (2013) technique, but I also remained open to "re-forming and adding to those questions, [as well as] incorporating impromptu depth-probes as needed"

(Glesne, 2016, p. 96). I heeded Glesne's (2016) advice to "listen, look, and remember" during the interview process.

I coordinated dates for interviews at mutually agreeable times and locations with participants, and I informed participants that the interviews would be recorded, lasting no more than one hour. Seidman (2013) supports the one-hour time limit for younger participants although he says there is "nothing magical or absolute about this time frame" (p. 20). He stresses sticking to the process and structure of the three-interview format and resisting the temptation of continuing the interview after taping, which would be problematic because such conversations are not normally in the written consent/assent forms.

I began the interview sessions with an icebreaker. In addition, I advised participants that they could request to end the interview at any time. Upon completion of transcription, I stored all transcripts per protocol outlined in the data management and recording section below. After passing the proposal defense and gaining IRB approval, I followed Seidman's (2013) suggestion that interviews take place within a two- to three-week period if possible. Seidman (2013) concedes that there are "no absolutes in the world of interviewing" (p. 22). On occasion, I altered interview schedules, but most interviews took place within the prescribed two- to three-week period (April - May).

Interview protocol (See Appendix 2B) was predicated on proven practices of eliciting student voice (Cook-Sather, 2006; Fielding, 2007; Mitra, 2004), the four components of ethics of care theory (Noddings, 1984, 1992, 2002, 2010, 2012), the ECHSI 3R curriculum (AIR & SRI, 2005, 2009, 2013), and Seidman's (2013) three-interview series. All interview protocol relied upon the study's two overarching research

questions: (1) How do early college high school students describe their academic experiences while enrolled in the early college high school program? (2) How do early college high school students describe their social experiences while enrolled in the early college high school program?

Documents. Among the documents I collected were participants' self-reflection logs, journals, transcripts, and academic program plans (APPs). I obtained the transcripts and APPs through the head principal of the school. Participants were asked to log self-reflections after spring semester midterm and final exams. I asked them to journal about their academic and social experiences minimally two times a week, beginning after the first interview and concluding in May. I encouraged participants to not only write in their journals but to also draw or use any other medium (paint, scribble, doodle, paste photos) they felt allowed them to express their academic and social experiences in their journals. I purchased a journal and a set of markers for all participants to jumpstart their journaling. Long accepted as a valid method of accessing rich data, journaling is not without its drawbacks (Blythe, Wilkes, Jackson, & Halcomb, 2013). Participation sometimes lags as students become busy with their studies or possibly feel too vulnerable to express their lived experiences. To offset the possible lag, I offered each participant a \$20 gift for participating in my study. Even though some researchers feel that providing monetary compensation to their participants might abnormally influence participants' responses, I agreed with other researchers who believe that participants deserve some kind of financial compensation for their time (Miles et al., 2014).

Data Management and Recording Procedures

Organization is key to data management. To that end, I created a data management plan (DMP) for recording, backing-up, storing, and sharing data. Michener (2015) describes a DMP as detailing how the researcher should treat data during and after a project. A DMP typically covers the life cycle of data and ensures that data are safe and sharable. Because technology formats that are acceptable today might not be acceptable in the future, Michener (2015) suggests uncompressed and unencrypted data storage. I followed the data retention policy set forth by the University of Louisville, which requires all data, including all signed consent form documents, be kept for a minimum of three years after completion of the research project (University of Louisville [UofL], 2016). I likewise followed all IRB protocol for data management with human subjects.

For recording interviews, I downloaded an application for my android phone from Rev.com[©]. For peace of mind, I also used a secondary recording device. I informed interviewees of both recording devices and explained the rationale behind use of two devices. I noted date, place, and time of all interviews, as well as special mention of any particularly challenging circumstances or observations by memoing. Memoing is a process for recording the thoughts and ideas of the researcher as they evolve throughout the study (Glesne, 2016; Miles et al., 2014). I originally planned to use Nvivo, a qualitative analysis software tool, to organize and code data. However, I had only vague familiarity with Nvivo, and I felt overwhelmed with learning the software; instead, I relied on manual organizational techniques, such as using highlighters, post-it notes, colored pens, and spreadsheets to organize and code data. Once interview transcripts

were complete, I kept hard copies in a three-ring binder. This binder was located in a secure location available only to me. I also kept other materials in the binder, such as participants' demographic information, APPs, transcripts, and self-reflection logs. Moreover, I used the binder to store my own reflexive journaling, my codebook, and copies of all appendices.

In addition to keeping materials in a three-ring binder, I also stored data digitally. Michener (2015) recommends storing “at least three copies in at least two geographically distributed locations” (p. 5). I routinely saved data to the desktop computer at work and at home, to my personal laptop, and to my personal flash drive. All these storage devices were password protected. Not only did I store data to multiple devices, but I also stored data in multiple locations using Cloud computing, a type of internet-based computing that enables users to access storage systems regardless of their location or what device they use (Noor, Sheng, Maamar, & Zeadally, 2016). I used two password-protected Cloud service providers to backup data: Google's DropBox and Microsoft's OneDrive. When my dissertation was completed and deposited to the university's archives, I kept backup data on a compact disc (CD) for final storage.

The last component of my data management plan involved considerations for sharing. During the dissertation process, I shared data with my capstone colleagues, members of my doctorate cohort, and my committee chair. I shared data with participants for the purpose of member checking during the data collection and analysis process. Member checking is a form of participant feedback used to help improve trustworthiness (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2016; Miles et al., 2014). I emailed copies of transcriptions to participants to ask if I captured the essence of the interview, and I

invited participants to provide feedback. I assumed that no reply indicated accuracy of the transcription. Finally, I plan to share data through journal publication or a future conference.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Here I outline data analysis procedures, rationalizing them by citing existing research. Specifically, I discuss how to work with qualitative data—how to organize it, break it into manageable units, code it, synthesize it, and look for patterns of meaning through both inductive and deductive lenses. In addition, I provide an in-depth discussion of trustworthiness.

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) describe data analysis as “the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials that a researcher accumulates to enable the researcher to come up with findings” (p. 147). Specific to narrative inquiry, Polkinghorne (1995) defines the process of data analysis as one that requires “recursive movements from the data to the emerging plot” (p. 15), always testing the story with the database. Glesne (2016) says that data analysis involves “organizing what you have seen, heard, and read, so you can figure out what you have learned and make sense of what you have experienced” (p. 183). Participant narratives must be “textualized [for] only in textualized form do data yield to analysis” (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 95).

To become a good analyst, the researcher must “become more than a recording machine” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 51) and become a critical thinker, faithfully representing the participants’ lived experiences. To represent the participants’ lived experiences faithfully, the narrative researcher must collaborate with participants. Larson

(1997) substantiates this position by emphasizing that “failing to engage in deliberative dialogue and inquiry, researchers put themselves at greater risk of not seeing, not understanding, and misinterpreting people whose lives and life experiences differ from their own” (p. 459). This circuitous movement between researchers and participants and from participants to data analysis increases the likelihood of faithful representation of lived experiences.

The initial step in data analysis is to select a procedure well suited for the study’s methodological design. Researchers may analyze narrative stories about what was said (thematic), the nature of the telling of the story (structural), or who the story is directed toward (dialogic/performance) (Creswell, 2013; Riessman, 2008). I chose thematic analysis for this study. The goal of using thematic analysis was to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of the lived academic and social experiences of four Willow ECHS students. In thematic analysis, the researcher must first segregate data into categories by codes. Coding is an iterative process that involves aggregating text into small categories and for describing the implications and details of these categories (Creswell, 2013; Miles, et al., 2014). The process of coding into categories “removes the experience from the individual participant and is the first step in processes of conceptualization, synthesis, and abstraction” (Morse, 2015, p. 588). My approach utilized both inductive and deductive reasoning through line-by-line coding, paying particular attention to *in vivo* (exact words) and *in situ* (the setting of the person, place, or event) codes.

I contracted with Rev.com[©] to transcribe interviews; turnaround time was often within a 48-hour window or shorter as suggested by Glesne (2016). Once transcription

was completed and I began to collect documents, I started first cycle coding, i.e. searching for “word[s] or short phrase[s] that symbolically assign a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldaña, 2012, p. 3). Thematic analysis should not be viewed as a final step to be done after all data are collected; rather, working with the data while collecting enables the researcher to focus and shape the study as it proceeds (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2016; Miles et al., 2014).

Once first cycle coding was complete, which I wrote in terms of gerunds, I created a codebook (See Appendix 2C). In it, I began to arrange codes into major categories and subcategories. Then I turned to second cycle coding, which involved working with first cycle codes to understand the relationship among them and to look for emerging themes (Saldaña, 2009). Coding without analysis, however, is nothing more than counting or labeling. As Saldaña (2013) says, “Counting is easy; thinking is hard work” (p. 39).

The hard work of thinking occurs within both inductive and deductive reasoning. Inductive analysis is most often associated with qualitative research, and I relied upon it to develop concepts from the data. I also used deductive coding as I searched the text for codes associated with ethics of care theory: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation (Noddings, 1984). The goal was to note similarities in the data to researcher-produced categorical best-fit ordering of data (Polkinghorne, 1995), as well as preconceived codes connected with ethics of care theory. Revising/retesting, grouping/regrouping, and naming/renaming categorical items achieve best fit. To enhance and record inductive and deductive reasoning processes while making analytical

connections, I used memoing to capture my thoughts as they occurred and recorded them in my reflective journal. The art of coding, categorizing, and searching for themes was a lengthy process, but this process led to rich descriptions of storied lives.

To supplement coding, categorizing, and theming, a technique of analysis that has received increased attention is the use of visual devices, such as diagrams, tables, matrices, and graphs to display the finished product (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994). These display methods condense data from an, oftentimes, unwieldy form into one arranged systematically on one page. Formats vary, and to date, there are no formal agreed upon set-ups among qualitative researchers (Miles et al., 2014). I used a data analysis table such as shown below.

Table 5. Data Analysis Output

Interrelating the Explanations:
<p>Testing the Themes: member checking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exit interview. Go back to participants and ask, “Did I interpret your meaning correctly?” • Make any changes post-member checking. <p>Testing the Themes: triangulation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do at least three independent measures of the findings agree with or at least not contradict findings? Do the measures produce a generally converging conclusion? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Multiple ECHS student interviews ➤ Documents (transcripts, academic program plans, self-reflection logs) ➤ ECHS student journaling
Themes:
Categories:
Second Cycle Codes:
First Cycle Codes:

In addition to the data analysis output table, I also used a code map, which looks similar to one illustrated below (See Figure 8). Together, the data analysis table and the code map led toward further analysis and interpretation of data. They also led to the development of “ideas about [my] findings and relating them to the literature and to broader concerns and concepts” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 147). I likewise used matrix displays with defined rows and columns and network displays with a series of lines and arrows as described by Miles et al. (2014) as I analyzed data. In particular, I considered the event-state network design, the vignette concept, and the poetic display for the purposes of my study.

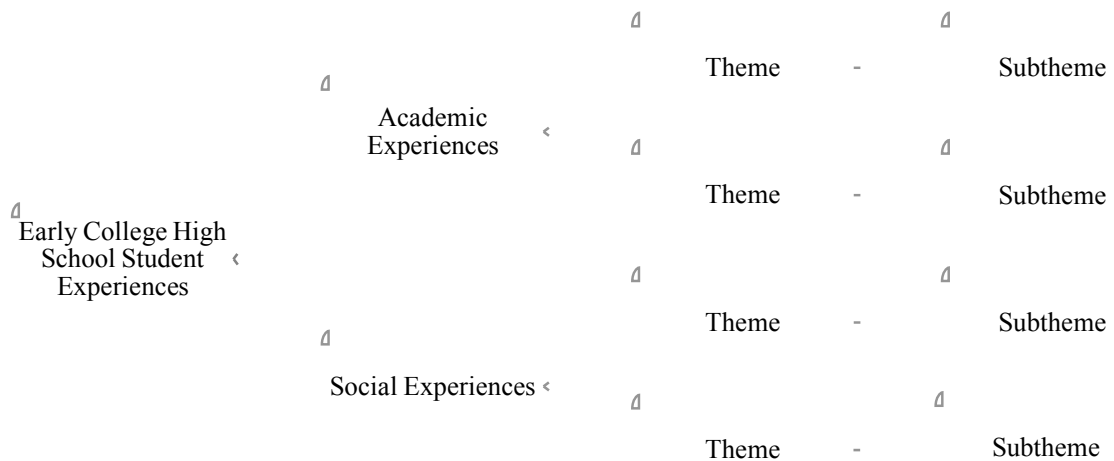


Figure 8. *Visual Representation of Code Map*

I checked the accuracy of data analysis by use of triangulation and member checking, both detailed earlier in this methods section. I also checked the accuracy of data analysis by seeking to clarify any questions of bias. Some strategies to assure trustworthiness and authenticity are prolonged engagement, debriefing with peers and

supervisors, use of thick description, and monitoring of subjectivity (Glesne, 2016; Seidman, 2003). Moreover, use of the three-interview structure enhances credibility because interviews spread over the course of weeks can account for idiosyncratic days and check for the internal consistency of what participants say (Seidman, 2013). By authenticating voice in interviews, the researcher can help determine credibility and trustworthiness. Another strategy to assure trustworthiness includes preserving an audit trail by saving and organizing all documents related to data as a record of the research process (Glesne, 2016).

In sum, qualitative researchers talk in terms of trustworthiness instead of validity because, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) contend, the validity criteria associated with quantitative research (internal validity, external validity, reliability, and generalizability) are inappropriate for interpretive inquiry. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested constructs to achieve trustworthiness that parallel those used by quantitative researchers but used for different ends by qualitative researchers. Those constructs are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Meeting all these does not guarantee a worthwhile study, but meeting them increases the likelihood that the study is more than mere story.

Assumptions

According to Martin (1998), “To speak is one thing, to be heard is another, to be confirmed as being heard is yet another” (p. 9). I assumed that participants felt I heard them in a nonjudgmental fashion and that they were comfortable enough to share their experiences openly with me. I believe, as Noddings (2010) does, that if researchers approach the world “through the relational ethic of caring, [they] are more likely to listen attentively to others” (p. 391).

For my results to be trustworthy, I assumed that students who participated in my study provided accurate data and did not intentionally omit or forget the details of their experiences. Even though I was not the teacher of record for these participants, I did work in the ECHS program where they attended school. I assumed that students responded with accurate accounts despite their familiarity with me. In fact, my affiliation with the program was an asset since it allowed me to gather information that an outsider might not have obtained. According to Unluer (2012), there can be advantages to being an insider-researcher, such as knowing the culture. Conversely, the insider-researcher may create a climate wherein incorrect assumptions surface. I approached the study with full objectivity. Last, my participants belonged to a vulnerable population of minors, and I assumed I would receive the university's International Review Board (IRB) approval, parental consent, and student assent. All assumptions held true.

Limitations and Delimitations

Despite efforts to design the study carefully, limitations outside the researcher's control are inevitable. Regarding the theoretical framework, although there is an element of universality concerning ethics of care theory, meaning all people everywhere want to be cared for, users of this theory are limited because universal caring is impossible. Also, because caring is not always direct, external, and observable, researchers and participants alike might feel limited in their sense of being cared for. Another limitation of using care theory is a few people might feel that so much caring is intrusive. A relation may fail because the cared-for refuses to respond, is unable to respond, or is unwilling to respond; also, a condition, such as lack of time, might cause a relation to fail (Noddings, 2010).

In addition, though some researchers might deem a singular research site and a small sample size as limitations, I saw them as delimitations. I studied only one site because all other ECHSs in the state are over two hours away, which made it impractical to travel since I was full-time employed. As for sample size, I went slightly beyond Creswell's (2013) suggestion of focusing on only one or two individuals for narrative research and, instead, focused on four ECHS students for this study. I also limited this study to examining the narratives of seniors who earned college credit through the school's on-campus cohort and had not yet completed the program in its entirety. I purposely excluded juniors who were in the on-campus cohort. This purposive sampling allowed for swift gathering of data; in turn, it allowed more time for coding and theming, signature procedures of narrative inquiry.

Summary and Foreshadowing Future Findings

In the above discussion, I detailed methodological components of the study. I discussed the characteristics of qualitative research as they pertain to narrative inquiry, and I drew on existing research to justify its use. I also addressed positionality and the researcher's role in situating self and following ethical practice. I then outlined data sources, data collection, data management, and data analysis procedures. Next, I presented assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the study. Finally, I conclude this methods section by looking forward to analysis.

In the following analysis section of this study, I discuss findings based on emergent themes from inductive analysis, as well as themes from deductive analysis of preconceived codes for ethics of care theory. As someone who had some experience in an ECHS setting, I related to most all the themes that the literature review revealed. One

subtheme did surprise me, however. For example, in the Woodcock and Beal (2013) study, lack of supervision while ECHS students were on the college campus surfaced as a subtheme. As I anticipated what my findings might reveal, I predicted that Willow ECHS students would have the opposite view of supervision, if supervision surfaced at all during data collection and analysis. I believed Willow ECHS students would note abundant supervision while they were on the college campus. I provide follow-up discussion about this topic later in the following discussion of analysis.

Also in the following discussion, I examine whether patterns and emergent themes from my study corroborate with findings from other studies. In particular, I look at data with regard to participants' responses to feelings of empowerment versus disempowerment (student voice), engagement versus disengagement (relevance), connection versus disconnection (relationships), as well as reciprocal caring (ethics of care theory) and commonplaces of narrative inquiry (temporality, sociality, and place). I use progressive presentation modes, balancing aesthetic and academic writing; in other words, I use literary devices to present students' lived experiences in "creative nonfiction" style (Miles et al., 2014, p. 328). I support each emergent theme and subtheme with narrative details, quotes, and a brief synthesis of how the results relate to the study's two overarching research questions and the theoretical and conceptual frames of the study. Finally, I also utilize tables, figures, network displays, and matrix displays to present findings.

STUDY TWO: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

Before I present findings from data analysis, I restate the two guiding research questions that informed the study: (1) How do early college high school students describe their academic experiences while enrolled in the early college high school program? (2) How do early college high school students describe their social experiences while enrolled in the early college high school program?

In this section, I revisit researcher positionality, considering who I am and my interactions with participants during data collection and data analysis. Next, I present the context of each participant and the found poetry from within the data, which I then follow by a discussion of coding methods and thematic analysis. I discuss the findings based on emergent themes from inductive analysis, as well as themes from deductive analysis of preconceived codes for ethics of care theory, the 3R curriculum, and three commonplaces of narrative inquiry. I support each emergent theme and subtheme with narrative details, quotes, and a brief synthesis of how the results relate to the study's two overarching research questions and the theoretical and conceptual frames of the study. I then discuss the emergent patterns and themes and how they do or do not corroborate with findings from previous studies discussed in the literature review. Last, I conclude by summarizing the section and looking ahead to implications and recommendations.

Researcher Positionality Revisited

Researchers who utilize narrative inquiry become instruments of data collection and must exercise reflexivity by positioning themselves in the study (Creswell, 2013;

Hatch, 2002; Milner, 2007). In the following section, I define my role at Willow ECHS and my relationship with the participants by discussing positionality, reflexivity, and ethical considerations as they related to my study. I also outline steps that I took to minimize bias throughout the study.

In one regard, my background as a white female over the age of 50, who was born and reared in the rural foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, separated me from the largely black urban population of Willow ECHS in many ways. However, more than 30 years of prior experience working with high school students transitioning to college, teaching dual credit at the high school, as well as serving as adjunct English professor at the community college for many of those years, suitably equipped me for the job of College Access Resource Teacher (CART) at Willow ECHS. My work as a CART illuminated the need for providing support and care for the typically under-represented college-goer and compelled me to embrace ethics of care theory to study ECHS students' lived academic and social experiences.

Given that I interacted frequently with the students who became participants in the study, I kept a reflexive journal throughout the research process as a method of self-checking and analytic noting (Glesne, 2016). I was keenly aware of the potential for biases, values, and experiences that I might bring to the study, and I made those known explicitly (Glesne, 2016). As Hatch (2002) points out, researchers need to be sensitive to vulnerable populations and imbalanced power relations. Keeping a reflexive journal helped me remain mindful of those things as I sought to understand the academic and social experiences of participants. Excerpts from my reflexive journaling and analytic memoing appear in Appendix 2D.

Because I worked closely with one of the two on-campus cohort groups at Willow ECHS, I positioned myself to work with the group for which I did not serve as teacher of record to safeguard against bias. Before soliciting participants, I first sought permission to gain entry of the site. Negotiating entry with gatekeepers was not problematic as I worked at the school and had a good relationship with the head principal and the school's director of early college; additionally, the local school district has a good working relationship with the university. My role was to provide a holistic overview of the context under study and both explicit and implicit operating procedures of the ECHS program, as well as present students' lived experiences with care and self-awareness.

Reflexivity, or positioning myself in the study, was a way of acknowledging that how I write is a reflection of my own interpretation based on my experiences and personal politics that I brought to the research (Creswell, 2013). Situating self and one's own assumptions leads narrative inquirers to the belief that experience is knowledge for living (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dewey, 1938). Researchers may listen to participant stories, or they may co-construct stories with the participant (Coulter et al., 2007; Riessman, 2008). This co-construction of reality is core to social constructivism's epistemological beliefs. By asking participants to collaborate on the construction of their personal stories, I sought to make their lives present. For example, after I pulled words and phrases from interview transcripts and journal entries to create found poetry, I used member checking to decrease the chance of misrepresentation. This collaboration was necessary for the narrative to succeed (Coulter et al., 2007).

Presentation of Participants

As mentioned in the introduction of my study, we all have a story to tell: “We dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate, and love in narrative” (Hardy, 1968, p. 5). Narrative is a part of us. The stories, themes, and subthemes that follow evolved from four ECHS students in a large urban district in the southeastern United States. I present demographic information, a brief introduction of each participant, and found poetry reconstructed from each participant’s data (See Table 6). It is important to note that participants wrote in their race, gender, and household type on the demographic questionnaire instead of selecting them from a predetermined list. It was not until the interviews and reading through journal entries that I learned more about the participants’ demographic backgrounds and how these inform their lived experiences.

Table 6. *Participant Demographics*

Pseudonym	Age	Race	Gender	GPA	College Credit Hrs.	Agreed to Journal	Household Type	Degree Path
Candy	17	W	F	2.89	65	yes	married parents	AA
Danielle	18	B	F	2.00	40	yes	single father	AA
Mason	17	B	M	3.30	65	yes	blended family	AA
Nolan	17	W	Non-conforming	3.07	41	yes	single mother with boyfriend	AAS

Source: Willow ECHS Students

Note: Degree Path: Associate of Art (AA), Associate of Science (AS), Culinary Arts (AAS)

Each of these individuals chose their respective pseudonyms. Before participant introductions, I discuss found poetry and its use in qualitative research. Glesne (2016) says that “poetry and qualitative inquiry have made good partners” (p. 252). Research poetry has many names, but for the purposes of this study, I use the term *found poetry* (Butler-Kisber, 2002) to describe how I “craft[ed] the poems and put the poetic pieces ... [together] out of the words of the interviewees...” (Glesne, 2016, p. 253). By using this arts-based interpretation and by using participants’ exclusive own language from their interviews and journaling, the researcher creates a “third voice” (Glesne, 2016, p. 253). These poetic reconstructions of participants’ lived experiences provide the organic poetry that offers richness of what it means to be an ECHS student. Found poetry, defined as “the imaginative appropriation and reconstruction of already-existing texts” (Prendergast, 2006, p. 369), emerged from in vivo coding. The American Education Research Association (AERA) recognizes this approach for its contribution to qualitative inquiry (Saldaña, 2013; Glesne, 2016). Saldaña (2013) says, “There are times when we must crunch the numbers, and [there are] times when we must compose a poem” (p. 260). Below I present introductions of the participants and the found poetry within their words.

Candy’s Story

Candy is a Caucasian female, and she was a 17-year-old senior at the time of this study. Candy is from a household with married parents, and though it was not one of the interview questions, she volunteered that she was a first-generation college-goer. Candy held various part-time jobs throughout her time in the ECHS program, limiting her work hours to focus on academics. Candy’s early academic and social experiences were difficult at times. She reported experiencing bullying in elementary school because of

being overweight. She also reported signs of depression but remained focused on academics. She sprang back during her middle school years with a better self-image and stated that she has been a good student ever since. Her high school transcript showed this to be the case; however, her college transcript disclosed struggles in some collegiate coursework. Nonetheless, Candy graduated from high school with her associate's degree from the community college. Below is the poetic representation of Candy's ups and downs while enrolled in the ECHS program.

“Proud of Myself”

I feel like giving up,
Focus.
I feel like giving up,
Map it Out.
I feel like giving up,
Push Me.
I feel like giving up,
Guide Me.
I feel like giving up,
Help Me.
I feel like giving up,
Pick Me Up.
I feel like giving up,
But. I. Refuse.

Proud of Myself: Degree Confirmed.

Candy admitted that she needed to improve her time management and organizational skills, but she expressed satisfaction with her writing skills and her perseverance. Even though she spoke of being shy and sometimes having difficulty with sharing, Candy confirmed that she felt cared for during her tenure in the ECHS program.

Danielle's Story

Danielle is an African-American female, and she was an 18-year-old senior at the time of the study. Danielle is from a single father household. She was not a first-

generation college-goer. This detail permeated her interviews and journaling; in fact, family members with college educations surround her, and that put added pressure on her to excel in her college courses. Danielle's early academic and social experiences were self-reported as positive ones. She attended a touted magnet school and performed so well that teachers offered the opportunity for her to skip a grade, but her parents chose not to accept the offer. Things went exceedingly well for Danielle until the ninth grade, when she failed her first course. She began to struggle with academics while she fought to find her way socially. A review of her high school transcript confirmed this struggle, yet she still maintained average grades until the last semester of her senior year despite working an after-school job every day from 5:00 p.m.-10:00 p.m. A review of her college transcript exposed an academic dive. Danielle was on target to earn her associate's degree by graduation time; however, that did not happen. The poetic reconstruction of her experiences is below.

"Lessons Learned"

Family and friends finding their way—degrees in hand—pressure to measure up.
I wanted that degree.

What mad pursuit? One year good grades, one year bad.
I wanted independence.

Too many classes, too much to do—high school, college, work, activities, social life.
I wanted to balance it all.

Surrounded by success. What about me?

Working hard, staying positive, overwhelming strife—they do not understand.
I wanted to drop a class or two.

How much can I handle? Sometimes a lot, sometimes a little.
I wanted to focus more.

Tutors, drawing, singing—stress relief—must persevere.
I wanted to speak up; I wasn't loud enough.

Surrounded by success. What about me?

On another level—no denying, learning what to do and what not to do.
I wanted to succeed.

Will I even graduate? Incompletes, failed classes, low GPA
I needed help.
Teachers and professors: You can get through this; I believe in you.
I wanted everything to be okay.
Surrounded by success. What about me?

Some regrets, disappointments, and setbacks along the way.
I wanted to avoid pitfalls of ambitiousness.
Would I do it again? Yes, indeed. Lessons learned, guaranteed.

No degree yet, but 40 college credit hours; who gets to say that?
Early college program: makes or breaks you.
Surrounded by success. What about me?

Bent but not broken. I will succeed.

Danielle believed that she handled adversity well and learned to persevere and conquer challenges. She admitted, however, that she should strive to improve her communication skills and to speak up when she needs help. Like Candy, she confirmed that she felt cared for during her time in the ECHS program.

Mason's Story

Mason is an African-American male, and he was a 17-year-old senior at the time of the study. Mason is from what he calls a blended family. He self-reported that his family consists of a mother, a step-father, a brother, and a step-brother. He did not volunteer whether he was a first-generation college-goer during any of the interviews, but he wrote about the pressures coming from his birth father to follow in his footsteps of obtaining a college degree. Mason was a multi-sport athlete and worked a weekend job every Saturday and Sunday. His early academic and social experiences brought success. Academically, he reported that he was always naturally competitive and strove to be the top scholar in the class. Socially, then and now, he reported being talkative and friendly. Analysis of his high school transcript confirmed his academic successes; he graduated as

the valedictorian of his class. Review of his college transcript indicated that he met a few academic obstacles, but those did not deter his earning the associate's degree from the community college alongside his high school diploma. Below is the artistic reconstruction of Mason's experiences.

“This is Me”

This is me being a college student in high school.

Nervous, not going to lie.

Self-doubt: Just try it, why not?

I wake up. I get prepared. It's a process.

Get hold of it; shocking myself; getting the hang of it—
sort of.

This is me being a college student in high school.

Nervous, not going to lie.

Balance it all: school, sports, job, family, friends.

I wake up. I get prepared. It's a process.

Get hold of it; proving myself; getting the hang of it—
finally.

This is me being a college student in high school.

Nervous, not going to lie.

Sacrifices: late nights studying, sleep no more, all eyes on me.

I wake up. I get prepared. It's a process.

Get hold of it; appreciating the opportunity, getting the hang of it—
Thankful.

This was me being a college student in high school.

Degree with Distinction.

Mason never felt forgotten academically while enrolled in the ECHS program, but he felt forgotten sometimes socially. His self-reflection log revealed his need to lessen the tendency to procrastinate and to work on his nervousness when approaching new experiences. Without hesitation, like Candy and Danielle, he confirmed feeling cared for during his ECHS experiences.

Nolan's Story

Nolan is a Caucasian, gender non-conforming teenager and was a 17-year-old senior at the time of the study. Although Nolan prefers the use of non-gender pronouns, for this study, I use the pronoun associated with the male gender because use of gender inclusive pronouns is not considered standard formal English language usage. Nolan self-reported that he is from a household with a single divorced mother who has a live-in boyfriend. Nolan has two siblings who have moved out on their own. During all three interviews with Nolan, he mentioned that he will be the first in his family to obtain a college education. Nolan was not involved in any extra-curricular activities, nor did he have an after-school or weekend job. He shared that he spent a lot of time participating in community service and volunteer work. Nolan's early social experiences included a battle with gender identity and a speech impediment. He also battled a sense of belonging, once mentioning that he was in a pep club with a big grant [referring to the ECHS program]. Academically, he graded himself as a B/B+ student in elementary and middle school. Socially, he explained that even as a young child he learned that social life and school were not going to be the best combination for him. He described experiences of being bullied and fat-shamed throughout school. A probe into Nolan's high school transcript supported his self-description of being a B/B+ student, and his college transcript divulged the same. When he graduated from high school, Nolan had earned 41 college credit hours. Below is the reframing of data from Nolan's interviews and journal entries.

“Looking for More of Me”

I am an open book,
searching for answers.

I am generations of poverty,
seeking financial certainty.
I am deprived of home internet,
relying on school technology.
I am gender non-conforming,
owning no shame.
I am hungry, sleepy, and weary of buses,
persevering nonetheless.
I am shaken with despair,
hiding like a bastard child.
I am fat-shamed,
turning to Grandma because she does not judge.
I am a contradiction,
earning good grades and bad.
I am aware I should be on top of my grades more,
studying to increase my GPA.
I am driven to culinary arts,
hoping to be a pastry chef.
I am finally expressing myself,
revealing my true nature.
I am finding more resources,
learning how to fit in.
I am learning college is a place for everyone,
leaping forward in knowledge and identity.
I am still in transition,
realizing I am not hopeless.
I am fortunate to have close friends,
keeping me from falling apart.
I am compromise,
changing paths whenever I see the need.
I am an early college high school student,
refreshing to study gender and sociology.
I am figuring out how much of me I want to express,
worrying less and caring more.
I am a heart of fragility,
using my voice to cope.
I am not a failure,
tempering decisions with caution.
I am eager to write the next chapter,
empowering my future.

Nolan stated that he did well constructing essays and documents but that he needs to improve time management and study skills. He was the only participant who felt uncared

for at times during his experiences in the ECHS program. He described feeling more cared for in his first year of the program because he had more friends.

I next present analysis of data. First, I discuss the interpretive issues with qualitative analysis and how researchers can discern findings based on something more than hunches. Though interpretive, the essence-capturing afforded by use of qualitative analysis validates its importance (Glesne, 2016; Miles et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2013). Qualitative analysis is not just labeling; it is linking data to an idea and the cyclical process of arriving at conclusions (Saldaña, 2013).

Analysis of Data

Even though analysis of qualitative data is not a precise science, this interpretive approach to analysis does not diminish the value of data; rather, Madden (2013) believes it “value adds” (p. 10). Researchers use this non-numeric approach to uncover and explore phenomena or experiences that affect participants. Though there are no finite boundaries (Saldaña, 2013), when researchers pay meticulous attention to language, sense-making, and recognizing patterns, they can capture the human experience in understandable terms.

To capture the lived experiences of my participants, I relied on inductive analysis to discover emergent themes. Through the iterative process of coding, I relabeled codes, incorporated some codes with others, or dropped some codes altogether. I also relied on the theoretical and conceptual frameworks guiding this study as a lens to inform analysis. For deductive analysis, I searched for components of ethics of care theory: specifically modeling, dialoging, practicing, and encouraging the best in others (Noddings, 2012); the 3R curriculum of rigor, relevance, and relationships (JFF, 2009; JFF, 2013; Wolk, 2005);

and the three commonplaces of narrative inquiry, which are temporality, sociality, and place (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). A detailed summary of the coding processes is found below.

Coding Methods

To begin the coding process, I utilized a grammatical method of coding called attribute coding (See Appendix 2C). In it, I sought demographic information from each participant (See Table 2.3 above). Richards and Morse (2007) advise that “if it moves, code it” (p. 146). I took this advice and utilized further methods of coding that fall under elemental methods: (a) in vivo coding, to honor student voice; (b) descriptive coding, to summarize by topic; and (c) process coding, to connote action in the data (See Appendix 2C). In addition, I utilized an affective method of coding called values coding, as well as a language method called provisional coding. At times, I used simultaneous coding, using two or more codes within a single datum (Saldaña, 2012). I based values coding on a priori codes from the ethics of care theory, and I based provisional coding on the a priori codes from narrative inquiry’s three commonplaces and the ECHSI 3Rs. I noted these codes in the margin of transcripts and journals only and did not list them in an appendix. This repertoire of methods helped me collapse codes, manage, filter, and highlight salient features that led to themes and subthemes from the data.

Discussion of Themes and Subthemes

A theme is “an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent experience and its variant manifestations,” and it “captures and unifies the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole” (Saldaña, 2012, p. 175). Such interpretive discoveries led to some themes that naturally emerged from key data collected during

interviews and document analysis, while other themes were the result of pre-existing or a priori codes from the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that supported the study. Analysis of the data resulted in the emergence of five themes: (a) caring relationships, (b) overcoming setbacks, (c) evolving as a student, (d) balancing multiplicity, and (e) sacrificing for goals.

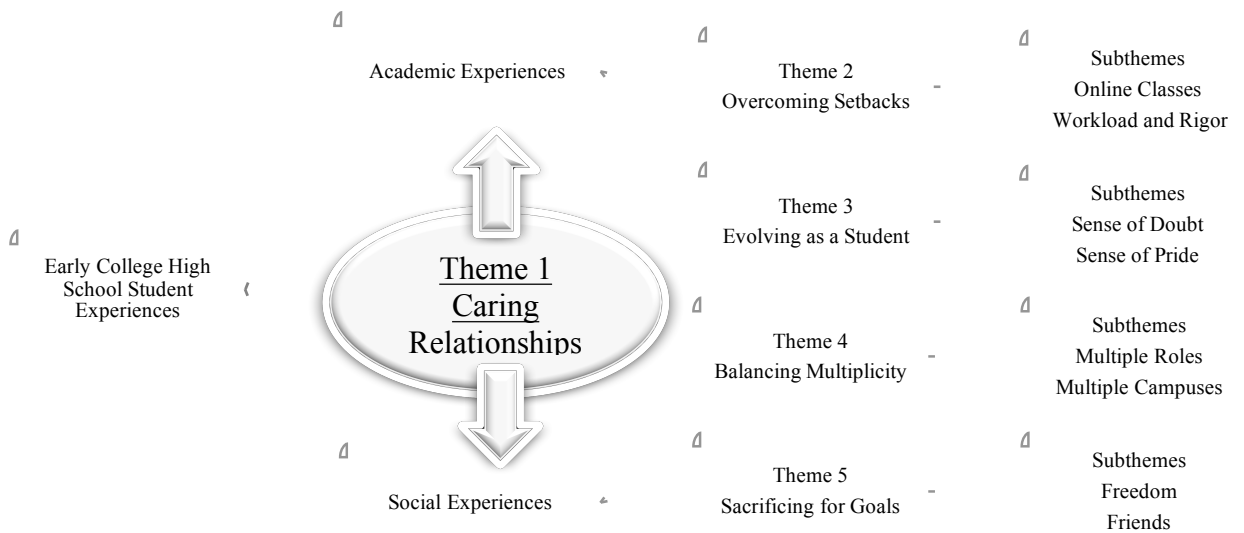


Figure 9. *Visual Representation of Themes and Subthemes*

The theme of caring relationships was central to participants’ academic experiences, as well as their social experiences (See Figure 9). I therefore chose to keep it enlarged and centered in Figures 10 and 11 below to show its connection the both overarching research questions. Figure 10 illustrates an overview of themes that relate to the first research question. Thereafter, I discuss caring relationships as they related to participants’ academic experiences, social experiences, and intertwined academic and social experiences. Last, I discuss the themes of overcoming setbacks and evolving as a student as they relate to participants’ academic experiences.

RQ1: How do early college high school students describe their academic experiences while enrolled in the early college high school program?

Overcoming
Setbacks

Caring
Relationships

Evolving as a
Student

Figure 10. *Visual Representation of Themes and Connections to Research Question 1*

Caring relationships. Through in vivo coding, descriptive coding, and a priori coding from ethics of care theory (Noddings, 2012), this theme revealed itself in participants' academic and social experiences while they were enrolled in the ECHS program. It is the only theme lending itself to both overarching research questions. Even though they experienced it differently, all participants spoke of feeling connected and cared for. They developed caring relationships with various adult figures (teachers, professors, head principal, assistant principal, mentors, and early college advisor), as well as classmates. Sometimes the caring adults modeled, dialogued, practiced, or confirmed care by providing academic counsel and sometimes by providing social counsel. There were times, however, that participants warmly received academic counsel only because of the caring social environment already established between students and key adults in the ECHS program. Therefore, some of the following narratives are distinctly academic or distinctly social in nature, and I categorized them accordingly. Yet other narratives could fit into either or both categories. In cases when the data did not distinctly direct category placement, I consulted my reflexive journaling and memoing to search for clues. Oftentimes, journaling or memoing directed my decision-making for placing a narrative

into social experiences even when the narrative first appeared academic in nature. This was because, as stated above, the caring academic experiences would not have occurred without the caring social experiences first at play. Since students spoke of caring relationships at both the high school and the college, I include examples of both. Because the theme of relationships surfaced in multiple situations, below I share only the most poignant narratives.

Caring relationships in academic experiences. Mason recalled a time during his first year in the program when his basic public speaking college professor built a caring relationship with him:

He was a really nice guy. He and I built a strong relationship. He told me that I reminded him a little of himself at a time when he was my age. He was a sort of older guy. He helped me out a lot in that class. We built a relationship like, he even told me that if I needed anything, like help during any classes or scheduling or anything after high school, ... he knew I was an early college student. He said he knows a couple of people at [the university] who could help me. He knew that is where I wanted to go to school.

Mason recalled another time when he experienced caring from a college professor. He shared how the professor practiced caring:

I was just thinking I was on my own at first going into the program. I was thinking some of the college teachers wouldn't even probably care whether kids passed or failed at times. One day during class, I was saying how I felt to a college professor, like I was telling you, how nobody really

cared, and I was saying, “You guys don’t care if we pass or fail.” She was like there’s actually people out here who care for you, you just got to see it. That was a time when somebody pulled me aside and actually let me know that they cared for me.

Mason shared a final academic experience that demonstrated caring from the early college advisor at the high school. He detailed that experience as follows:

We’ll open Blackboard together, and we’ll pull up the notes or everything that I need to know about it, and she’ll tell me, “What about your study guide? Remember you have the flash cards.” And she’ll tell me to write them down and just study. She’ll tell me about her study habits in college and what helped her, or what helped her get over that little hump of being nervous all the time.

Danielle also shared an experience of a caring relationship with a college professor. This experience was during summer semester between her junior and senior years of high school. During the summer semester, ECHS faculty is not in frequent contact with the students, which might have led to Danielle’s need for extra support that summer.

I’ve developed a somewhat friendly relationship with my English 102 professor that I had over the summer. Toward the end of that class, I could not finish this one final paper due to a family loss. It really had me down. I couldn’t really focus on my work that I needed to do. With that I ended up receiving an incomplete or an I for my grade. I told her the circumstances, and I told her what I was going through. She was very

comforting to me. She let me know that everything was going to be okay. She gave me time to do my work, and I ended up having a B after turning in that paper that I needed to turn in.

Nolan was the only participant who mentioned not only a caring college professor, but he also mentioned caring adults outside education who were associated with the ECHS program through its job shadowing program and its mentoring program. He detailed those caring experiences as follows:

It's the people who don't have to do stuff that mean the most to me. Like my job shadowing went over very well. I felt very cared for by my two people I shadowed. Then my mentor, I see her all the time, and I feel very cared for by her. I feel like through their actions and through just how they talk to me, like the dialect, everything they are doing just tends to show that they do care. It's just what they do. Like my mentor, she shows she cares all the time because she's so invested in helping me with my future. In fact, she called me to congratulate me on getting accepted into culinary [at the college], which was yesterday, before I even got to check that I was accepted, and it was really nice of her.

After a few moments of reflection, Nolan added another example and then revisited the topic of care. He added:

Oh, yes, and the incident with Ms. L., the college director of early college. There was that time where Ms. L. went out of her way to introduce me to Professor T. last year, so we could talk about the college's gender policy.

On the topic of care again, I felt uncared for when I first “came out,” but I’ve been feeling more cared for ever since.

Caring relationships in social experiences. In addition to caring relationships regarding academic experiences, participants also recalled experiences of caring relationships through their social experiences while enrolled in the ECHS program. One example came from Mason about the high school early college advisor, who not only advised students on academics but also played many other roles. Formally, the advisor provided support, assistance, and advice to the system-wide service center and the school. Also, the advisor formally provided technical support, feedback to appropriate district officials and school personnel on implementation of and compliance to college and career readiness, and worked with high school and college policies and standards. Last in the formal capacity, the advisor conducted seminars and provided leadership to school personnel who needed more guidance or information about the ECHS program. Informally, however, the early college advisor served as a mentor, friend, liaison, confidante, cheerleader, counselor, and as the participants called her, college mom. Mason expressed his experience this way:

Ms. W., she’s somebody that would care for me, like care for you. I’m picturing this situation now, her coming to me, I know she would sit down with me. And she always, I don’t know if it shows on my face, she’ll always know something’s wrong with me. She’ll ask me what’s wrong and actually sit down with me, and I’ll tell her. ‘Cause sometimes I sort of have an anxiety about a class, and I get nervous a little if I’m going to pass a big test that’s coming up. She would know, and she would just sit down

with me and ask me about it. I feel like that was a time where she would care for me. You'll see her actually talking with me and being engaged.

Danielle also recalled an episode when the early college advisor at the high school demonstrated caring:

I remember one time, I don't know if I should be saying this, but I remember one time, I had missed my school bus, and I had class that day, and I texted Ms. W. to let her know that I was going to be late or to hold the bus for me because I had to walk to school. She had called me and asked me where I was, and I told her where I was. She told me, "I'll be there in two minutes." She came and picked me up. Because she was running late as well, so she was like, "Well, I might as well just pick you up on my way." That's exactly what she did. She made sure that I did not miss my class that day.

Ms. W. frequently provided rides for students who could not arrange other means of transportation.

Danielle not only shared about a caring adult while she participated in the ECHS program, but she also shared an experience about a caring classmate:

I wasn't really sure about one of these papers that I had written for a certain class, and one of the classmates offered to help me and read over my paper for me and help add things that I could put into my paper to make it longer, and she was like, "Hey, maybe try this, try that." She became a good friend that I would not have known outside the early college program.

Like Mason and Danielle, Candy shared an experience with the ECHS advisor, who dialogued with her to demonstrate caring. Her story follows:

I sat down with Ms. W. at a table at the college one time. She gave me a piece of paper and asked me to map out what I wanted to do with my life. I was going through a tough time choosing and figuring out what I wanted to do career wise. I feel like she encouraged me, by my mapping it out and her going through and asking me, “Would this make you happy, or would this make you happy?” Then she encouraged me to go with what my heart told me to do and talked to me about how situations in her life have affected her, of where she is now, and how she wishes she could go back and change something. Or, how she chose her career now, and she likes it more so than what she thought that she would like a long time ago. I feel like she encouraged me a lot to make my decision.

Readers may recall that Mason is a self-proclaimed talker, so it comes as no surprise that he shared so many examples of caring. The following example was very important to him because it was about the greatest social event of the year: prom. This example illustrated the practice of caring (Noddings, 2010) by the head principal.

My mom was supposed to, it was about prom, my mom had the papers she was supposed to turn in herself to the school, but she forgot ‘cause she had to take a shift. So I just asked her, “Did you turn in that paper, and did they give you a ticket or anything for prom?” She was like, “Oh, I forgot!” I was nervous, ‘cause on the paper it said April 17 the papers would be due, and it was Sunday I believe. I was just nervous. I was

planning ‘cause it was my senior prom, and I was like, “I may not be able to go; I wasted money for a suit!” I emailed the principal. It was about 2:00 on a Sunday. He got back to me about 30 minutes later. That showed me the caring right there, ‘cause a head principal emailed me back on a weekend where he’s not even involved with school to tell me it’s okay. I could still get prom tickets.

Caring in both academic and social experiences. Candy told about an ECHS teacher who modeled caring in both academic and social contexts:

Ms. M. was a high school teacher my first year in the early college program. I still contact her through Facebook, and sometimes I see her outside of school. She really helped me with a lot of things emotionally and academically. I feel like she helped me better prepare myself for the program before I entered the program. She also helped me throughout the program with my English courses. I feel like she was a major impact in helping me succeed because she always would talk to me about papers and ask me to send them to her, so she could look over them. Or, asked did I need any help with anything, or just to be there if I needed anybody. I feel like I could come to her with anything. I feel like I looked at her as my second mother because she was always there no matter what.

Just as Candy, Nolan told of an experience that fell under both academic and social experiences. He failed an assignment, partially due to his insistence of using non-standard, gender-free pronouns in an essay. Nolan shared his appreciation of the care Ms. W. gave him:

Last year when I was crying in the library after I failed that essay, Ms. W. pulled out that package of donuts. I talk about that all the time. I'm just a very hungry person. I just love eating. It's one of my coping methods in life, but that showed me she really cared for me. After I ate the donuts, she encouraged me to open up Blackboard, so she could help me search the syllabus to see if I was allowed to do extra credit or if the professor dropped the lowest grade or anything like that.

Overcoming setbacks. This theme emerged through in vivo coding and descriptive coding, as well as provisional coding based on the ECHSI 3R curriculum (JFF, 2009; JFF, 2013; Wolk, 2005) and narrative inquiry commonplaces (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Participants talked of several topics that caused setbacks while they participated in the ECHS program and how they overcame those setbacks. Among those setbacks, online classes posed problems because of students' forgetfulness, lack of self-governing, and lack of dependable internet service at home. Participants also experienced setbacks when they faced a heavier workload and more rigor in their college courses than they expected. Through all the setbacks, students learned to overcome them by focusing more, studying more, procrastinating less, and staying positive. Below I share some of their stories.

Online classes. Despite those participants who found enjoyment in the freedom of online classes, there were those who felt disadvantaged by being in online classes. Mason asserted his concern in the following manner:

The summer between my junior and senior year I took an online class. I wasn't prepared for that at all. Because with online classes, there's no

face-to-face, there's no professors to see, so you got to do everything on your own. And within those classes, I would sometimes forget [to do the assignments] because I had a job, and, also, I was doing sports during the summer.

Because Mason needed a face-to-face reminder, he found himself behind in his online class. He shared the following:

So I didn't have like a reminder, so sometimes I'd find myself getting a little behind in the class because there was no class that I had to go to, so that was a struggle at first. When you don't have a class that you actually go to face-to-face, you find yourself procrastinating. Like, "Oh, okay, I'll just do that later on," and then you find yourself not doing it at all. So once I took those online classes, I was like, "Oh, I have to actually be involved myself." It basically depends on you in the online class. Well, it depends on you in both face-to-face and online classes, but you got to be more ... I say, steady, I guess. Like you got to be focused more.

Mason eventually overcame the setback that online classes first presented. He learned to self-govern as he shared below:

I learned to check on my online classes and make sure I'm caught up on everything every morning. 'Cause like I said, you know, I can be sort of forgetful about online classes. This semester my online class was geology, so I would check on that every morning, make sure I have everything done, like with the discussion boards and everything.

Mason was not the only participant to express concern about his forgetfulness and the resulting setbacks in online classes. Nolan also articulated concerns. He said, “Those online classes are always hard to keep up with. I’m just a forgetful person to start off, but secondly, I’m more motivated to work for people I see in person.” Nolan resumed, “Last semester I told Ms. W. straight up that I didn’t want to be in the online class that I eventually failed. It was visible. I didn’t want to do it. I was uncomfortable with it.” Nolan had a second unfortunate online class encounter with a Spanish exam. He misjudged the amount of time he needed to take an exam. He admitted, “As soon as I got to the last part, it was 10:22 a.m., and I had class at 10:30 a.m. every day. I had to get the hell out of there. I had to go.”

Nolan was further setback because he did not have dependable internet at home. He continued:

I have a laptop at home, but it won’t connect to the internet. I’ve done everything from connecting an Ethernet cord to it from my router. It just won’t. No ifs, ands, or buts. It’s just not a guarantee. I try my best to get things ... if I need to print, I always do it here [at the college]. I always wait ‘til I get here in the morning to print or any of that.

After these experiences, Nolan convinced administrators not to place him in any more online classes, and a review of his transcripts showed that his grades improved accordingly. Nolan’s insistence of not being enrolled in anymore online classes allowed him to overcome these setbacks and move toward improving his grade point average. Nolan’s narrative encompassed all aspects of the commonplaces of narrative as outlined by Connelly and Clandinin (2006): temporality (data comprised over multiple

interactions and through reflections on earlier experiences); sociality (attention inward and outward toward thoughts and emotions); and place (attention directed to places where events occurred).

Though Candy had less to say about online classes than either Mason or Nolan, she did say, “I’ve mainly had a lot of online classes, so I didn’t really meet the professors, which is too bad. It meant I couldn’t stop and say hi because I didn’t know them.” Candy did not view the online classes as setbacks necessarily, but she expressed how she wished for more face-to-face classes.

Workload and rigor. Every participant spoke of being ill prepared for the workload and the rigor (a component of the ECHSI 3R curriculum) of college coursework compared to high school coursework. Mason shared a setback about when he first got into his college classes that he “found [himself] not remembering everything...it’s so much—no way I could remember all that stuff.” He recounted:

So I was like, “Yes, I actually have to study.” I wasn’t prepared at first for the study habits that I had to do. I had to learn them on my own, and some of the courses that I took helped me with the study habits that I have now. The difficulty was very high. I was kind of expecting it, so it didn’t shock me out of nowhere, but it sort of did with the content that I was learning. I was never accustomed to that kind of rigor taking high school classes.

The most rigorous course for Mason was biology. He had never had a science course with a lab before, and it presented some problems for him. He continued:

The hardest was biology, because in the lab, she would teach you how to do it like one time, but then after that, you were on your own. You and

your lab partner were, you just had to follow the instructions. If you would ask a question, she would accept your question, but she would answer it with sort of like a question. It was hard. The tests would be over, well, the tests weren't even really tests. They were what you did in the experiments. You would redo the experiment. There would be like 30 different stations that you'd have to remember. Yeah, it was crazy. I never expected anything like that in a lab.

Just as Mason eventually learned to self-govern to overcome the setbacks that online classes presented, he also learned to overcome the setbacks caused by rigorous courses.

He concluded:

I finally started getting' ahold of some of it, but sometimes I would just go brain dead. Then my grades dropped a little bit to almost a low C, but the professor dropped the lowest grade. I have to focus more. Stay focused 'cause that one little thing you miss may be critical and may affect your grade completely.

I started studying more, and then, the next thing you know, the next week or two later, my grade went up to a B, and then it slowly progressed even more. I feel like you guys actually caring for me, it showed a lot.

Nolan also admitted being ill prepared for the transition to a more rigorous workload. It is worth noting that Nolan was the only participant who provided an accurate definition for the term *rigor*.

I would say the transition was difficult. I always thought of early college so far was like the first two years of attending Willow. You can take these dual credit college classes in grade 9 and 10, but there was no real transition. It was, oh, you can scrape by doing nothing in grade 9 and 10. Holy crap, if you don't do every assignment when you are a full-time college student in grade 11 and 12, you're going to fail. That was a big shift. That was something I didn't like, ... was the workload difference. That was a really bad part. A lot of people romanticized early college, but you've got to work hard.

Candy echoed Mason's and Nolan's thoughts about workload and rigor when she postulated the differences between high school workload and rigor and what she experienced at the community college:

A lot of the college courses that I've taken have been strict about turning in work on time. They [professors] don't let you slack and turn in late assignments as much as high school teachers do. High school teachers also allow you to be late to class, sometimes, on occasion. In college courses, you aren't allowed to be late to class, or you aren't allowed to come in because you're going to interrupt other students that are working. I would say that the work is more. You have to put your head on and focus on work. In high school, I feel like it's easy, so I can just fly through the work, and then I'm just sitting there. In my college classes, I'm usually the last one sitting in class when working on an assignment or taking a test. The difference is huge.

Danielle shared the same sentiment as her peers about being ill prepared for the workload. Her response intertwined with another theme of this study, caring relationships. She elaborated:

I wasn't prepared for the workload, and I've always juggled in ... I don't know, I was very good at multitasking, but this was on another level. I wasn't prepared at all. I carried too many hours. The load of work had gotten to me, and I noticed that all of my grades had dropped severely, and I felt like I had no support, and I had no one in my corner until I found out that Ms. W. and Ms. M. ... helped me get through what I was going through. Ms. W. made sure I did my work, and she made sure that my mental health was okay. She would always ask me if I'm okay. She always motivated me. She said, "You can get through this. I believe in you." That's just what really showed me, "Hey, these women are here for me, and they really care about my future."

Danielle confessed that she sometimes allowed the workload to trigger stress and procrastination:

I normally took care of everything I needed to take care of when I needed to take care of it. Then I would start to stack everything on top of one another and try to knock it all out. That's really stressful. That would be a stressful day, so you try to plan out what you need to do first, what you need to do after that, thinking to yourself, "Oh, I shouldn't have procrastinated."

When asked what she did to overcome these situations, she answered as follows:

I usually put music on. Also, after a long stressful day, I sit down, and I draw. I put my headphones on, I block everything out, and I just get to work. I have been drawing in my journal. It helps a lot.

Danielle's most emotional narrative revolved around her unfilled goals, yet she found a way to look at the positive:

At the beginning of this year, I really, really wanted to graduate high school with my associate's degree. I guess the person who had made my classes crammed me with a lot of classes that were overwhelming. I'm taking six college classes including the dual credit class at the high school, which is exceeding the amount any student should take at all. I know that now.

It has messed me up. It has messed my GPA up. I regret that. I wish earlier that I was like, "Hey, I don't really care for the title." I'm just glad that I have the credits that I do, but it's too late now. I just wish I could have took [sic] only four classes not to overwhelm myself. I took way too many. I was given way too many classes, and I can't take that back.

Like I said, I tried to juggle those classes, and I ended up failing. The grades have been raised now, but it's been preventing me from receiving scholarships. If anyone asks me if high school and college courses are the same, I will say, "Oh, no. No, no, no. No."

Danielle concluded this discussion as follows: “Now I know what to do and what not to do. I learned if you are dealing with something, speak up.” Danielle found her voice (Cook-Sather, 2006). She said, “The early college program is a good program, but it can make or break you.” Danielle did not let her setbacks completely break her; instead, she found a way to overcome them (with varying degrees of success).

Evolving as a student. This theme emerged through in vivo coding, descriptive coding, and process coding. Two participants spoke heavily of possessing a sense of doubt when they first entered the ECHS program, and some shared that their families also doubted their likelihood of success. The data revealed participants’ evolution from having a sense of doubt to having a great sense of pride in what they achieved in the program. Their stories unfold below.

Sense of doubt. Unfavorable odds caused a few participants to doubt their ability to succeed in the ECHS program. Mason verbalized his doubt when he referenced his first inclination to become a member of the ECHS program. He said, “At the time, I was a sophomore, so I was like, ‘I’m only a sophomore. I was nervous and didn’t know if it would be right for me. In my family, it was unheard of.’” Mason further elaborated, speaking of his doubt while also alluding to care:

I was telling the director of the program and you guys that I don’t know if I would be able to pursue that associate’s degree and actually graduate with it. You and her, you guys are the ones that told me that I could achieve it, just had to, you know, put my mind to it.

The support system overall, that’s why I said my level of care was a 10, ‘cause I never felt so much love and caring all at once from a whole lot of

people for me, and a lot of people just to believe in me. ‘Cause at first, I was just thinking I couldn’t do it. I was thinking some of the teachers wouldn’t even probably care whether kids passed or failed at times. But you guys showed me different, and I appreciate that.

The above excerpts were from the first interview with Mason. During the third and final interview, he reiterated his initial doubts about his scholastic potential:

If you had asked me before in like 7th grade that, I mean before if you were to tell me that you were going to be graduating with an associate’s degree coming out of your senior year, I would have told you I wouldn’t have believed it. I would have just like shrugged it off, and I would have been like “no way.”

Similar to Mason, Candy shared her uncertainties about joining the program, but unlike Mason, she revealed her sense of doubt mostly through journaling, whereas Mason revealed his sense of doubt through interviews. Candy wrote:

I wasn’t sure I was getting the college experience at first. I was actually nervous at first because I wasn’t sure how well I would do in the program, but after my first semester junior year, I realized that it was a good fit for me because I enjoyed it more than being in classes that I felt were too easy for me. I can say that I evolved to become a better college student. I struggled at the beginning of this year, and I’ve learned to put aside my worries and focus on school because that’s the only thing I have.

As presented in Candy’s found poetry, she frequently journaled about wanting to give up. Although I did not utilize word frequency as an analytic method, when I read

Candy's journal entries, the technique beckoned. She routinely repeated two phrases: "I wanted to give up," and "I was proud of myself." Candy battled this paradoxical inner dialogue as an ECHS student, but as evidenced below, she did not abandon her pursuits:

It [ECHS program] was amazing. I felt really excited to get my degree, and I feel like I was proud of myself. I haven't really felt that way in a long time. I'm just so grateful for the program.

Sense of pride. Just as the excerpt above evidences Candy's feeling of pride, Mason likewise spoke of his pride for earning college credit hours while in high school. Mason told it this way:

Yeah, I was just determined to get the diploma, and once I finally got it, it was just a major relief. I was just so proud of myself. Like words can't even explain how proud I was.

The feeling of walking across that stage, it was sort of like butterflies in my stomach, and my heart pumping because there was just so many people and families out there [at the graduation ceremony]. They knew I was sort of like a different sort of scholar because they seen [*sic*] my tassel; it was green and white Willow colors. So a lot of people asked, and I was proud to say it. I mean I still have to graduate high school in a few weeks. I'm a high school student.

People were shocked and amazed by it. Some people could kind of tell that I was sort of young because of just how I look. They're like, "So you didn't even graduate high school yet?" I said, "No, ma'am." This lady

she was like “that’s amazing.” Somebody telling me that, that just builds like my spirits up, gives me motivation.

Walking across that stage and having all those eyes on you and such in that big room, it was just like “whoa.” It was like all eyes on me at that little short..., even though it’s a short time, but it’s still like all eyes on me at that moment.

Once I got that diploma, I was just like, “It’s really happening.” I was so proud of myself in that. Right now that it has actually happened, I feel like anything is possible, and my destination in life is just going to be great. I feel like anything that I’m going to come in front of, or that comes in front of me, I can achieve, and I can accomplish.

Along with participants’ evolution from having a sense of doubt that later turned into a sense of pride, the data also brought to light a few minor subthemes that revealed participants’ evolution as students. As a decision-making rule, I chose to mention a minor subtheme if it were “confirmed by at least one other participant and not disconfirmed by anyone else” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 203). Both Candy’s and Nolan’s journal entries yielded how they learned to communicate effectively with online professors through email. Candy related her initial hesitancy to email professors, but she later recognized that emailing professors was a mature and professional method of communicating. Moreover, I again utilized the decision-making rule mentioned above and decided to mention how participants evolved as students when they accepted that all curriculum requirements were relevant despite students’ dislike for certain courses.

Candy journaled about accepting that all the courses on her academic program plan (APP) were relevant to fulfill degree requirements. She admitted, “I took sociology and psychology when I was going toward the science degree. Then whenever I switched over [to pursue the arts degree], I still had to take another psychology class. I felt like one should’ve been enough, but I understand the process now.” Danielle also echoed this sentiment as she learned about the relevancy of prerequisites.

Nolan had a different spin on the relevancy of curriculum. He said, “Biology, oh my lord. I hate it. Although I find it very interesting, I just don’t see it having much relevance to my life itself, being a culinary major. I don’t know...; we might study an animal that I might one day cook or eat.” Nolan followed with how he felt he had evolved to become a real college student: “I like the freedom to be able to just walk to class by myself. I really like the fact that I get to walk to class every day and feel like a real college student. It’s very nice and liberating, especially because just walking around campus is really nice because it’s very pretty.”

Even though Danielle’s evolution as a student regressed during her senior year of the program, she never expressed a sense of doubt as other participants did; rather, she intimated that she knew she would have a great takeaway from the ECHS program despite the setbacks. While her final semester was unraveling, she proclaimed, “I can say that I’ll be graduating from early college with like 40 college credits. Who gets to say that?” Overall, each participant evolved in his or her own fashion. The data show that experiences of engagement in relevant, rigorous courses (not necessarily culminating with high grades) led ECHS students to feel pride in themselves because of persevering to obtain either the associate’s degree or 40+ college credit hours.

As mentioned in the onset of thematic discussions above, the theme of caring relationships emerged central to both overarching research questions, and it therefore remains enlarged and centered in the figure below. Because I have discussed both academic and social aspects of caring relationships in a previous section, I now conclude the discussion of themes and subthemes with balancing multiplicity and sacrificing for goals and their connections to the second research question.

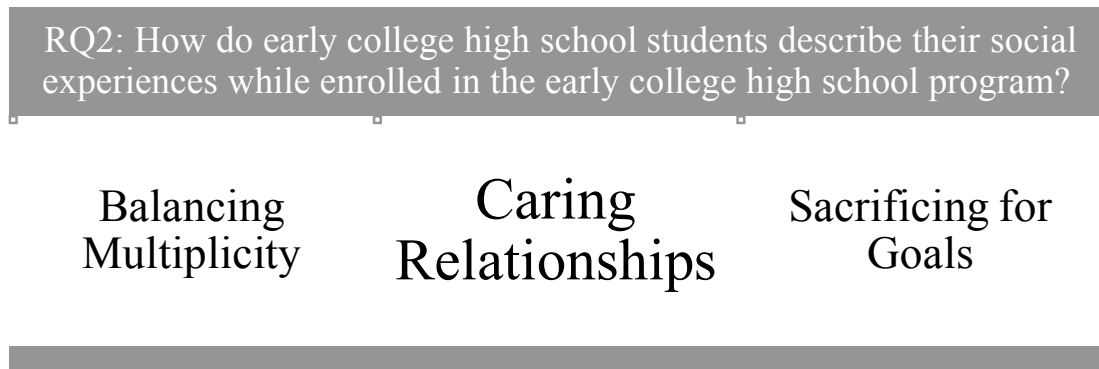


Figure 11. *Visual Representation of Themes and Connections to Research Question 2*

Balancing multiplicity. Through process coding of interviews and documents, it became clear that balancing multiple roles and multiple educational locations would emerge as themes. That participants balanced multiple roles was a given; however, I did not anticipate the theme of balancing multiple locations. First, I had overlooked the fact that these seniors had encountered three campuses during their two years in the program. In addition to their high school campus, the student participants in this study attended college classes at the downtown campus of the college during their junior year and at the southwest campus during their senior year. All participants discussed the differences in the various campuses that they attended during their junior and senior years at Willow.

Multiple roles. Balancing multiple roles hampered participants’ social lives while they participated in the ECHS program. Besides the obvious roles of being both high

school and college students while enrolled in the ECHS program, three of the four participants held after-school jobs. This role required balancing yet another element to their already busy calendars. Danielle reported leaving school at 2:20 p.m., riding the bus to her place of employment, and working until 10:00 p.m. most nights. Although Mason worked only on Saturdays and Sundays, the extra role of being a multi-sport athlete kept his calendar filled with obligations. Candy's employment was a bit more sporadic, as she worked intermittently with fewer hours than her peers. Nolan did not work an after-school job, but he reported after-school responsibilities of cooking for his family and caring for his grandmother while also finding time to volunteer for community service functions downtown.

In addition to these roles, participants spoke of the demands of being a son or daughter, step-son or step-daughter, grandson or granddaughter, or sibling in their various types of households, and paramount to most of them, being a friend (See discussion below about friends and sacrificing for goals.). These roles, in accord with the various school events such as ballgames and prom, called for a top balancing act. Balancing the multiplicity of high school student, college student, employee, athlete, caretaker, volunteer, family member, and friend left little time for a social life. Danielle iterated:

I work until closing time, I go home, take a shower, do some last-minute homework that I need to knock out before the next day, and then I go to sleep to start all over. I don't see my friends much, but I do see myself growing, making mistakes, learning from them, and figuring out my balance—see what I can tolerate. It [ECHS program] has really helped me

find out my tolerance, what I can do, what I can balance, how many courses I can handle, how many courses I can't handle.

Candy described the process of her daily balancing act as follows:

I would wake up, get ready for school around 6:00 a.m., eat breakfast, shower, dress. I would get to the high school around 7:40 a.m. After that, I would sit in the classroom and wait to get on the bus to college around 8:00 a.m. Then I would be at the college by 8:15 a.m., go to the lab, start my homework that I had due within the next couple of days. This semester I would start my artwork since that was my only in-class, the only class I had that was in-person.

Then I would start on my psychology and anthropology in the library. I would work on anthropology last because it was the course that didn't take as much time. If it was a Tuesday, I would work in the library until around 11:00 a.m. and go to the student center bookstore and get a snack, eat, and then go back to the library to finish up anything I might have due in my 7th period class back at the high school.

Then we would get on the bus around noontime, go back to the high school, eat lunch, go to 6th and 7th period class, and go home. After I got home, then I'd go to work—my actual job. Last semester I worked at Subway. Now I work at Rite Aid. Then I'd come home. After I got home, I'd study a little bit more. I'd get on the computer, check my

grades, do anything else I needed to do. Then I'd get ready for bed and go to sleep.

As evidenced by Candy's account above, participants not only balanced multiple roles, but they also balanced going back and forth between the high school and college campuses. More about balancing multiple campuses follows below.

Multiple campuses. Participants in this study attended two different college campuses during their tenure in the ECHS program. As mentioned above, they attended the downtown location of the college campus during the first year in the program, and they attended the southwest location of the college campus during the second year in the program. Adjusting to the different environments played into participants' social experiences. For Nolan, balancing multiple campuses allowed him to voice another of his many roles. He shared his story as follows:

When I first "came out" at the end of my freshman year, I hated high school. I wasn't ashamed, but I also wasn't very vocal about it. Coming to college allowed me to express myself, study more about famous queer people and stuff like that. Just being queer is just a huge part of my expression and then coming out as a trans or gender queer during early college was probably the best move for me, and it really happened because Ms. L. had said, "College is a place for everyone." Little did I know the drama to ensue that year, but I just took that leap forward. I've decided that college being so new to me, so open, so accepting. Sorry.

At the end of the above passage, Nolan wept. It was a moment I will never forget as a researcher. He spoke of the desire to take more leaps, try new things, and figure out how much of himself to express. He explicated further:

I've never really had those venues at Willow at all. In my college writing classes, I write about people that I can relate to now because I can finally research these famous queer scientists or these trans [gender] playwrights or something like that. Just people that I can relate to on a level. I can understand their struggles, and I can understand that even when I have these struggles, that I'm not hopeless because people have done so much good in the past with the same struggles. And I feel more comfortable. It keeps getting easier and easier for me to feel more... or fit in here.

Were it not for Nolan's liberating experiences with the college campus environment, his social experiences as a 16- and 17-year-old would have been quite different.

The above remarks by Nolan pertain to his experiences on both college campuses. He recounted his preference for the downtown campus because it had a cafeteria unlike the southwest campus that had only a bookstore filled with expensive snacks. He said, "I preferred downtown because there were so many foods to eat and try, and I really like that. I'm usually a very hungry person."

Nolan was not the only participant to comment on his preference of the downtown campus. Candy mentioned that she preferred it because it was bigger and had a lot more people. She lamented switching campuses because she "felt like more of a college student at the downtown campus" than she did at the southwest campus. Danielle also commented on the adverse effect of switching college campuses. She said, "I recall a

time last year where I was at the downtown campus. I had just completed my work. I went to the café, had a nice sandwich, socialized with a few friends for maybe 40 minutes, and then I went back to work. I would call that a good day. I could have fun, and I could still take care of what I needed to take care of.”

Last, Mason expressed his social experiences dealing with different campuses by comparing the high school setting with the college setting in general. He admitted:

I’m not going to lie. I was like a goofball sort of. Like I would joke a lot, but on the college campus, the professors, they’re not having it. They’re stricter than the high school teachers, so I had to mature as a student.

All participants expressed that learning to balance multiple roles and multiple educational settings eventually culminated in a harmonious mix of social experiences with two exceptions: friends and freedom. Whereas Nolan found his voice (Cook-Sather, 2006) on the college campuses (which was life altering for him), and other participants spoke of maturing through these experiences, all lamented lack of time with non-ECHS friends and family and lack of freedoms typically associated with being a college student. These subthemes surfaced in the final theme detailed below.

Sacrificing for goals. This theme emerged through in vivo coding, descriptive coding, and a priori coding based on commonplaces of narrative (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006) and the ECHSI 3R curriculum (JFF, 2009; JFF, 2013; Wolk, 2005). While not all participants identified sacrificing for goals as a major concern, they all referenced it in varying degrees. Participants used words such as *push*, *drive*, and *focus* to describe actions that helped them meet their goals. Their stories of sacrifice support this theme below.

Freedom. A caring adult from the high school does not typically supervise college students; instead, college students are generally free to experience college life on their own. However, the ECHS student is not a typical college student, and some of their much-anticipated freedoms met with initial disappointment. High school advisors accompanied students to the college campus every day and set rigid parameters on where the students could and could not go while they were on campus. Both the downtown campus and the southwest campus presented supervisory challenges. Given its location in a large urban area, the downtown campus was proximal to higher incidences of crime, and the southwest campus was secluded. Mason shared his thoughts about the anticipated freedoms of being on the downtown college campus during his first year of the program:

At first, I pulled that “I’m a college student, I know how to cross the street and go to McDonald’s.” I was tempted to leave the college campus and go to McDonald’s or Taco Bell, but I feel everything came into place. I understand your strictness was because of safety, and we weren’t there for the McDonald’s or Taco Bell; we were there to learn to get college degrees and stuff.

As for the southwest campus, Mason also expressed frustration with supervision: “They were strict on us and made sure we were on our A-game. I appreciate that now. ‘Cause when they seen [*sic*] my grade drop from a C, they told me I can’t go to the second floor of the library just to hang out.”

Candy also shared thoughts about sacrificing freedom she thought she would have on the college campus. She said, “The early college teachers always knew where we

were. If we went another place, you all found out quickly. We couldn't skip class. Teachers made sure they knew where we were at all times. Our academics do come first. I know at times all the students..., we didn't like the fact that it was so strict, but it paid off."

Unlike Mason's and Candy's impressions of sacrificing freedoms to meet their academic goals, Nolan considered supervision somewhat strict and somewhat lenient. Nolan thought supervision was most strict on the bus to and from the college campus, but once he arrived on the college campus, he supervised himself to meet his academic goals. He did, however, say he compromised a lot to be in the ECHS program and that it was all to help him have a more financially and academically safe future. Although it was not a sacrifice of freedom as Mason and Candy described, it was a sacrifice for him nonetheless. He gave up the culinary magnet at the high school to be a part of the ECHS program. He explained:

I gave up my environment, my comfort area of cooking, so I could pursue college credits. Culinary is very important to me, and it's what I want to do with my life, so I prioritized it until May of my sophomore year and then applied for early college.

As evidenced in demographic Table 2.3, Nolan accrued 41 college credit hours during his tenure in the ECHS program. In his words, "That's more than half way to a degree, and any compromise was worth it." He had just accepted an offer from the culinary program at the community college as a degree-seeking candidate.

Like Nolan, Danielle reflected that supervision on the college campus was only somewhat strict. She said, "I'd say the supervision wasn't really that... I don't know..."

pressuring on me as it should have been. Probably because I was doing so well last year and last semester that supervisors just thought I was okay and that I could handle what I was going through.” In this case, Danielle’s plentiful social experiences and lack of sacrificing freedoms led to her academic downfall in the end.

Just as participants expressed concern about sacrificing freedoms of being on a college campus, they also expressed concern about sacrificing freedoms that come with earning the proverbial title of big man on campus during senior year of high school. Candy reflected on some of the sacrifices she made to be a part of the ECHS program. She said, “I feel like I missed out on a lot of senior activities and meetings that I wanted to be a part of. I feel like I would have changed that part of the program if I could. I was a class officer, but I felt very left out.”

Mason described another sacrificial experience of missing high school activities:

One morning we were on the bus heading to the college, and we saw all the other seniors going into the gym for an assembly. We thought “What’s going on?” And we were sort of sad that we couldn’t participate in the activity [drunk driver simulation presentation]. That’s where the social experiences and stuff come in. We sacrifice sometimes. That affected me sometimes.

Even though the sacrifices were hard for him at times, Mason shared how his mother guided him toward understanding that sacrifices are necessary sometimes in order to achieve goals. He iterated:

My mom was like, “You have to make sacrifices. It’s all about sacrifices.” I actually understood that. So I actually made the sacrifices,

came a long way, and I am what I am today. The program was the most important thing that was on my mind like in my life so far.

Friends. As for sacrificing friends to reach goals, Candy had this to say: “If I could change an aspect of the program, I would change not being able to be a high school student and be involved with my friends here at the high school.” Even though Candy sacrificed time with non-ECHS friends, she believed participating in the ECHS program was worth the price. Her sentiments are below:

The program is a really important part of my life because it helped me go further in a shorter amount of time. It helped me get to where I needed to be faster. It meant a lot to me personally because it helped me achieve a lot of goals I probably would have gave [*sic*] up on if I would have waited until after high school because I would have been scared. I think it’s probably the most important thing that’s probably happened to me throughout school in general, from kindergarten through high school. I’d honestly say that it’s Yeah, it’s the most important thing that’s happened.

Candy validated her sacrifices by saying, “It was worth it because you don’t really get many chances like this anywhere else. So, I’m kind of happy that I chose Willow.”

Part of Nolan’s success or lack thereof revolved around whether friends surrounded him or not. For instance, he shared that it was his friends who drove him toward success during his first year in the program: “They just helped me stay on my academics. They’re the reason I didn’t fall apart because I’d meet up with them at the lunch area, and we’d always study French, even if we did it over a croissant or two.”

When Nolan found himself in classes without friends, he did not perform well. He stated, “It didn’t help that for the second time I was put in an English class without any friends.” An analysis of his transcript revealed that he failed or made poor grades in courses wherein he had no friends. For Nolan, sacrificing friends sometimes obstructed his ability to attain goals.

Nolan further explained the importance of friends:

Last year, I felt more cared for only because I had a closer circle of friends, but since they graduated, and I’m with all these juniors, I don’t know any of them, and my senior friends are all pretty ... they’re to themselves a lot. I feel a lot more isolated and less cared for this year. I did have a phone, and I tried to communicate and have a social life outside of early college with my friends. I tried to expand my social horizons.

Comparable to Nolan’s feelings, Mason shared that he preferred friends in classes because they made him feel comfortable. He said, “So, if we miss notes, I’d be more comfortable to ask, ‘Hey, did you catch this, or did you catch that?’” The self-proclaimed talker and socialite, Mason rarely met a stranger and was well prepared to meet new classmates. Even so, he lamented the sacrifice of not seeing his non-ECHS friends more often. He said, “I’ve got like three minutes to talk to friends at breakfast before the bell rings, and then we go to the where the other college kids go, and we head out to the college.” He added:

When we get back to the high school from college, we eat, and I meet with my other friends—the friends that I don’t have in the early college program. That’s given my little time to talk with them, ‘cause I barely

have it, 'cause I'm at the college all the time. So I talk with them, and sometimes it doesn't even be [*sic*] that long, 'cause it just depends on what time we get back to the high school for lunch. We'll probably have like 5-10 minutes sometimes of lunch. That doesn't give me that much time to talk with my other friends.

During the fall, I really only got to talk to my teammates during practice. And now I can't really because the season is over, and they co-op, so I can't talk to them. I barely see them. It's just "hi and bye." We try and catch up, but it's not enough time really. It's either we have to try to meet up after school if they're not busy, or if I'm not busy or something. Like I said, our schedules aren't working. These last two years have prohibited me from having the kind of bond I would like with my classmates who aren't in the ECHS program, but they understand that I'm in the program.

Although they did not emerge as key subthemes and I did not evaluate them in this research, two topics worth mentioning are losses of sleep and travel time. As stated previously, I decided to mention a minor subtheme if it were "confirmed by at least one other participant and not disconfirmed by anyone else" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 203). All participants mentioned sacrificing sleep and spending too much time on buses, yet none of them spoke of these sacrifices as impediments to achieving their goals.

Overall, participants agreed that the goal of obtaining college credit hours or even earning an associate's degree while they were in high school was ultimately worth sacrificing freedoms and friends along the way. I now turn to a discussion of themes as

they relate to the theoretical and conceptual frameworks used in this study. I review the purpose of theoretical and conceptual frameworks, as well as include visual representations of frameworks and themes.

Themes and Relation to Frameworks

Theoretical frameworks provide a structure for examining research based on established theories (Creswell, 2014). I utilized the ethics of care framework (Noddings, 1993) to situate participants in the context of how they experienced caring relationships in their academic and social experiences while enrolled in the ECHS program. In addition, conceptual frameworks provide supportive concepts, theories, and assumptions by which to examine and understand data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Although the ECHSI core principles (See Figure 5) and student voice (Bahou, 2011; Cook-Sather, 2002 & 2009; Mitra, 2001 & 2004) naturally undergird the study conceptually, I chose to expound upon two other key conceptual frameworks to examine experiences and relationships of participants. Those were commonplaces of narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006) and the ECHSI 3R curriculum (JFF, 2009; JFF, 2013; Wolk, 2005). Figure 12 illustrates these two supporting conceptual frameworks as I used them for this study grounded in ethics of care theory (Noddings, 1993).

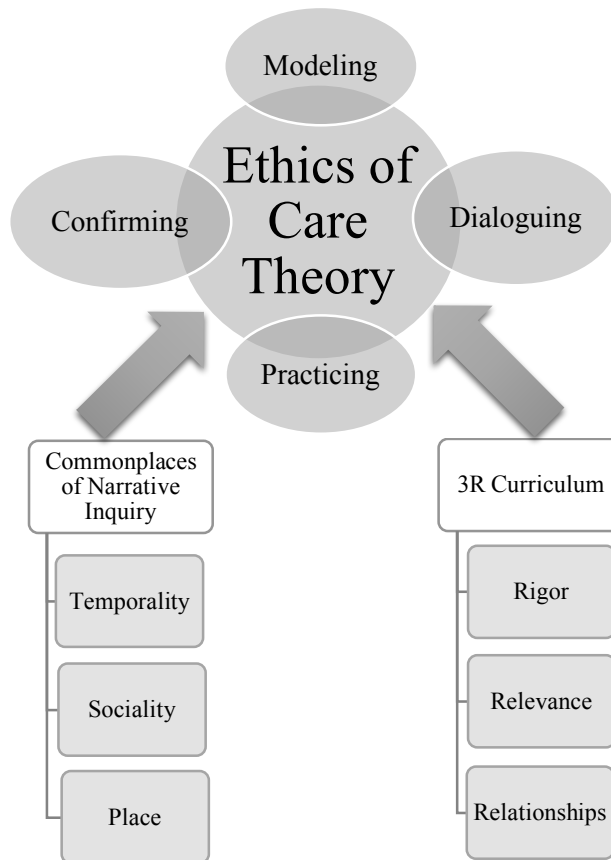


Figure 12. Supportive Conceptual Frameworks for Ethics of Care Theory

To examine the influence of these key frameworks, below I provide a table displaying the alignment with the themes, summary results of themes, and relation to frameworks. This alignment shows purposeful and strategic connections of my decision-making process and a quick overview of how I shaped the study.

Table 7. *Themes and Relations to Frameworks*

Themes	Summary Results of Themes	Relation to Frameworks
Caring Relationships	Participants felt cared for when adults modeled, practiced, dialogued, and confirmed caring relationships.	Ethics of Care Theory 3R Curriculum: Relationships
Overcoming Setbacks	Participants responded to setbacks by earning 40+ college credit hours, and in some cases, by earning an associate's degree.	Ethics of Care Theory 3R Curriculum: Rigor Commonplaces of Narrative Inquiry
Evolving as a Student	Participants matured by turning a sense of doubt into a sense of pride during their time in the ECHS program.	Ethics of Care Theory 3R Curriculum: Relevance
Balancing Multiplicity	Participants balanced many different roles and locations while they were in the ECHS program.	Ethics of Care Theory Commonplaces of Narrative Inquiry 3R Curriculum: Rigor, Relevance, Relationships
Sacrificing for Goals	Participants sacrificed to achieve goals that typically under-represented students do not achieve while they are in high school.	Ethics of Care Theory Commonplaces of Narrative Inquiry 3R Curriculum: Rigor, Relevance, Relationships

In Table 8, I provide a table displaying the alignment of which participants provided evidence of each theme or subtheme.

Table 8. *Participants and Relation to Themes and Subthemes*

Themes	Subthemes	Candy	Danielle	Mason	Nolan
Caring Relationships	Academic Experiences	X	X	X	X
	Social Experiences	X	X	X	X
Overcoming Setbacks	Online Classes			X	X
	Workload and Rigor	X	X	X	X
Evolving as a Student	Sense of Doubt	X		X	X
	Sense of Pride	X	X	X	X
Balancing Multiplicity	Multiple Roles	X	X	X	X
	Multiple Campuses	X	X		
Sacrificing for Goals	Freedom	X		X	X
	Friends	X		X	X

Using an ethics of care framework for this study helped me discern participants' lived experiences. As previously discussed in the literature review, Noddings (1984) argued that educators must follow all four components of care theory: (a) modeling—caring by example, (b) practice—opportunities for practicing care and reflecting on that practice, (c) dialogue—caring by discussing and evaluating as a community, and (d) confirmation—affirming and encouraging the best in others. Evidence of all four components arose throughout the study's results, narrative analysis, and conceptual frameworks. Likewise, evidence of commonplaces of narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006) and the ECHSI 3R curriculum (JFF, 2009; JFF, 2013; Wolk, 2005)

arose throughout the study. I remained “firmly rooted in the data but ... not a slave to it” (Miles et al., 2016, p. 183) as I interpreted, constructed, and reconstructed the data from this study. Overall, participants’ conversations around the five major themes illuminated the complexity of what it is like to be an ECHS student.

Corroboration with Previous Research

I begin this section with Table 9 below. In it, I associate studies that touched upon the themes from my own study. Then, I discuss whether my study did or did not corroborate with existing literature. Readers will recall that none of the existing studies examined students currently enrolled in an ECHS program; therefore, my discussion of corroboration is not whether it is equivalent but, rather, whether it is similar.

Table 9. *Themes and Relation to Existing Literature*

Themes	Relation to Existing Literature
Caring Relationships	Berger et al., 2010; Born, 2006; Cravey, 2007; Edmunds et al., 2013; JFF, 2011; Lieberman, 2004; McDonald & Farrell, 2012; Nakkula & Foster, 2007; Newton, 2008; Thompson & Ongaga, 2011; Wolk, 2005; Woodcock & Beal, 2013
Overcoming Setbacks	AIR, 2009; Edmunds et al., 2010; Fischetti, MacKain, & Smith, 2011; McDonald & Farrell, 2012; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2004; SRI, 2011; Thompson & Ongaga, 2010; Wolk, 2005; Woodcock & Beal, 2013
Evolving as a Student	Cravey, 2007; McDonald & Farrell, 2012; Ndiaye & Wolfe, 2006; Thompson & Ongaga, 2010; Woodcock & Beal, 2013
Balancing Multiplicity	Cravey, 2007; Wolk, 2005; Woodcock & Beal, 2013
Sacrificing for Goals	Cravey, 2007; McDonald & Farrell, 2012; Woodcock & Beal, 2013

As previous research has shown, caring relationships are integral to student success (Berger et al., 2010; Born, 2006; Cravey, 2007; JFF, 2011; Lieberman, 2004; McDonald & Farrell, 2012; Nakkula & Foster, 2007; Newton, 2008; Thompson & Ongaga, 2011; Wolk, 2005; Woodcock & Beal, 2013), and my study found the same to be true. Similar to the Thompson and Ongaga (2011) study, my study corroborated that caring relationships built upon the ethics of care theory (Noddings, 2010) are well suited to undergird an ECHS program. Using the ethics of care framework added to the current body of literature because it allowed examination of ECHS students' academic and social experiences while they participated in the program, which no other researchers had investigated.

However, my findings differed from prior studies in terms of the development of caring relationships. Whereas I found that participants developed caring relationships with both adults and peers, Woodcock and Beal (2013) found that participants developed caring relationships with peers only. One possible reason that my study participants developed deep, caring relationships with the ECHS advisor, for example, is that Ms. W. accompanied students to the college Monday-Friday and was constantly available. Not only was Ms. W. available during the school day, but as data revealed, she was oftentimes available to students hours before and hours after school. Added to her already caring personality, she embraced the program's drive to fulfill the 3R curriculum component of relationships, which resulted in genuine caring all around. Like Thompson and Ongaga (2011) discovered, the highly personalized relationships between adults and participants led to a culture of academic and social engagement with caring adults, who were often confidantes as well as mentors. Unlike teachers in the Thompson and Ongaga

(2011) who were constrained by traditional school designs and philosophies, Ms. W. was free to innovate and develop caring relationships as she saw fit. Many Willow ECHS participants had perfect attendance or near perfect attendance in part because they wanted to be at school in that nurturing, caring environment. This aligns with the sociality and place components of the commonplaces of narrative inquiry (Connelly & Caine, 2006). Ms. W. provided emotional safety for many of the study participants. She listened to student voice, which opened the door to build relationships (Cook-Sather, 2006).

Another divergence from two studies (Berger et al., 2010; JFF, 2011) about caring relationships involved the high school guidance counselors. While these two studies uncovered caring relationships with counselors, my study participants did not mention a caring relationship with guidance counselors. This does not mean to impugn the work that Willow ECHS counselors do. However, these individuals were not involved in the program in the way of modeling, practicing, dialoguing, or confirming (Noddings, 2010) caring relationships. One explanation for this divergence from other studies is that Willow ECHS has a principal and an assistant principal who are heavily involved in participants' lives in caring fashions, and these two building-level leaders often played the role of impromptu counselor, along with Ms.W.

Even surrounded by caring adults and peers, students still suffered setbacks. Existing literature revealed mixed results about overcoming academic setbacks. For instance, studies by AIR (2009) and SRI (2011) found students performed well in rigorous college classes with B averages. On the other hand, Fischetti et al. (2011) found ECHS students to have lower GPAs than traditional freshmen at the university that partnered with the ECHS. Woodcock and Beal (2013) found only some ECHS students

to be successful at promoting positive academic outcomes after setbacks, and Edmunds et al. (2010) found ECHS students to have lower passing rates than those who went on to the university. In the majority of studies, ECHS students reported being unprepared for rigorous collegiate coursework (McDonald & Farrell, 2012; Thompson & Ongaga, 2010; Woodcock & Beal, 2013) and made grades of C or below in college courses. My study corroborated with studies that revealed ECHS students to be unprepared for the workload and rigor of college coursework. All four participants narrated stories of unpreparedness. While none of the existing literature about ECHSs addressed online classes as potential setbacks, my study revealed them to be problematic for all four participants. Despite feeling unprepared for the workload and rigor plus the challenges of online classes, participants overcame setbacks enough that two graduated with an associate's degree, and two earned over 40 college credit hours. As for the 3R curriculum, Willow ECHS successfully established the R for relationships but not so much the R for rigor.

In agreement with findings from Cravey (2007), McDonald and Farrell, (2012), Thompson and Ongaga (2010), and Woodcock and Beal (2013), my study corroborated that ECHS students evolved from students with a sense of doubt and lack of confidence to students with a sense of pride. Like Thompson and Ongaga (2010) found, my study found that students initially had a social identity crisis. Through extended caring perspectives and increased academic and social competence, participants' evolution involved adjusting behaviors and developing confidence (McDonald & Farrell, 2012). Evolving to form their own identities as ECHS students with confidence and pride was an experiential process.

Another experiential process required this study's participants to balance the multiplicity of different roles and different campuses. Similar to Cravey's (2007) findings, my data disclosed participants' anxiety at changing campuses. Some ECHSs are located on the high school campus, some are located on the college campus, and some are stand-alone sites (Wolk, 2005). Willow ECHS's program is unique in that it utilizes co-locations during the day. At first, the co-location routine was daunting. Ndiaye and Wolfe (2006) advocated locating ECHSs near college campuses to "first introduce, gradually expose, and then immerse students in the college experience" (p. 34). This was not possible for my study participants; they experienced full immersion from the beginning. My study diverged from the Woodcock and Beal (2013) study that found participants skipping class. Skipping class was rare for my participants due to the vigilant supervision of the ECHS advisor, which did not take place on the Woodcock and Beal (2013) study campus. While my research revealed a theme of balancing multiple roles and multiple campuses, no existing research explored the multiple roles that ECHS students must play while enrolled in the program and the effect those multiple roles have on academic and social experiences.

The last theme to examine is sacrificing for goals. Cravey (2007), McDonald and Farrell (2012), and Woodcock and Beal (2013) all found ECHS students had difficult choices to make: sacrificing friends, activities, freedom, and sleep. These things are beneficial to developing self-concept and effective social skills. Cravey (2007) also found participants experienced many missed opportunities to be a high school student in general. My study corroborated with these findings. My study diverged, however, from the Woodcock and Beal (2013) finding of lack of supervision. Quite the opposite was

true. Participants spoke of the strict supervision by the ECHS advisor while students were on the college campus. The ECHS advisor required students to sign a check-in/check-out log every day, and when students were not in class, they were to be in a designated study area of the library and take breaks only at designated times. The strict supervision pertained not only to student study locations but also to student conferencing and advising.

Noted absences from my data were references to time management or communication skills, contrary to other study findings (JFF, 2009; JFF, 2013; Wolk, 2005). Neither interviews nor journal entries revealed weighty concerns with these topics. Two of four participants did check “needs improvement” regarding time management on the midterm and final self-reflection log, but had the topic not been on the self-reflection log already, I do not believe any of my participants would have mentioned it.

Summary of Results

For some participants, early academic and social experiences were good experiences; but for others, their academic and social experiences started on rocky ground from the first days of school. Taken together, student conversations provided insight on how they constructed the academic and social experiences while enrolled in the ECHS program. Through analysis of the interviews and documents collected, I identified components associated with how ECHS students in this study engaged in caring relationships (Noddings, 1993), the commonplaces of narrative (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006), and the ECHSI 3R curriculum (JFF, 2009; JFF, 2013; Wolk, 2005). By using Saldaña’s (2013) recommendation of holistic, interpretive inquiry, I developed a

sustained, intensive experience with participants that led to ongoing conversations about the temporal unfolding of their lives and the five themes generated from this study: (a) caring relationships, (b) overcoming setbacks, (c) evolving as a student, (d) balancing multiplicity, and (e) sacrificing for goals.

I relied on Milner's (2007) adage of "truth, or what is real and thus meaningful and 'right' for researchers and participants, depends on how they have experienced the world" (p. 395). I also accepted that "researchers can acquire evidential truth in research when they value and listen to the self, to others (Nieto, 1994), and to self in relation to others" (Milner, 2007, p. 395). Further, I poured over the data to ensure that I interpreted it correctly, diligently, and as unobtrusively as possible, knowing that participants and the researcher "may interpret an experience or an interaction in very different ways, depending on the life worlds ... of those conducting and involved in the research" (Milner, 2007, p. 396).

To that end, I discovered my own bias about the concepts of freedom and friendship and how they played into academic and social experiences of students enrolled in the ECHS program. I realized that my research contained autobiographical narrative groundings along with theoretical and conceptual groundings (Clandinin & Caine, 2008) that colored my analysis. I eventually recognized that participants felt they sacrificed freedoms and friends for the sake of obtaining their collegiate goals as a theme, but it became clear to me only after third and fourth cycle coding. As a graduate student myself, forsaking freedoms and friends when necessary was not a sacrifice—it was a natural step toward the goal. My positionality almost led me to overlook this important

theme in my study. In total, all participants expressed a degree of comfort of being in the ECHS program and an even greater degree of thankfulness for the program.

To conclude this discussion of analysis, I revisited researcher positionality and provided context for each participant through demographic information, found poetry, and excerpts from interviews and journal entries. In addition, I discussed coding methodology that led to themes and subthemes. I supported each theme and subtheme with quotes and paraphrases from data and noted whether the themes emerged from inductive or deductive analysis. I presented how themes related to frameworks, I provided information about which participants provided evidence toward particular themes or subthemes, and last, I examined how this study did or did not corroborate with previous literature in the field. Next, I turn to the final section wherein I provide a summary of the study and its findings, implications for practitioners and policymakers, and recommendations for future research in the field.

STUDY TWO: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this final section, I present a summary of the study by restating the problem, purpose statement, research questions, and reviewing the methodology. Moreover, I present major findings organized by themes, connect them to the broader literature, and position them within the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that guided the study. Next, I restate limitations and delimitations of the study. I then discuss implications for practitioners and policymakers. Last, I close the section with recommendations for future research and my concluding remarks.

Summary of the Study

This qualitative narrative inquiry examined the lived experiences of four students enrolled in Willow ECHS during the 2016-2017 school year. Located in a large urban district in the southeastern United States, Willow ECHS subscribes to components of the Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI) launched in 2012 to address educational disparities for first-generation, minority, and low-income students (JFF, 2013). As such, it partners with the local community college for joint accountability of student success and bridges the gap between secondary and postsecondary education for students who are typically under-represented in higher education (Wolk, 2005). In addition, it provides an opportunity for students to earn a high school diploma and an associate's degree simultaneously or up to two years of credit toward a bachelor's degree tuition free with

the goal of improving graduation rates, attendance, and achievement. Notably to this study, the ECHS reform model aims to support and prepare students academically and socially (JFF, 2013; Wolk, 2005; Woodcock & Beal, 2013).

To that end, this study went straight to the students—the “knowers [who] ... possess knowledge and insights that would benefit a more open and fluid dialogue” (Wiggan, 2007, p. 324) to understand their lived experiences as ECHS students. Through a social constructivist lens, I sought to interpret their experiences as I interacted with them and talked to them as an insider researcher. Because “reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever changing” (Glesne, 2016, p. 9), I listened to student voice (Mitra, 2004) to make fully informed decisions. These steps, combined with Noddings’ (1994) ethics of care theory, the ECHSI 3R curriculum (JFF, 2013; Wolk, 2005), and the three commonplaces of narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006) laid the foundation for this narrative inquiry.

Overview of the Problem

Students are graduating from high school at a higher rate than ever before; however, those students are not obtaining postsecondary credentials at an equivalent rate (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2013). Even though officials have implemented numerous reform initiatives to help bridge the gap between secondary and postsecondary education, challenges still exist, particularly for typically under-represented students (NCES, 2013). In the southeastern state where this study took place, 2016 data shows high school graduation rates, college enrollment, persistence, and degree completions are not sufficient to meet the educational and economic goals. Employment projections for 2020 show 57% of jobs in this southeastern state will require a career

certificate or college degree (Complete College America, 2011; Recovery 2020, 2013). Trend data show this southeastern state is unprepared to reach projected need.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to seek understanding of the lived experiences of students enrolled in an ECHS program. Two guiding research questions informed the study: (1) How do early college high school students describe their academic experiences while enrolled in the early college high school program? (2) How do early college high school students describe their social experiences while enrolled in the early college high school program?

Review of the Methodology

Inside the scope of qualitative research, this study utilized a narrative inquiry methodological design. Because I chose theoretical and conceptual frameworks based around relationships, which are not static (Glesne, 2016), a qualitative design was best suited for this study. There were two sources of data for this study: interviews and documents. I used purposeful sampling (Dörnyei, 2007; Creswell, 2013) to select four participants who were in their second year of the early college program. Interview protocol followed Seidman's (2013) three-interview series (See Appendix 2B). I employed Rev.com[©] to transcribe each interview. I then cross-referenced interview transcripts with my reflexive journaling and by member checking. Document collection consisted of self-reflection logs, journaling, high school and college transcripts, and academic program plans. For data analysis, I used first and second cycle coding as recommended by Creswell (2013), Miles et al., (2014), and Glesne (2013) to determine emergent inductive themes and to denote a priori themes from ethics of care theory

(Noddings, 1994), 3R curriculum (JFF, 2013), and commonplaces of narrative (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). I then collapsed codes into five themes.

Major Findings

Through my analysis of the data, I identified five themes to increasing understanding and offering supports to students typically under-represented in postsecondary pursuits. First, if we want under-represented students to succeed in collegiate coursework, administrators must fill classrooms with adults who nurture caring relationships. This theme appeared foremost regarding both research questions of this study. Teachers will largely say they *care for* students, but without a purposeful theoretical framework, those teachers might only *care about* students instead, which according to Noddings (1992, 2002, 2010, and 2012) is merely expressing concern about a matter but not necessarily responding to students in need. While many extraneous factors may have played a role, all participants in this study attributed many of their achievements to caring relationships during their two years in the ECHS program. They shared narratives about the importance of caring relationships woven within both academic and social experiences while enrolled in the program. It is important to note that every participant identified more than one caring adult involved in the ECHS program.

The notion of caring relationships within the ECHS setting is not a surprising phenomenon. As demonstrated in previous studies and advocated by founding leaders, caring relationships with adults (Berger et al., 2010; Born, 2006; JFF, 2008; Kaniuka & Vickers, 2010; Lieberman, 2004; McDonald & Farrell, 2012; Thompson & Ongaga, 2011) and caring relationships with peers (Edmunds et al., 2013; Thompson & Ongaga,

2011; Woodcock & Beal, 2013) improve navigation through and successful completion of the ECHS program. Participants in this study noted the importance of teachers who communicate that they care personally and academically, which is well supported in the literature (Foster, 2008; Ongaga, 2010; Thompson & Ongaga, 2011).

As they relate to the frameworks of this study, just as Delpit (2012) discovered, my findings suggest that students “don’t learn *from* a teacher, as much as they learn *for* a teacher” (p. 86). All participants agreed that they were more willing to learn for a teacher who demonstrates the components of ethics of care theory: modeling, dialoguing, practicing, and confirming (Noddings, 1984). These findings not only support existing care theory, but they also support the ECHSI 3R curriculum (relationships) (JFF, 2013; Wolk, 2005) and two of the three commonplaces of narrative inquiry (temporality and sociality) (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

The second and third major findings appeared in themes related to participants’ academic experiences: overcoming setbacks and evolving as a student. Participants overcame academic setbacks spurred by online courses. Although all participants initially found the independence offered by online courses to be liberating, findings showed a higher likelihood that online courses caused more stress, lower grades, and in some cases, failing grades. Likewise, participants overcame academic setbacks spurred by the increased workload and rigor presented in collegiate classes. It appears the high school tenth grade curriculum did not sufficiently prepare students for the transition to more rigorous coursework of college classes, nor did its teachers sufficiently prepare students for the increased workload that accompanies being part of the ECHS program. All participants spoke of the stress associated with their lack of preparedness for

increased rigor and workload that they encountered in classes on the college campus. Despite the setbacks, as shown in the participant demographics (See Table 2.1), two students graduated with 40+ college credit hours, and two students graduated with an associate's degree.

This study's findings are consistent with the findings of AIR & SRI (2013) and Edmunds et al. (2013) that revealed early exposure to increased rigor positively impacts students' learning habits and facilitates their content knowledge development. Even though some participants' GPAs suffered, narratives from this study bore examples of increased rigor and workload that led to eventual improved study skills and better grades. My findings also connect with Kaniuka and Vickers (2010) who found ECHS student success traceable to embedded rigor and environments conducive to developing an identity of maturity and resilience.

Within the 3R conceptual framework of this study, I uncovered evidence that suggests the school's early college program is deficient in developing the rigorous workload that students need to experience before transitioning to the on-campus early college experience during their junior and senior years of high school. Likewise, evidence suggests that the program is also deficient in preparing students to meet the demands that they face in online courses. These findings became apparent through the conceptual frame of narrative inquiry's three commonplaces: temporality, sociality, and place (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). These findings also became apparent through the ethics of care theoretical framework. Participants attributed their successes in meeting rigorous coursework and overcoming online challenges to the caring relationships developed in the ECHS program.

In addition to the second major finding of overcoming setbacks as part of their academic experiences while enrolled in the ECHS program, a third major finding emerged as part of academic experiences: evolving as a student. Participants experienced an academic evolution during their two years of the program. Three of the four participants shared narratives about having a grave sense of doubt when they first entered the ECHS program. However, their voices were strongest when they talked about their senses of doubt later turning into senses of pride at what they had accomplished during their two years in the program. Interestingly, the one participant who did not experience a sense of doubt when she entered the ECHS program was the very participant who had the lowest GPA. I talk about this phenomenon in the implications section to follow.

As for the broader literature, my findings are consistent with the findings of others who espouse that listening to students share their lived experiences of schooling experiences is a powerful source for examining the aspects of school reform models that work and do not work (Barnett, 2006; Born, 2006; Byrd & McDonald, 2005). In an odd twist, my findings are similar to Ongaga's (2010) findings, but instead of students' lack of confidence in their ability to handle social responsibilities and expectations of a college environment, my participants revealed a lack of confidence (what I call sense of doubt) in their ability to perform academically. This finding adds importance to Ongaga's (2010) study to show that ECHS students not only lack confidence about social issues concerning the transition to college, but they also lack confidence concerning the academic transition, as well. Similar to my findings, Thompson and Ongaga (2011) found participants approached the ECHS model with trepidation of academic failure.

Also similar to my findings, McDonald and Farrell (2012) found that ECHS students' experiences provided the foundation to build confidence in their identity as a college scholar, which included a "gained sense of pride in academic progress, accomplishment, and social recognition and acceptance" (p. 232). Based on my study's findings, the evolution from doubt to pride seems likely to follow these participants into the next stages of their academic journey.

From the conceptual framework, this theme of evolving as students directly connects to the 3R curriculum of relevance. Once participants understood the relevance of course content and how it applied to their overall academic plan, they performed more confidently, consequently earning better grades. This theme also connects to the commonplaces of narrative inquiry, particularly place. Once students found their "place" inside the college corridors and classrooms, they started evolving as scholars. From the theoretical framework, this theme connects to ethics of care theory. That is to say, once again, without the caring relationships in place through the ECHS model, it seems unlikely that participants would have evolved as much as they did.

The fourth and fifth major findings materialized in themes related to participants' social experiences: balancing multiplicity and sacrificing for goals. As for balancing multiplicity, findings indicated pressures associated with balancing multiple roles, as well as pressures with balancing multiple campus locations. I was not surprised that balancing multiple roles (high school student, college student, son, daughter, athlete, friend, employee, etc.) emerged as a theme as I witnessed it firsthand in my role as an insider researcher, but I was surprised that every participant talked at length about managing the co-locations of the program. Officials at each location (high school and college

campuses) mandated similar and dissimilar rules and boundaries that required students to switch daily what role they played and where they played it. Along with the chore of balancing roles and campus locations, all participants spoke of the number of hours they spent on buses to and from the various campuses. While some ECHS models are located on or near college campuses (JFF, 2009), Willow ECHS is a 15-20-minute bus ride away from the college campus. Because the district in this study utilizes a student assignment plan (Muñoz, Fischetti, & Prather, 2014), some of the ECHS students traveled on multiple buses to reach the high school each morning only to step off and on again to ride to the college.

To my knowledge, there is no literature about the role switching required of ECHS students. McDonald and Farrell (2012) revealed a subtheme of autonomy and self-governance through which ECHS students remarked how quickly they learned to monitor and adjust behaviors and habits, but their finding correlated primarily with academic performance and not social role switching adjustments. From my findings, I see a need to add to the knowledge base of ECHS students and role switching. Although the broader literature addresses various designs (stand-alone designs, school-within-a-school designs, or hybrid designs) (AIR & SRI, 2013; Born, 2006; Lieberman, 2004; McDonald & Farrell, 2012; Wolk, 2005; Woodcock & Beal, 2013), the literature does not address the lived experiences of students as they balance being on a college campus or a high school campus all day, half-day, or on a hybrid schedule. I discuss these topics more in the recommendations for future research at the end of this final section.

Positioned within the conceptual framework of narrative inquiry's commonplaces (temporality, sociality, place), the theme of balancing multiplicity meets all three

components, especially place. As Connelly and Clandinin (2006) note, place is the specific physical boundary where the inquiry and events occur, and place impacts experience. In addition, findings pertinent to this theme align with the 3R curriculum component of relationships. As participants learned how to balance multiple aspects of being an ECHS student, relationships played an integral part of managing the multiplicity of being both a high school student and a college student.

The final major finding emerged through the theme of sacrificing for goals. In addition to narratives that exposed the difficult balancing act that ECHS participants performed as they related to social experiences, narratives also exposed how participants sacrificed social experiences to achieve their goals. One sacrifice was the cost of freedom typically associated with being a college student. For example, a distinguishing factor of the Willow ECHS program is the employment of a full-time college access advisor who monitors and supervises students closely not only on the high school campus but the college campus, as well. Another sacrifice was the cost of feeling isolated from non-ECHS friends and feeling disengaged from high school activities. All participants agreed, however, that acceding sacrifices was beneficial in achieving their goals.

Positioned within the literature, my findings are consistent with other studies that found lack of extracurricular activities available for ECHS students, especially on the college campus (Edmunds et al., 2010; McDonald & Farrell, 2012; Woodcock & Beal, 2013); however, this study's findings do not align with Woodcock and Beal's (2013) findings about lack of supervision to facilitate good decision-making and enhance success. Conversely, I discovered evidence that students are diligently supervised. Officials at Willow ECHS believe that, even though students are in a specialized

program, they are still children and need vigilant oversight (M. Norwood, personal communication, January 2014). To no surprise, this study's findings concur with the findings of McDonald and Farrell (2012), who found sleep deprivation to be a sacrifice that many ECHS students made. Though sleep deprivation did not emerge as a major sacrifice in this study, I chose to mention it using the same decision-making rule I used in the above discussion of analysis; if the item was "confirmed by at least one other participant and not disconfirmed by anyone else" (2014, p. 203). I agree with Miles et al. (2014) and felt it deserved comment here.

In relation to the 3R conceptual framework, the theme of sacrificing for goals became clearer as participants understood the relevance of sacrifice in achieving their goals. Likewise, findings pertinent to this theme support the conceptual framework of narrative inquiry's commonplaces of temporality, sociality, and place. With regard to the theoretical framework, ethics of care theory undergirded every aspect of this theme as it did all other themes. When students made sacrifices, either reluctantly or willingly, caring adults and peers supported them and gave them impetus to move forward toward their goals.

Among the major findings were a few unanticipated outcomes. These outcomes did not emerge as a theme or subtheme, but they are noteworthy nonetheless. First, none of my participants mentioned a guidance counselor as helping them during their tenure in the program. Studies about ECHS programs have produced mixed results regarding the role of the high school guidance counselor. Kazis et al. (2004) indicated that high school counselors often lack the focus on college-related issues, and none of the participants in the Woodcock and Beal (2013) study received help or mentoring from a high school

counselor. This is a divergence from the broader literature that suggests the significance of high school counselors in helping students succeed in ECHSs and postsecondary institutions (Berger et al., 2010; JFF, 2011). In this study, participants relied on the early college advisor instead of the high school counselor for help. Second, I did not anticipate the resilience of the ECHS students. They faced some difficult obstacles, yet they overcame them to go on to graduate from high school with either an associate's degree or 40+ college credit hours. As evidenced by participants' journaling, had it not been for the supportive, caring role of the early college advisor, director, and head principal of the school, students would likely have collapsed instead of persevered. Last, I was surprised that ECHS officials did not foresee or prepare students more fully for the academic or social ramifications of being in program.

Overall, participants in this study demonstrated the ability to overcome setbacks, evolve into better students, balance multiple demands, and render sacrifices to achieve their goals. In other words, these findings increase our understanding of the lived experiences of the ECHS students in this study and can consequently help inform future reform models in how to better support students in an ECHS program. Participants in this study considered themselves successful. I submit that the school's focus on caring relationships likely served as the core catalyst of success for most, if not all, participants.

Limitations and Delimitations

By definition, narrative inquiry calls for a small sample size, so sample size was not a limitation of this study as some unfamiliar with qualitative research might assume (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2016). To ensure credibility, transferability, and dependability, I explicitly described the research context and the assumptions that were central to the

study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I checked accuracy of data by use of triangulation and member checking, and I checked accuracy of data analysis by clarifying any questions of bias (Milner, 2007). Further, I sought to foster trustworthiness and authenticity through prolonged engagement and debriefing with peers and supervisors (Glesne, 2016; Seidman, 2003). Moreover, use of the three-interview structure aided credibility because interviews were spread out, which augmented internal consistency (Seidman, 2003). I addressed external validity through rich description and narratives filled with plentiful accounts such that readers can determine how closely their research situations match and whether findings can be transferred (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2016). I also preserved an audit trail by saving and organizing all documents related to data as a record of the research process (Glesne, 2016).

Using ethics of care as the theoretical framework for this study was limiting in that caring is not always direct, external, or observable; therefore, participants might feel limited in their sense of being cared for. Another limitation was that some people might feel that so much caring is intrusive. Noddings (2010) says a relationship may fail because the cared-for refuses to respond, is unable to respond, or is unwilling to respond.

As a delimitation, I chose to study narratives of only seniors. This purposive sampling allowed for swift gathering of data, which in turn allowed more time for coding and theming, signature procedures of narrative inquiry. It is assumed that all participants were low-income because of the school's demographics, but I did not ask that question as part of the demographic survey that participants completed as part of this study.

Implications for Practitioners

One of the foundational goals (See Figure 5) of the ECHS model is to support and prepare students academically and socially (JFF, 2013; Wolk, 2005; Woodcock & Beal, 2013). In the case of these four participants, Willow ECHS is successfully supporting students socially and minimally-to-adequately preparing them academically for collegiate life. An implication for practitioners, then, is to continue supporting ECHS students socially and strive to improve preparing them academically. Looking beyond Willow ECHS, academic rigor is often absent in underperforming schools and typically geared toward top tier students in top schools (Edmunds et al., 2010). However, as referenced earlier in this discussion, research shows early exposure to rigor helps under-represented students succeed (AIR & SRI; Edmunds et al., 2013); therefore, the implication extends to practitioners in every underperforming school to offer a rigorous curriculum.

Along with the need to offer a rigorous curriculum to aid academic success is the need to provide a better transition for the workload of college courses. Findings from this study agree with findings from Thompson and Ongaga (2012) whose results showed a need to increase dialogue inside the high school building for better transitions into the ECHS program. Implications for practitioners include increasing the workload for high school freshmen and sophomores who plan to transition fully into the ECHS program for their last two years of high school. Another implication for practitioners is to educate students and parents alike about the rigor and workload that accompanies college coursework. Although Willow ECHS officials advised participants and their families to expect a rigorous workload, parents nonetheless had difficulty understanding the demands of college on their children, and students had difficulty acclimating to the

demands of college. Moreover, findings from this study indicate that Willow ECHS is successfully developing one of the 3R curriculum components—relationships—but has room to improve the other two 3R components of rigor and relevance. Participants in this study identified all 3R components as being valuable to their ECHS experience.

Implications for practitioners at not only Willow ECHS, but underperforming schools in general, are to make concentrated efforts to link relevance to educational experiences.

In addition to implications for increased preparation for rigor, workload, and relevance, there are implications for utilizing an ethics of care theory to enhance students' abilities to navigate academic and social aspects of college with more confidence and success. Noddings (1995) said, "We will not achieve even meager success unless our children believe that they themselves are cared for and learn to care for others" (p. 676). Because there is evidence pointing to the importance of positive, caring relationships in education (McHugh et al., 2013), implications are that practitioners should consider incorporating this theoretical frame into their curriculum. My analysis suggests that the ECHS practitioner's role extends beyond the classroom walls; therefore, practitioners would need to seek training in ethics of care theory and be ready for the extension of modeling, dialoguing, practicing, and confirming care.

Because participants in this study had difficulty with online courses, an implication would be for practitioners to design an online pre-requisite at the high school before students enter the on-campus component of the ECHS program. Although I did not take a quantitative look at online course pass-fail rates of participants in this study, I analyzed transcripts and found that three of the four participants failed or performed poorly in one or more online courses. The poor and failing grades were in both core and

elective courses, such as English, biology, psychology, and sociology. These findings are consistent with some recent data about performance in online college classes and face-to-face classes. For example, Barshay (2015) conducted a study of California community colleges and found 11% of students were less likely to pass an online section of the same face-to-face class.

Regardless of whether the course was an online course or a face-to-face course, participants in this study expressed a sense of doubt toward academic aspects of college, unlike participants in Ongaga's (2010) study, who expressed a sense of doubt toward social aspects of college. As an insider researcher, I witnessed firsthand many social meltdowns among the participants in this study. However, participants did not speak to social doubts through journaling or interviewing. As increased self-concept is a goal of the ECHSI (JFF, 2013; AIR, 2008), the implication is for practitioners to be mindful of these academic and social doubts, which could be caused when students role-switch between being a high school student and a college student. One way practitioners can be better informed about participants' doubts is to listen to more student voice. According to Flutter and Rudduck (2004), "The most important argument for listening to the pupil voice lies in its potential for providing schools with directions for constructing a better future" (pp. 131-132). By listening to voice and being knowledgeable of narrative inquiry's three commonplaces (temporality, sociality, and place), practitioners can learn about the benefits and challenges that ECHS students face and pattern practice correspondingly.

In this section, I discussed implications for practitioners concerning academic and social support for ECHS students associated with relationships, rigor, workload,

relevance, and care theory. I also discussed implications for practitioners concerning designing pre-requisite online courses, addressing academic and social self-concept, and listening to more student voice. I close this section with a call for practitioners to share their own voices with ECHS students (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). The practitioner's job has always been all encompassing, and making time for anything other than mandated functions is challenging; however, all four participants in this study recalled the meaningful support they received when the early college advisor shared personal stories of navigating her own university academic and social journey. It therefore behooves practitioners to share personal narratives about their own lived experiences.

Implications for Policymakers

While no one model serves every district's needs, there are some potential policy implications that emerged from my analysis. Willow ECHS employs a full-time college access advisor to oversee the ECHS cohort and accompany them to the college campus every day. Student narratives revealed the importance of this employee to students' academic and social experiences while enrolled in the ECHS program. Policymakers and program directors alike can use this study as an informative tool to not only better understand the narratives of students enrolled in an ECHS program but also consider the feasibility of employing a full-time college access advisor to assist in student success. When funding is scarce, policymakers would perhaps be tempted to eliminate this employee's position, but such action could be costly to the program in the end.

Few would argue the need to help traditionally under-represented students enter college and persist to degree attainment, but many local, state, and national policymakers have been either complacent or uninformed about the benefits of ECHSs. As Muñoz et

al. (2014) noted, ECHSs have “potential to foster effective classroom changes and deserve further study” (p. 51). One way to effect classroom change is to provide professional development for high school teachers and college professors who work with ECHS students to encourage culturally responsive pedagogy through a caring perspective (Thompson & Ongaga, 2012). In addition, dominant policy continues to pay too little attention to the deliberate promotion of supportive teacher-student relationships (McHugh et al., 2013). Quality relationships matter (Kaniuka & Vickers, 2010). Furthermore, “policy hasn’t been influenced by analysis of relationships or relatedness” (Noddings, 2012, p. 192). Therefore, this study, as well as other studies (McHugh et al., 2013; Noddings, 2012; Thompson & Ongaga, 2012), highlights the need for policymakers to become more informed about ECHS reform models, provide professional development for teachers and professors who work with ECHS students, and drive reform based around caring relationships.

Despite the many positive outcomes for students attending an ECHS (Berger et al., 2013; Edmunds et al., 2013; Hoffman et al., 2009; JFF, 2009; JFF, 2013), students in this study still felt disconnected at times. Because “this country’s secondary and postsecondary systems, are, by design, disconnected and uncoordinated” (Hoffman et al., 2009, p. 56), implications for policymakers are to provide more coordination between the two to alleviate the disconnect and integrate high school and college life. In addition to the general disconnect (which emerged in this study’s themes of balancing multiplicity and sacrificing for goals) between secondary and postsecondary institutions’ design, academic calendars, course schedules, and organizational norms, there is also a disconnect for students who seek to participate in extracurricular activities. Policymakers

have “largely ignored the loss of opportunity [for ECHS students] to participate in extracurricular activities” (Woodcock & Beal, 2013, p. 71). It befits ECHS leaders and policymakers to work with partnering colleges and universities to provide opportunities for students to become involved with extracurricular activities while they are on the college campus. Given the embryotic relationship between ECHSs and the postsecondary institutions that partner with them, now is the time to advocate for a more fluid structure than traditional schools offer (Thompson & Ongaga, 2012). One component of such fluidity would be for ECHS policymakers and administrators to have more autonomy over curriculum selections to best prepare students to transition to academic life after graduation.

A call for a more fluid structure requires a call for strong leadership. Kaniuka and Vickers (2010) stated that school leaders must develop organizational supports and structures perceived by stakeholders (e.g. students and teachers) as available, consistent, visible, and effective. In my study, lack of leadership at the partnering college caused undue stress for students and even contributed to failed classes and/or poor academic performance, lowered GPAs, and for one participant, risk of dropping out. The partnering college was without a director during this study; lack of leadership interrupted the growth of the Willow ECHS program. My analysis reveals that policymakers should seek to ensure consistent, strong leadership in key positions of the partnership of every ECHS program.

Part of a more fluid structure also calls for better educating and streamlining expectations for all stakeholders. Narratives from this study revealed that participants felt school personnel, parents, and peers assumed that they were already prepared to

attend college classes by merit of acceptance into the program. Participants struggled with defining the expectations of dual enrollment in high school and college simultaneously and then switching roles all within a school day. My analysis revealed that policymakers should seek to pay greater attention to student experiences, because without doing so, one runs the risk of policy and practice that may undermine the role of students as partners in shaping and changing their own education. The eagerness of the Woodcock and Beal (2013) participants to share their experiences “suggests ECHS leaders and policymakers need to find ways to more carefully and systematically listen to students who participate in reform efforts like ECHSs” (p. 71).

Because this study, as well as others (Fischetti et al., 2011; Ongaga, 2010; Woodcock & Beal, 2013), suggests that ECHS students are unprepared for the transition to college, policymakers need to step back and question accelerated education of at-risk students long enough to consider adjustments to the model in some cases. In this study, narratives revealed too much emphasis on obtaining the associate’s degree and carrying too many college credit hours to reach that goal. For example, readers might recall Danielle’s story. She was so determined to graduate with the associate’s degree that she convinced policymakers to go against their better judgment to allow her to enroll in 18 credit hours. As a result, her narrative revealed she suffered burnout, depression, and ultimately failed or performed poorly in every class. Policymakers may wish to consider limiting the number of credit hours students carry and instead help them focus on quality of coursework and maintaining a good GPA.

Lastly, participants in this study struggled with navigating online courses, suggesting that policymakers and key ECHS leaders need to confer and design policies

regarding which courses from an ECHS student's academic program plan should or should not be offered as an online course. Also, policymakers should determine which ECHS students should or should not be permitted to enroll in an online course, e.g. juniors, seniors, or both. Finally, policymakers need to examine closely the motivation eliminating face-to-face courses in favor of online courses. Many are doing so because colleges are suffering declines and need enrollments, and one way to boost enrollment is to offer more online courses (Barshay, 2015).

In this section, I discussed the need for policymakers to learn more about ECHSs, as well as the need for all stakeholders to become better informed. I also discussed the need to provide professional development for teachers and professors who work with ECHS students and the need to alleviate the disconnect between partnering institutions. In addition, I addressed the need for fluid structures to accompany strong leadership and the need to adjust the model when circumstances call. Last, I made a call for examining policy regarding online course enrollment.

Recommendations for Future Research

According to researchers Bragg et al. (2006), ECHSs are the “fastest growing pathway model” (p. 14) to higher education. The latest large-scale study by Jobs for the Future reported more than 280 schools across 32 states (JFF, 2014). Even though this reform model is fast growing, it is only 15 years old, and much remains for researchers to study. One recommendation to extend the current study would be to investigate insights of different populations that are integral to the ECHSs operation. Because the literature is absent of insights from ECHS advisors, college professors who have ECHS students in their classrooms, and limited of insights of principals of ECHSs, such studies would

contribute to the field and bring richness and a more complete picture of the ECHS model in a more comprehensive way. Reid and Moore (2008) and Woodcock and Beal (2013) espouse that little research provides meaningful recommendations to counselors, teachers, or principals who work with ECHS programs. Researchers need to study ECHSs further to “gain greater understanding of potential academic, social, and financial costs or challenges of the ECHS model” (Woodcock & Beal, 2013, p. 74).

Another recommendation to extend this study is to conduct research on ECHS student encounters with online courses. Although there are research studies that have examined online courses versus face-to-face settings for community college students (Barshay, 2015; Johnson & Mejia, 2014; Xu & Jagers, 2010), the research literature is void of any studies of the ECHS students’ completion rate or success rate of online courses compared to the same courses in face-to-face settings for these atypical students. In a study with community college-goers, Johnson and Mejia (2014) found that 79% of students who enrolled in online courses completed their courses while 85% of students enrolled in face-to-face courses completed their courses; 56% of students enrolled in online courses passed while 63% of students in face-to-face courses passed. Online courses are not working well at community colleges (Barshay, 2015). Future research should see if similar findings would be true of ECHS students enrolled in online courses and to see what accompanying unintended consequences might arise due to their enrollment in online courses.

In addition to investigating insights of various people who are integral to the ECHSs operation and to investigating online course success rates compared to face-to-face course success rates for ECHS students, there is also a need to conduct campus

location research. As noted earlier in this discussion, there are stand-alone designs, school-within-a-school designs, or hybrid designs (AIR & SRI, 2013; Born, 2006; Lieberman, 2004; McDonald & Farrell, 2012; Wolk, 2005; Woodcock & Beal, 2013).

Willow ECHS falls into a hybrid design as students spend partial days at both high school and college locations, as well as a portion of the day commuting. Future research should determine if student outcomes are stronger using one model design over another.

Lieberman (2004), one of the founders of the ECHSI, purported that when students attend classes on a college campus and engage with other college students that they develop a fuller sense of being real college students, but no scholars have conducted research to that end with respect to the ECHS model designs.

Along with the need to study ECHS locations and their effects on student outcomes is the need to study role switching of the ECHS student when he or she switches campus locations in programs that utilize co-locations. This need arose from participant narratives that revealed the difficulty of switching roles and the various expectations of those roles from teachers, professors, peers, and parents. Reconciling when they were to be a high school student and when they were to be a college student appeared to be the biggest challenge to participants in this study. An examination of literature exposed no research on this topic.

Also of consideration should be future research into how accelerated learning affects students psychologically, cognitively, academically, and socially, especially since ECHS students sit alongside adults in college classes during their adolescent years. Adolescent years are difficult at best, and to expose adolescents to such accelerated learning while also surrounding them with adults of all ages in college classrooms

deserves investigation. Some studies call into question cutting high school from four years to two years for students already considered at-risk (NCES, 2004). Woodcock and Beal (2013) question whether accelerated learning programs like ECHSs set up students for success in college or if they set them up for failure. However, Hoffman et al. (2009) say, “Despite these challenges, accelerated learning options are an important strategy for increasing the nation’s high school and college success rates because of their potential for bridging the secondary-postsecondary divide” (p. 57). The topic merits further research.

Finally, the discrepancy that arose in this study between self-perception and reality of academic performance warrants further exploration. Through self-reflection logs and journal entries, all participants revealed that they thought they would maintain A/B averages while enrolled in the ECHS program, yet all but one participant failed at least one or more classes. One participant’s self-reported readiness for collegiate coursework vastly mismatched her academic outcomes. Woodcock and Beal (2013) discovered the same to be true in their study, which found “the gap between students’ self-perceptions and their actual academic performance warrants additional research” (p. 71).

While the above recommendations are by no means conclusive, they provide ideas for future research of the ECHS program and the ECHS student. As Milner (2007) advocated, “giving voice to people who have often been silenced, misinterpreted, misrepresented, and placed on the margins” (p. 397) is paramount to improving education for the under-represented. With further research into other stakeholders’ voices, types of course offerings, role switching, various campus designs, accelerated learning, and closing the gap between self-perception and reality of academic performance, ECHS

programs have potential to expand and reach even more typically under-represented students as they enter postsecondary institutions.

Concluding Remarks

Through this study, I explored the lived academic and social experiences of four ECHS students from a large urban district in a southeastern state. The narratives within drew attention to their unique experiences, as well as their common experiences. Narrative inquiry has potential to uncover valuable understandings of experiences as students see them. Although listening to student voice and living alongside participants as they live their stories (Clandinin & Caine, 2008) does not necessarily guarantee improvement of students' academic and social experiences, doing so enhances the possibilities just as the ECHS model itself enhances student possibilities. The United States Department of Education praised the ECHS model as “innovative ... with a proven record of improving student outcomes and closing achievement gaps for high-need students” (Webb & Gerwin, 2014, p. 1). Even though every participant in this study struggled at times with academic and social aspects of being an ECHS student, findings from this study support the above statement. All participants graduated from high school with either an associate's degree or 40+ hours toward a degree and with a great sense of pride of having done so.

My research study is notable because it provided personal accounts of the lived experiences of ECHS students while enrolled in the program—a perspective lacking in the literature. Outcomes mirrored many of the outcomes from ECHS alumni studies and what graduates had to say about the ECHS reform model and their experiences in it. Participants in this study credited the small size of ECHS cohort group in promoting

secondary and postsecondary success. This purposeful design enabled the Willow ECHS advisor to remain astutely aware of students' academic and social needs while they took part in the program, which participants revealed to be an important factor of accomplishing their goals.

To conclude, in this final section I presented a summary of the study and its major findings as they related to the broader literature and frameworks that grounded the research. I stated limitations and delimitations of the study, which I followed with implications for practitioners and policymakers. Last, I provided recommendations for future research based on the study's outcomes. My final words offer a poetic glance at who I am. This literary presentation closes my dissertation with insights of what brought me to and through the journey.

“Who Am I?”

I am the Lady of Shalott,
hoping never to live in a world half full of shadows;
I am a Grecian urn,
seeking truth in beauty and beauty in truth;
I am Hamlet,
doubting not the stars are fire;
I am Ulysses,
striving for some work of noble note yet to be done, and
remembering I am a part of all that I have met.

I am Abraham,
willing to sacrifice for what God commands;
I am Ruth,
proclaiming your people shall be my people;
I am Mary,
living in a Martha world;
I am Peter,
repenting when I deny the truth.

I am a daughter, sister, aunt, teacher, friend, advisor, and researcher.
I am a temporary resident on this earth.
I am a child of God.

Mostly happy, mostly content, mostly confident, mostly proud,
hoping to contribute my verse.

STUDY THREE: GRADUATING ON-TIME AND COLLEGE AND CAREER READY
IN AN URBAN EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL

INTRODUCTION

In today's educational settings, the school accountability model has become the measure of effective schools. The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA)—the most recent re-authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965—was revised, but still retains many of the key accountability requirements that were a part of the previous re-authorization. The state in which this study takes place has proposed a new accountability model that still meets the criteria for grant application (Klein, 2015). Thus, efforts to improve school accountability scores must focus around the four growth model components: Achievement, Gap, Graduation, and College and Career Readiness. For principals, knowing where to focus energy and resources within this model can help their schools make measurable progress in the accountability process.

Successful school leaders have developed structures and programs within their schools that help promote advancement in all the components of the accountability system (Crum & Sherman, 2008). Therefore, empirical research may assist schools in selecting specific programs that have proved successful in the individual components of their accountability model. In addition, with more schools falling into low performing status, schools are more than ever in need for empirical evidence to assist them in maximizing the accountability system for school improvement.

How should a principal select the appropriate program for their reform? How will he or she know the program chosen will improve school performance? The answer depends on the needs of the school and what outcomes they are looking to improve. For this study, the urban school that served as the context for this study identified the need to improve the percentage of students successfully transitioning to postsecondary learning. Graduating on time and being college or career ready (CCR) are two components that have a strong relationship for students transitioning to postsecondary learning. The school of study adopted an early college model to help achieve its desired success. As a result, the early college reform model was the subject of this research. Specifically, this study sought to determine if there is a statistically significant difference between students who take dual credit coursework, compared to those who do not, and if they graduate on time and obtain their college or career readiness benchmarks before graduating.

Background

Graduating from high school on time and being CCR is a current expectation for every student within the state that serves as the context of this study, but now earning a college degree may possibly be the outcome for every high school graduate there. Getting more citizens to earn a college degree has been an aim for the past six years in the city where the school of study is located. Under its previous mayor, the city launched a campaign to add more degrees to the local economy, 40K more bachelor's degrees and 15K more associate or technical degrees by 2020. This campaign has worked to collaborate local partnerships to provide resources to the citizens in order to assist them in reaching the goal. According to the organization's website (2014), the pledge includes

opportunities for monetary support as well as other opportunities such as mental health support, housing support, and educational philanthropy support.

On June 1, 2016, the current Governor and Secretary of Education and Workforce Development announced a new dual credit scholarship to provide every public school junior and senior the opportunity to take dual credit courses at no direct cost of tuition to the student. The scholarship's aim is to help every graduating student in the state realize that a college degree is possible. The scholarship provides each student with the opportunity to take six college credit hours for free and reducing the price for additional dual credit hours if a student wishes to take additional course work aligned to a college degree. The scholarship's goal is to help students see success in earning college credit, in hopes they may be more likely to persist into college for their technical, associate's, or bachelor's degree.

Although this scholarship opportunity is a new addition to the state, dual credit programs have been available to students since the 1950s (Marshall & Andrews, 2002). According to the state's community and technical college systems office website (2008), dual credit courses allow high school students to enroll in college courses and earn college credit while still enrolled in secondary school. Evidence suggests that dual credit is providing multiple opportunities for success when attempting to influence the outcomes of students and college completion (Andrews, 2001; Bailey, et al., 2003; Pierce, 2001). In addition, dual credit programs intend to reduce the high school drop-out rate, reduce the need for course remediation at the college level, and encourage more high school students to enter higher education (SREB, 2014). By providing high school

students with access to college courses, dual-credit programs contribute to student success in terms of matriculation and persistence (Bailey & Karp, 2003).

Adelman (1999) found that the strongest predictor of bachelor's degree completion is the intensity and quality of students' high school curriculum. Dual credit has provided students an advantage to meet their goals by allowing students to complete required high school coursework while taking challenging collegiate coursework. In a combined study involving the American Institute for Research (AIR) and the Southern Regional Institute (SRI) (2013), researchers found that 86% of students taking dual credit graduated college within four years compared to 81% of a comparison group. This advantage over the comparison group helps validate the need for additional dual credit courses. Moreover, Adelman (2006) estimates that 20 credits enhances the obtainment of a college degree. As such, dual credit then provides students the opportunity to complete his or her 20 hours, or even more, before their first year of college. Unfortunately, little research has examined to dual credit and high school outcomes. This is primarily due to a lack of longitudinal dual credit data tracking between high schools and colleges (Karp, et al., 2007). Furthermore, dual credit data tracking within the state is very limited with no publishable report that posts statistics annually.

To help students successfully earn dual credit as well as utilize dual credit programs to improve school outcomes, state and local administrators must give great care when developing dual credit programs within local high schools. The state already requires schools to enact a school level policy that clearly identifies how districts assign students to and enroll in advance coursework, including dual credit (Coldiron, 2014). However, administrators must do more to ensure success beyond enrollment. Orr (1998)

states that high schools and colleges must work together to ensure students possess the needed skills and knowledge required for collegiate coursework and to assist the students in achieving their educational goals. An end goal would be to help students experience as many collegiate scenarios and access as many collegiate resources to help the student acclimate to college expectations. The early college model of delivering dual credit may provide guidance to school administrators when designing dual credit opportunities for all students.

Theoretical Framework

Posited within the social constructivist epistemology, a student's success within school is partially determined/constructed by the interactions with others within the school environment (Crotty, 2012). The structure of early college provides students a unique and supportive environment designed to provide students from diverse backgrounds, low social economic status, and limited resources the opportunity to construct an opportunity for future success by the experiences they participate in during their enrollment in school. To further the understanding of the advantages of the early college opportunities, I utilized a tiered theory design for this study. This research reviews three theories: social capital theory, human capital theory, and academic capital theory. Each subsequent theory developed from the other. However, all three theories guide the ideals behind the early college model and allow students the ability to utilize dual credit as means of student graduation and CCR success.

From the social constructivist epistemology, Bourdieu and Passeron developed a theory of "cultural reproduction" in the late 1960s (Sadovnik, Cookson, & Semel, 2013). Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) presented the idea that a culture can reproduce itself based

on the values shared through social networks and connections that are passed on by families and schools. Their theory evolved into social capital theory as their research advanced (Sadovnik et al., 2013). This theory serves as the initial guide of this research, as early colleges provide experiences to students who are first-generation college-goers, students of low social-economical status (SES), and minority students, who have limited access to social capital.

From social capital theory, human capital theory emerged (Becker, 1975). Becker (1975) defines expenditures on education as an investment in human capital, enabling individuals to increase potential income. Becker (1993) further refined the choice of educational opportunities for students' future success. In his work, he noted individuals accumulate education and experience through the financial capital expended on a student's behalf. Because early colleges are a unique expenditure on student's educational growth beyond the traditional high school structure, it is evident that human capital theory guides the advancement of students towards future degree obtainment and potential increased income.

However, the advantages of a student's choice to take and academically perform within dual credit courses are evident in St. John, Hu, and Fisher's (2011) development of the academic capital theory. St. John et al. (2011) claim that under-represented students can acquire specific types of knowledge and skills, or academic capital, to help them navigate educational systems. Therefore, as the model of dual credit promotes and the aforementioned research suggests, students who take dual credit can transition into and persist in college with better outcomes than their peer groups who have not taken dual credit. Moreover, academic capital, as developed through the social

and human capital theories, provides this work the ability to compare the outcomes of dual credit on the student success indicators of meeting high school graduation on time and achieving CCR benchmarks.

Purpose of the Study

This proposal sought to determine if students who earned a higher number of dual credit hours are graduating from high school on time and meeting their college and career readiness benchmarks. If the students who earned more dual credit hours graduate on time and meet CCR, then early college programs may represent a possible solution to help schools maximize their graduation and college readiness benchmarks. Moreover, this study informs future research on the relationship of dual credit concerning the improvement of the state's high school Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) by affecting 50% of the school's accountability score. In this regard, this study contributes empirical evidence that serves as a guide to assist principals in developing dual credit programs. These programs will help bridge students' academic gaps and ensure they can successfully enroll in dual credit, help students set goals to ensure successful participation in a minimum number of hours, and help determine the necessary student supports to help students earn dual credit hours.

Furthermore, this study provides state policymakers an opportunity to overcome the misalignment between high school and postsecondary institutions. The state of study does not currently have a P-20 standards alignment program to ensure all students are prepared for postsecondary learning. By aligning high school curricula to collegiate curricula, both institutions will benefit from the successful transition of more students through the educational process, including successful completion of dual credit courses.

Second, policymakers must create a longitudinal data tracking system to allow the state to collect P-20 data and track students, including their dual credit performance. Finally, the state could benefit from policy that specifically allocates funding to provide the needed dual credit resources to the individual student. These funds may include textbook monies and access to state awarded financial assistance to allow low SES students the opportunity to pursue more than six credit hours.

Research Questions

For this research, binomial logistic regression analyses were utilized to seek answers the following research questions:

1. Controlling for other variables in the model, what is the relationship between students' dual credit hours and high school graduation?
2. Controlling for other variables in the model, what is the relationship between students' dual credit hours and meeting college or career readiness benchmarks?

Hypothesis

The following are the researcher's hypotheses regarding the primary questions that guided this study:

Hypotheses: Dual Credit and College and Career Readiness

- Null – There will be no difference in college and career readiness obtainment of students who have dual credit hours than those who do not.
- Alternative – There will a difference in college and career readiness obtainment of students who have dual credit hours than those who do not, specifically the more hours earned the more likely the obtainment of CCR.

Hypotheses: Dual Credit and On-Time Graduation

- Null – There will be no difference in on-time graduation of students who have dual credit hours than those who do not.
- Alternative – There will a difference in on-time graduation of students who have dual credit hours than those who do not, specifically the more hours earned the more likely the on-time graduation.

Scope of the Study

This study examined the outcomes of one urban high school's five-year implementation of an early college, dual credit program. Most early colleges are magnet schools with an application-based program, are situated on or near college campuses, and are demographically made up of only students who are all enrolled in dual credit courses (ECHSI, 2012). However, the school of study is not a traditional early college. It is not situated on or near a college campus, and it is one of a handful of schools across the country that have nested an early college program within the traditional high school structure. This means that its service of the early college is open to all students who apply to the magnet program, as well as to all resides students. Furthermore, this study relied on a stratified sampling utilizing the graduation cohort lists from a large southeastern urban district's data request system identifying students who have graduated from the 2011-2012 school year to the 2015-2016 school year. This study also included an element of criterion sampling in that all participating subjects must have started in the school of study in their 9th grade year and either persisted to graduation or dropped out of the school of study and did not enrolled in another academic program.

Data Sources

The school of study's district office and the local partnering community college's data department granted access to data utilized in this study. For this study, the researcher used three data sets spanning school years from 2008-2009 to 2015-2016. The first data set is the graduation cohort lists produced by the school district's research department for each graduating year (from 2011-2012 to 2015-2016) which will include: (a) the necessary demographic data, and (b) whether the student met the on-time graduation and CCR benchmarks or not. The second data set, provided by the local partnering community college, included the longitudinal tracking of every student enrolled in dual credit and the number of credit hours they earned. The third data set utilized was the school's local data monitoring database. Together, these data sets provided the needed variables for this research.

Definition of Key Terms

This study uses the following definitions:

Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) – AMOs are yearly targets as described by each states regulation in their proposal of accountability for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

College and Career Readiness (CCR) – The combined total of College and Career Readiness.

Career Readiness – The state system wide standards that measured the level of preparation a high school graduate needs to advance to the next stage in his/her chosen career. This may be a student's choice to continue postsecondary coursework, receive industry certification, or enter the workforce. This measurement is completed by a

student's enrollment in a minimum of three years in a specific Career Technical Education (CTE) pathway. Once a student completes the third course, he or she is eligible for career readiness status. In addition, a student must receive an industry certification for the CTE pathway they completed. Furthermore, a student must also meet academic readiness as measured by the ACT or the Work Keys Assessment. Finally, the student must have successfully completed all three components to be deemed career ready.

College Readiness - A student's performance on the ACT or ACT COMPASS is measured by the state system wide standards of college readiness. To be considered college ready, a student must score an 18 for English, a 20 for reading, and a 19 in mathematics on the ACT. If a student does not meet these benchmarks by the ACT, he/she will be eligible to take the ACT COMPASS, an online alternative assessment to the ACT. ACT produces the COMPASS and measures a student's performance in English, Reading, and Math. Acceptable scores within each domain are 76, 85, and 36 respectively. A student may receive college readiness by individual performance in the different domains across different assessments.

Dropout – An individual who enrolled with Willow Early College High School (WECHS) in their 9th grade year, but did not persist to a consecutive year's enrollment at any other educational institute.

Dual Credit – Earned credit for a course for both the community college and WECHS.

Free and Reduced Lunch – The federal status given to a student based on parents earned income.

On-Time Graduation – A student completing all requirements established by the local board and state board of education within four years of high school. The student must earn a standard diploma.

Organization of the Study

This section introduced the study, including the introduction, background of the problem, purpose of the study, theoretical framework, statement of research questions, scope of the study, definition of terms, and an organizational summary of this study. The literature review presents an examination of the current challenges facing urban schools and explains the operational features of early college, dual credit programs to describe the uniqueness of its programming on student success relevant to the scope of this study. The methods section explains the research methodology used, data collection, and procedures of this study. The following section presents the study's analysis, including a descriptive analysis of the data and the reporting of the results from the study. The discussion section summarizes the findings of the study and includes recommendations for future research and policy implications.

STUDY THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This quantitative study sought to determine if Willow Early College High School's student dual credit hour completion contributes significantly to students' high school on time graduation and college and career readiness (CCR) benchmark obtainment. If thresholds of dual credit hours earned predict graduation and CCR obtainment, then early college programs may be the solution to help schools maximize the percent of students graduating high school and being college and career ready. This research will seek to determine the following research questions:

1. Controlling for other variables in the model, what is the relationship between students' dual credit hours and high school graduation?
2. Controlling for other variables in the model, what is the relationship between students' dual credit hours and meeting college or career readiness benchmarks?

To guide this research, a review of literature examines the current challenges and disparities facing urban schools. Next, the operational features of early college, dual credit programs are explained in order to describe the uniqueness of its programming on student success. In addition, current research is overviewed showing the relationship of dual credit and student demographic data on graduation rates and CCR benchmarks.

Urban School Demographics

The demographic composition of urban high schools has significantly changed since the late 1960's (Frankenberg, 2009a). While white students once comprised 80% of urban public-school enrollment, they now represent less than 57% of enrollment (Orfield & Lee, 2007). Furthermore, most students of color in the 1960s were black, current enrollment identifies that Hispanic/Latinos represent 25%, African Americans represent 17%, and Asians represent 5% of student enrollment in urban schools (Frankenberg, 2009a).

Along with these changes in student demographics, there has been a marked increase in the percentage of students living in poverty (Douglass-Hall & Chau, 2008). Within all public schools, only 18% of students under the age of 18 classified as qualifying for Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL); however, urban schools disproportionately enroll low-income students (Frankenberg, 2009a). Nearly 66% of students in schools in large urban schools are from low socioeconomic status (SES) families that lack health care, stable housing, or food to eat, which greatly influences a student's readiness for school (Rothstein, 2004). SES has received attention in education research for its demonstrating a positive and significant relationship with academic outcomes (Caldwell & Ginther, 1996; McKown & Weinstein, 2006; Sirin, 2005; White 1982). As a result, principals in urban education settings with low SES students must seek ways of removing the economic barrier for their students.

Another considerable demographic variable notably marking a characteristic of urban schools is the school's student mobility rates. A student's mobility rate is an impeding factor of student readiness for school and, ultimately, academic performance

(Benson, Haycraft, Steyaert, & Weigel, 1979; Engberg, Gill, Zamarro, & Zimmer, 2012; Kerbow, 1996; Rumberger, 2016). One record of mobility research found that 31% of students in public schools had changed schools two or more times between the first and eighth grades (Rumberger & Larson, 1998). Another study found that 50% of all school age children in the United States moved at least twice and 10% moved at least six times while attending public schools (Wood, Halfon, Scarla, Newacheck, & Nessim, 1993). In both studies, student mobility was higher between low SES and minority students when compared to more affluent white students. Although researchers have conducted few studies using the variable of mobility on student achievement, most note that mobility is negatively associated with achievement (Mao, Whitsett, & Mellor, 1998; Nelson, Simoni, & Adelman, 1996; Williams, 1996). Unfortunately, principals of urban schools must account for the influx of student enrollment based on the high percentages of students of poverty enrolled in their schools. By creating programs that allow for continuity and school cultural acclimation, principals can help students adjust to the differences in academic programs between schools (Wood et al., 1993).

The Challenges of Improving Urban Schools

In today's high stakes educational environment, state officials expect efforts to improve academic performance for all students to quickly occur and create immediate results. Principals working in low performing urban schools know all too well the pressure to achieve results. So much so, the state in which the school of study is located has enacted a law citing a provision to remove a principal if his or her school does not reach achievement standards in a timely manner. It is imperative then to understand how

schools are measured in order to design systems to monitor progress and to select instructional design models to improve needed areas of school accountability.

Policymakers have established high-stakes accountability models to measure school's effectiveness (Ravitch, 2010). Accountability for student performance continues to be a central theme in education reform policy (de Leeuw, 2016). The required accountability reporting is typically to the local school board; however, with recent government involvement, many low performing schools are now submitting accounts of progress directly to state level agencies. This involvement in school accountability can be traced to the 1830s when state and federal grants were given to improve structures, improve teaching, and improve attendance (William, 2010). The federal government's involvement in school accountability continued in the wake of the publication of *A Nation at Risk* report in 1983. Early efforts included President George H.W. Bush's American 2000, President Bill Clinton's Goals 2000, the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, and most recently in the federal government's reauthorized of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in December 2015. With this legislation, states were required to submit new accountability plans to the federal government to receive monies for the 2017-2018 school year (Klein, 2015). Thus, more accountability requirements have been demanded from schools to receive federal monies.

The state in which the school of study is located has stood at the forefront of educational reform and currently under the oversight of the federal government's Race to the Top Accountability Measures. The state's model of accountability has four equal elements: Graduation Rate, College and Career Readiness Rate, Academic Achievement, and Gap Student Achievement. A school's five-year cohort graduation rate contributes to

25% of the high school's accountability score. Another 25% comes from the percent of students meeting the state's college and or career readiness (CCR) benchmarks in their graduating year. Together these two categories, each with a simplistic calculation equation, comprise 50% of a school's Annual Measurable Objective (AMO). Academic Achievement, and Gap Student Achievement are two additional categories within the model, but each is comprised of multiple factors that determine the total point value for the AMO and will not be the subject of this study.

The urban school setting brings even more challenges when attempting to make progress in school accountability. Principals must understand and evaluate student demographics, achievement trends, and curricular design considerations to determine where to focus energy and resources to help their school make measurable AMO progress within the accountability process. While it is imperative for schools to create structures and programs within their schools that help promote advancement in all the components of the accountability system, their efforts must be culturally responsive and benefit all students.

Achievement Trends

When people hear the title "urban school," many assume that the school is low performing (Sandy & Duncan, 2010). Unfortunately, their assumption is right for most urban schools. The U.S. Department of Education reports that urban schools, compared to the rest of the nation, have significantly more students testing below the basic level in reading, math, science, and writing on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test (Sandy & Duncan, 2010). The reasons for the difference in performance is endless, but some include tracked and unequal programs, irrelevant curricula,

overcrowded classrooms, under experienced teachers, and a “factory model” organizational structure (Balfanz & Legters, 2004a; Darling-Hammond, Aneess, & Ort, 2002; Gonsalves & Leonard, 2007; Payne, 2008). However, a main concern relevant to this study is the inequitable graduation rates based on race and social class. In Balfanz and Legters’ (2004a) study that located high schools with the highest dropout rates, they found that Black and Latino children more often attend high schools where less than 50% of students graduate.

Furthermore, students in urban schools composed of low-income, minority, and first-generation students see differentiated outcomes in terms of access and success in college, (Kao & Thompson, 2003; Perna, 2007; Ross et al., 2012). In addition, if these same students enrolled in postsecondary education, they would be four times more likely to drop out after their first year of learning (AIR & SRI, 2013). Moreover, 55% of white, affluent students earn their bachelor’s degree compared with 11% of low SES, first-generation college-going students (Engle & Tinto, 2008). As a result, principals are charged to create genuine and sustainable reform efforts that help low-achieving, transient students reach proficient performance and graduate prepared for postsecondary learning (Zavadsky, 2009). Furthermore, principals must help low-achieving, transient students understand their personal capabilities and inspire them to graduate high school with a future goal of college or career readiness.

Curricular Designs

For the past six decades, urban high schools have undergone numerous reforms and yet remain a persistent concern in education research and practice (Green, 2015). The most recent reform efforts have been to utilize standards-based accountability

context to drive change in student performance. However, this is not an easy task. To meet accountability standards, most urban high school reforms aim to increase rigor in assessments, strengthen programmatic and organizational structures, increase the quality of instruction, and change school culture (Green, 2015). In myriad attempts to influence these reform efforts, school leaders have attempted many initiatives. These attempts include charter schools, trimester schedules, career academies, and school choice (Burks & Hochbein, 2015). Though school officials have implemented many attempts, none have proven dramatically successful at large scale. Unfortunately, organizational bureaucracy has compounded the problem by demanding immediate change of low-performing urban schools (Payne, 2008). While there is no “magic bullet” for school reform, school leaders must strive to select academic programming that meets their population’s needs. One model of programming, which is the purpose of this study, is early college, dual credit programs.

History of Dual Credit and Early College High Schools

One curriculum model that is gaining interest of school leaders, as well as becoming a recent subject of state and federal policy, is dual credit. According to the state-wide community and technical college systems office’s website (2008), dual credit courses allow high school students to enroll in college courses and earn college credit while still enrolled in secondary school. Dual credit programs have been available to students since the 1950s but have been more recently utilized since the 1990s (Marshall & Andrews, 2002). There are multiple ways students can earn college credit in high school. Bailey and Karp (2003) share that students can earn credits through advance placement (AP) courses, middle college high school programs, as well as dual enrollment

courses. The high school, in partnership with local universities and community colleges, offers these types of coursework. The courses offered must follow college-approved course curriculum and competencies as well as meet the high school academic standards (Stephenson, 2013).

While different states have policies on how administrators award student credit on the high school transcript, ultimately a student's performance in the college class determines his or her grade recorded on their collegiate transcript (Karp, Bailey, Hughes, & Fermin, 2004). In most traditional dual-credit programs, the high school teacher has earned the number of required graduate hours to offer the college course as an adjunct professor while instructing during the day at the high school (Hoffman, 2005). This design allows students access to dual credit based on the availability of instructors within the high school who are certified to teach the course.

Currently, the WECHS is in a leading state offering dual credit opportunities for students. The state has engaged in a series of reforms to facilitate students' transitions from high school to college (Karp, Hughes, & Cormier, 2012). With the passing of a new bill in 2011, the department of education entered multiple Memorandum of Understandings (MOU) with partnering colleges to address dual enrollment in the state. However current MOU's have allowed dual credit to be available for all high school grade levels. Furthermore, the state now has six operating middle and early college programs, where students can earn their associates or technical degree before graduating. However, the ability to take a cohesive selection of dual credit, with structured supports preparing students to earn a degree based on an academic program plan, did not come about until the early 2000s when early colleges were developed.

Early College Development

Educators in Massachusetts introduced the concept of early college in 1966. The mission of Simon's Rock Early College was to help advanced high achieving students accelerate their learning and graduate high school with an associate's degree (Webb & Gerwin, 2014). The school model eventually converted to a college only curriculum, which enrolls students ready to begin college. This program is still in existence but has since been renamed Bard College.

The second early college opened in 1974 as Middle College High School. However, its mission was to target at-risk students of low SES backgrounds and students who would be first-generation college-goers (Lieberman, 2004; Webb & Gerwin, 2014). The school's program nested itself on the LaGuardia, New York Community College campus.

By 2000, these two early colleges were assisting students in earning their associate's degree while earning their high school diploma. There was great interest in their work by the Ford Foundation, which then offered leaders from these schools an opportunity to pilot a new nationwide educational reform: Early College (Webb & Gerwin, 2014). With additional monetary support from The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and other foundations (e.g., Carnegie Corporation, W. K. Kellogg, Walton Family Foundation, Lumina Foundation, and the Dell Foundation), the movement grew from two schools in 2001 to more than 280 schools across 32 states by 2014 (Jobs for the Future, 2013). This effort officially began the Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI, 2012).

The Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI) schools serve low-income,

first-generation college-goers, English language learners, students of color, and other young people under-represented in higher education. In addition, these early colleges seek to help students simultaneously earn a high school diploma and an associate's degree, or up to two years of credit toward a Bachelor's degree – tuition free (Jobs for the Future, 2008).

Currently, eight concurrent enrollment initiative partnerships provide design oversight for school leadership. Their focus ranges from “the type of entity that functions as the lead partner, specific career focus pathways, class location and time, instructor characteristics, course content, student diversity, and opportunities for earning credit” (Hughes, Rodriguez, Edwards, & Belfield, 2012, p. 10). Another important design principle of early college is that the school be located on a college campus or students are transported to a 2- and/or 4-year college and university campus to provide students access to a wide array of collegiate coursework and to expose the students to college lifestyle (ECHSI, 2012). Though there are many focuses of the ECHSI, all share a key principle belief that with a “well-designed program, high school students can successfully complete college work at an earlier age” (Muñoz, et al., 2014, p. 38). This accomplishment serves as a powerful motivator to engage students in their learning process and help them realize that achieving a college degree is obtainable.

Early colleges serve three purposes: (a) motivate students to take more challenging coursework in high school, (b) assist students in the transition to college, and (c) increase college completion rates (Hoffman, 2005; Jobs for the Future, 2008; Karp & Hughes, 2008). To further describe the expectations of early college programs, Jacobson (2005) offers that a goal of early college programs should be to take students who may be

below grade level in a subject area and “try to slingshot them ahead with a combination of extra support and challenging work” (p. 2). As a result, dual credit opportunities help motivate students to perform by shortening the time required for successful completion of academic program plans/degrees (Welsh, Brake, & Choi, 2005).

Do early college models, specifically dual credit obtainment, have any correlation on student or program success? More specifically, do early college programs help improve the urban school setting? To gain an understanding of the benefits of early college, this study includes current research of dual credit programs on the outcome variables of students meeting graduation and CCR benchmarks.

Factors Associated with High School Graduation

Balfanz and Legters (2004b) reported that “between 1993 and 2002, the number of high schools with the lowest levels of success in promoting freshmen to senior status on time, a strong correlate of high dropout and low graduation rates, increased by 75%” (p. 4). However, more recent figures continue to show that graduating rates have trended slightly upward this past decade (Bruce, Bridgeland, Fox, & Balfanz, 2011). In fact, in 2013, a record was set for high school graduation with 81% of students graduating, creating a realization that the nation might meet the federal governments goals of graduating 90% of students by 2020 (DePaoli et al., 2015).

WECHS’s state has made headway in its pursuit of improving graduation rates and is currently outperforming the national graduation rate with an impressive 88% (Timmell et al., 2014). However, according to the department of education for the state in which the school of study is located (2015), many of the state’s lowest performing urban high schools, the four-year cohort graduation rates are close to the national average

at 75%. Unfortunately, students who attend these schools are less likely to not only graduate, but also fail to attend and graduate from college and attain jobs (Frankenberg, 2009b). Dropouts are less likely to find a job and earn a living wage, are more likely to be poor, and are more likely to suffer from a variety of adverse health issues (Rumberger, 2011). Another devastating statistic in relation to the graduation rate is that a dropout can only expect to earn an annual income of \$20,241, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. This figure is starkly lower in comparison to a student graduating from high school, who can expect to earn \$30,540 and even \$56,275 if they graduate with a bachelor's degree (Nix, 2016). Even more concerning is the incarceration rates among dropouts between the ages of 16 and 24. According to a study by Nix (2016), incarceration rates of high school dropouts were a 63 times higher than among college graduates. Furthermore, 82 percent of all inmates dropped out of high school.

The effects of not graduating on time are reason enough to implore educational leaders to find programs that will help students reach the graduation stage. To understand who is graduating and who is not, this review will provide a closer look at the student demographics indicators of race, gender, and socio-economic status.

Race

As noted previously, minority students now almost comprise 50% of urban school enrollment. More than ever, it is imperative that schools focus on improving their graduation rates. A recent article revealed that 92% of Asian, 82% of Caucasian, 66% of Hispanics, and 64% of African American students graduate on time (Nix, 2016). While these numbers seem low, research has shown that the graduation rates of minority students have significantly improved. Since 2006, Hispanic/Latino students have

improved 15 percentage points and African Americans have improved 9 percentage points (DePaoli et al., 2015). Thus, Hispanic/Latino and African American students are starting to close the graduation rate gap with their White student peers.

Furthermore, one recent study correlated GPA and retention rates to high school graduation. It found that when adjusting for the population size between subgroups, the graduation of African-American students mirrors the graduation rate for all white students (Waugh, Micceri, & Takalkar, 1994). Notably, and what should be an immediate concern for school administrators, was that the retention rates for these two ethnic groups differed considerably for students with low GPAs and students with high GPAs (Waugh, Micceri, & Takalkar, 1994). The study found that among students with a low GPA, schools retained African-American students twice as often as Caucasian students (Waugh, Micceri, & Takalkar, 1994). Unclear in the study was the type of school the students attended. Because this was a nationwide study, it combined both urban and rural schools. Regardless, efforts should help minority students engage in their educational process and incentivize low performing students to quickly raise their academic status.

Gender

When looking at graduation rates by gender, women slightly outperform the men. In 2010, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, 89% of women ages 25 to 29 had graduated from high school, compared to 84% of males (Doyle, 2010). However, there is great disparity between young women and men by race/ethnicity. In a review of census data, of women ages 25 to 29 in 2006, 95% of white women were high school graduates, but only 88% of African American and 67% of Hispanic women were high school

graduates (Corbett, Hill, & St. Rose, 2008). The disparities between same ethnicity men and women also exist. Of Hispanic men aged 18–24, 65% have a high school credential compared with 74% of Hispanic women. A similarly large gap exists between African-American men and African-American women, with 73% of men having attained a high school diploma compared to 82% of women (Doyle, 2010).

Socio-economic Status

Throughout this literature review, Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) served as a proxy for SES. Not only is the national school dropout rate of 19% for all students unacceptable, but it is even greater for minority groups, males, and the poor (Gentry & Buck, 2010). Though over the past decade graduation rates have increased for low-income students, they still fall short of their more affluent peer group. There is even greater disparity in graduation rates of students in urban, socioeconomically disadvantaged communities (Gentry & Buck, 2010). Graduating on time is the norm for affluent students, but not for their low-income peers. In fact, the difference is 15% higher than the rate for low-income students (DePaoli et al., 2015). However, WECHS's state leads the nation with the smallest gap between the two income groups. Its graduation rate gap between low-income and non-low-income students is only 1.4 percentage points (DePaoli et al., 2015).

Dual Credit Relationship with Graduation

In the review of literature regarding student outcomes of dual credit and on time graduation, most studies examine “on time” college degree completion, which is one of the key design outcomes of the ECHSI but not the focus of this study. This is primarily due to the limited access of tracking data from both high schools and colleges. In many

states, one institutional body does not govern dual credit programs, which creates fragmentation in data tracking (Karp & Hughes, 2008). As a result, most research has been limited to the state of Florida, North Carolina, and Texas where students are tracked longitudinally between high school and college (Karp, et al., 2007).

When reviewing literature specific to dual credit on high school graduation, Karp et al. (2007) used quantitative methodology (ordinary least squares and logistic regression) techniques and found a significant relationship between students who took dual credit and high school graduation among students taking dual credit in Florida and New York. Their research utilized two large longitudinal data sets tracking all students within the state from all postsecondary institutions. A second study published by Struhl and Vargas (2012) found positive correlations between dual enrollment and outcomes of high school graduation, college enrollment, first-year college GPA, second-year persistence in college, and the number of college credits accumulated after three years. AIR and SRI (2013) released the third nationally focused study examining 10 early college high schools (ECHS) spanning seven years to determine whether ECHS students have better graduation outcomes than those of students who attended other high schools. In their quantitative regression analysis, they controlled for student background characteristics. This research found statistically significant correlations between those attending an ECHS than those not. In addition, the ECHS students were 86% more likely to graduate from high school than 81% of the comparison students (Berger et al., 2014). This advantage over the comparison group helps validate the need for additional dual credit courses, but more specifically the need for research of dual credit obtainment on state accountability outcomes.

Even more interesting than overall support of graduation is the benefit dual credit has for minority and low SES students. Unfortunately, many parents who did not attend college themselves do not have the “know how” or social capital to assist their child in pursuing a college degree. By exposing these students to college while they are still in high school, dual credit courses may demystify college and show students that they can be as successful as their peers (Bailey & Karp, 2003). A second study by Haveman and Wilson (2007) looked at the disparities in college completion between the top and bottom quartiles of SES, as measured by median household income. They found that only 26% of the students in the lowest quartile earn a degree by the age of 25 as compared to 59% of students in the top quartile. This representation of low SES students in dual credit nationwide can serve as a warrant within WECHS’s state to ensure that every student has equal access to dual credit and each school can provide adequate resources to help ensure successful completion of college coursework.

With the review of the quantitative studies above, correlational designs have been the dominant approach when comparing graduation rates of students taking dual credit or participating in early college programming. As such, the same methodology was chosen for this study’s inclusion of comparing graduation rates of students attending Willow ECHS and participating in the early college program compared to those who do not.

Factors Associated with College and Career Readiness

With the weight of accountability ever pressing on urban school leaders, college and career ready (CCR) accountability benchmarks may influence programmatic change. Policymakers at the state and local level have placed much emphasis on CCR accountability over the past 20 years (Carlson & Planty, 2012; Chaney, Burgdorf, &

Atash, 1997; Musoba, 2010; Thurlow, Ysseldyke, & Reid, 1997; Willis, 2011). This is in part due to 84% of high school students graduating. Yet 80% of all jobs requiring some level of postsecondary education (DePaoli et al., 2015). College readiness becomes a value for students because according to ACT reaching that benchmark means students have approximately a 50% chance of obtaining a B or higher, or a 75% chance of earning a C or higher in the corresponding courses (Allen & Sconing, 2005). This means students will be more likely to stay on track for their degree. Also, students who meet benchmarks are considered college ready and can enroll in credit-bearing coursework. While definitions of college readiness vary, Conley (2007) defines college readiness as “the level of preparation a student needs to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in a credit-bearing general education course at a postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree” (p. 5). Even with a clear quantifiable definition of college readiness and more than a 20-year history of standards-based reform, high school graduates are still not graduating college ready (Leonard, 2013). Because “college readiness” can be defined by many different measures and the limited scope of “career readiness” in this research design, the focus of this literature review will be primarily to the CCR requirements within the WECHS’s state.

Beginning in 2012, the state’s department of education introduced CCR measures in both legislation and the accountability model (Timmel et al., 2014). Prior to 2012, the state measured college readiness for data purposes, not accountability. At that time, the percentage of students who were college ready was 32%; but since the creation of legislation and its inclusion in the accountability model, the percentage of students has grown to 55% in 2014 (Timmel et al., 2014). Prior to 2012, measures of career readiness

were not kept in the state. In 2012, the initial year of career readiness measures, only 8% of graduating seniors were career ready. However, over the next two years, the career readiness number rose to 18% (Timmel et al., 2014).

State officials measure CCR performance in two parts. The first is by academic performance. According to the department of education for the state in which the school of study is located (2015), a student's performance on the ACT is the primary instrument of measure. To be considered college ready, a student must score an 18 for English, a 20 for reading, and a 19 in mathematics. If a student meets all three benchmarks, the state awards one point to the school. If a student does not meet these benchmarks by the ACT, he/she was eligible to take the COMPASS, an online alternative assessment to the ACT. Additionally, ACT produces the COMPASS and also measures a student's performance in English, Reading, and Math. The department of education (2015) listed acceptable scores within each domain as 76, 85, and 36 respectively. A student may receive college readiness by individual performance in the different domains across different assessments.

Officials measure the second part of CCR, a school's career readiness, by the level of preparation a high school graduate needs to advance to the next stage in his or her chosen career. This may be a student's choice to continue postsecondary coursework, receive industry certification, or enter the workforce. A student's enrollment in a minimum of three years in a specific Career Technical Education (CTE) pathway completes this measurement. Once students complete the third course, they are eligible for career readiness status. In addition, students must receive an industry certification for the CTE pathway they completed. Furthermore, students must also meet academic

readiness as measured by the ACT or the Work Keys Assessment. The state awards a point for career readiness once a student completes all three components.

The increased emphasis on college and career readiness forces school leaders to understand their students' needs as they transition through high school coursework (Kim & Bragg, 2008). Also, practitioners need a way of determining their school's performance on CCR rates to improve their AMO. Because colleges utilize ACT scores as an indicator of a students' basic academic skill level and accept career ready industry certifications as pre-requisites for enrollment into selected degree/certification programs, schools must ensure their instructional programs adequately prepare their students (Kim & Bragg, 2008). By reviewing the trends in CCR performance by race, gender, income status, and the outcomes of CCR through dual credit participation, practitioners may look for ways to improve CCR outcomes.

Race

Black and Hispanic students are traditionally under-represented in colleges and universities; however, the situation is improving (Waugh, Micceri, & Takalkar, 1994). Yet one of the most alarming national statistics is that only 20% of all African-American students and 16% of all Hispanic/Latino students leave high school college ready as compared to their Caucasian and Asian peer groups who graduate respectively 37% and 38% college ready (Greene, Forster, & Manhattan Inc., 2003). In the same study, Greene, Forster, and Manhattan Inc. (2003) found that "while black students made up 14% of the overall 18-year-old population in 2000, they made up only 9% of college ready 18-year-olds in that year, and while Hispanic students made up 17% of all 18-year-olds, they made up only 9% of college ready 18-year-olds" (p. 10).

Willow ECCHS's state has made great strides in graduating students CCR. Timmel et al. (2014) found that 70% of Asian students, 57% of White students, 44% of Hispanic students, and 33% of Black students graduate college ready in the state. Of these students, 68% of Asian students, 77% of White, 77% of Hispanic, and 75% of Black students enroll in college the semester immediately following high school graduation. These numbers are impressively different than students graduating career ready. In WECHS's state, only 6% of Asian students, 20% of White students, 10% of Hispanic students, and 6% of Black students graduate career ready (Timmel et al., 2014).

Gender

While average performance for both girls and boys has risen overtime, a small but persistent gender gap favors boys in regard to meeting college readiness benchmarks on both the SAT and ACT (Corbett, Hill, & St. Rose, 2008). On average, girls performed better on the English and reading sections of the ACT, while boys performed better on the math and science sections. Boys also consistently earned higher average ACT composite scores (Corbett, Hill, & St. Rose, 2008). Though college readiness does not directly correlate to acquiring a job, these numbers indicate that females are just as capable of enrolling in college and earning a degree.

In WECHS's state, there is little gap between college and/or career ready males and females. In 2014, 58% of all females and 51% of all males graduated college ready. What is interesting is the reversal in career readiness numbers. In 2014, 19% of males and 16% of females graduated career ready (Timmel et al., 2014). But with the small percentage differences in each category, it is recommended that school leaders look for programming efforts that allow both genders equal opportunity to become college and

career ready. More importantly, school leaders should look for opportunities to “sling shot” both genders forward and ensure that students meet CCR benchmarks at 100% before graduating high school.

Socio-economic Status

Another under-represented demographic in higher education are students who come from low socio-economic status (SES) households. This is in part due to low SES students graduating high school without meeting college ready benchmarks (Bettinger & Long, 2004). Even though school leaders design collegiate remedial courses to help students who do not meet benchmarks improve academic skills, these courses are heavily populated by low SES, non-native speaking, and students of color (Bettinger & Long, 2004). Unfortunately, these courses are non-credit bearing and only serve as a gateway course before a student can continue perusing his or her intended degree. According to Bowler (2009), as many as one in three first-time, low SES college students will not make it back for the second year. These statistics regarding income status and college obtainment show the need for immediate solutions to ensure all students become college ready while in high school.

When compared to their more affluent peers, regrettably, there is a large difference in the number of low SES students graduating high school. The college readiness rate for FRL students in WECHS’s state is 41% while non-FRL students graduate 67% college ready. Interestingly, though, the career readiness percentage for both groups is equal at 18%. The gap in college readiness and the low percentage of career readiness are two specific outcomes early college, dual credit programs can improve if implemented effectively.

Dual Credit Relationship with CCR

While a body of literature exists related to dual credit and high school graduation, few bodies of research exist linking dual credit to the obtainment of college or career readiness benchmarks in WECHS's state. Instead, most bodies of research focus on college readiness as defined by enrollment into college, persistence in college, GPA while in college, and degree completion. In a causal-comparative study conducted by Ganzert (2014), researchers studied the relationships of dual enrollment of traditional-age North Carolina community college students. Researchers found positive outcomes on collegiate GPA and collegiate graduation rate (Ganzert, 2014). Researchers also found an additional research design utilizing dual credit and college readiness results as operationalized by ACT benchmarks. In Kim and Bragg's research (2008), multiple regression techniques show a statistically significant correlation between dual credit hours and articulated credit hours earned on ACT college readiness benchmarks. Their findings posit statistically significant results on all four sub-categories of the ACT college readiness assessment.

Unfortunately, there is limited research on career technical dual credit course work. Limited research exists correlating achievement of technical degrees based on obtainment of transferable, articulated dual credit earned by students (Bragg, 2001). The studies conducted review success rates of career technical dual credit coursework on various outcomes, but the outcomes are limited to a student's ability to transfer their technical course dual credit to a college with a similar technical program (Hughes, Karp, Bunting, & Friedel, 2005). Because the state in which WECHS is located has a unique

career readiness definition, no current literature exists showing correlation of dual credit to career readiness obtainment.

With the review of CCR literature, it is evident that positive correlations between dual credit and meeting ACT benchmarks exist. Yet with the metric of CCR used by WECHS, there are no quantitative correlational studies using dual credit with the state's CCR measures. As a result, this study utilizes a quantitative correlational analysis to answer the study's questions, making this study the first of its kind.

Summary

In today's competitive postsecondary institutions and job markets, being college and career ready gives an individual an advantage for success. With only 56% of graduates enrolling in college, educators must work harder to improve the outcomes for all students in WECHS's state. Even more important, due to only 87% of the state's enrolling students persisting to spring semester, programs must be created to ensure students are truly "ready" for college.

With CCR being an indication of the state of study's high school success, educators and policymakers must determine how to help every student achieve the CCR benchmarks. This state is one of only 17 states that require all 11th grade students to take the ACT for college readiness accountability measures. Three additional states and the District of Columbia chose the SAT as their accountability test (Timmel et al., 2014). However, only 10 states include dual credit obtainment in their state accountability model (Timmel et al., 2014). Though WECHS's state does not include dual credit in the existing accountability model, it is reported on the school report card and has been recommended to be included in the next draft of the new accountability model.

By providing high school students with access to college courses, dual-credit programs contribute to student success in terms of matriculation and persistence (Bailey & Karp, 2003). Dual credit programs intend to reduce the high school drop-out rate, reduce the need for course remediation at the college level, and encourage more high school students to enter higher education (SREB, 2014). By offering programs modelling the early college principles, high school students have regular college students as role models, increase their confidence in completing challenging coursework, and provide the encouragement to continue their education.

From the review presented above, this quantitative study analyzes the relationship between dual credit and the reviewed demographic variables with the outcome variables of on time graduation and CCR obtainment. In next section, the methodology of research is presented. Furthermore, the context of the study, data sources, data collection, and limitations of the study will guide the reader to understand the relationship of how this literature review influenced the research model.

STUDY THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

To clarify the potential benefits of students obtaining dual credit, this study was designed to provide empirical evidence to the research community. Furthermore, the outcomes of this research may benefit educational leaders throughout the state and nation. Being an educational leader in a low performing school for over nine years, evidence is needed to challenge or support program designs to make decisions that quickly increase student success outcomes. The idea of challenging whether a program change impacts student success is based on Crotty's (1998) post-positivist belief that scholars must challenge the traditional notion of absolute truth.

Throughout the study, an examination of how the amount of dual credit hours earned and the degree to which the demographic variables of gender, ethnicity, and FRL status affect a student's achievement of high school graduation and college and career ready (CCR) benchmarks was examined through a post-positivist approach. To achieve this goal, a quantitative research design was the chosen methodology. Creswell (2014) defines quantitative research as "an interrelated set of constructs (or variables) formed into propositions, or hypotheses, that specify the relationship among variables" (p55). Because the data for the variables of this study are quantitative, the researcher sought to determine the relationship between one independent variable, dual credit hours, and two

outcome variables, high school graduation and college and career readiness controlling for demographic variables.

For this research, a binomial logistic regression analyses was conducted to answer the study's two research questions (Field, 2012). The first research question sought to determine the relationship between students' dual credit hours and high school graduation, while controlling for other variables in the model. The second research question sought to determine the relationship between students' dual credit hours and meeting college or career readiness benchmarks, while controlling for other variables in the model.

This section is organized into the following areas: context of the study, conceptual framework, data sources, data collection, method of estimation, operationalizing variables in the model, data analysis, interpreting results of logistic regression, and limitations of the study.

Context of Study

This study reviewed data from Willow Early College High School's (WECHS) seven-year implementation of its program. This study utilized dual credit, graduation, college and career readiness, and demographic data from the 2008-2009 to 2015-2016 school years. A brief descriptive overview provides to better understand the demographic composition of WECHS, as well as levels of performance on the outcome variables of graduation and CCR.

WECHS is one of 22 public high schools in a large urban district located in the southeastern United States. In addition, it is one of the smaller comprehensive high schools within the district with a total enrollment of approximately 800 students. In

2009, WECHS was labeled as a persistently low achieving school by the state and has been in the bottom five percent of schools within the state for over 15 years. According to WECH's district office (2016), the school's demographic ethnicity is comprised of black (70%), white (24%), Hispanic (3%), and other (3%). The gender composition within the building is female (43%) and male (57%). Currently, 79% of its student population qualifies for and receives FRL support.

Over the past five years, the graduating cohorts have remained consistently around 200 students. In 2011-2012, the first graduation class of this study and three years after WECHS implemented the early college model, the graduation rate was 76%. In the following years, the graduation rate continued to improve reaching 86% in the 2013-2014 school year. However, according to the department of education for WECHS (2015), by 2015-2016, the graduation rate dropped to 76%.

Regarding CCR, over the past five years, only three percent of the junior class met ACT Benchmarks on the state administered ACT test in the spring of each year. Collectively, the entire graduating class' ACT composite has risen from 15.2 to 15.9 over the six years of this study's analysis. In addition to the ACT, the school's accountability for college and career readiness can be measured by the students' achievement of the CCR benchmarks in their senior year. In 2009-2010, the first year the state reported CCR obtainment on the state report card, the graduating class was only four percent CCR as defined by ACT/COMPASS test scores and CTE career readiness requirements. However, the department of education (2015) identified this number grew to 53% of the 2016 graduating class.

Conceptual Framework

As identified, the variable of interest for this quantitative study is dual credit. The additional variables for this study were chosen based on the review of literature. As explained in the study's introduction, the study itself was conducted based on a tiered theory of Social Capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), Human Capital (Becker, 1973), and Academic Capital (St. John, Hu, & Fisher's, 2011) theories. Together, their research has identified attributes of "capital" and its relationship on student success. Looking at Figure 13, one can see this tiered theoretical approach, guided by social constructivism.

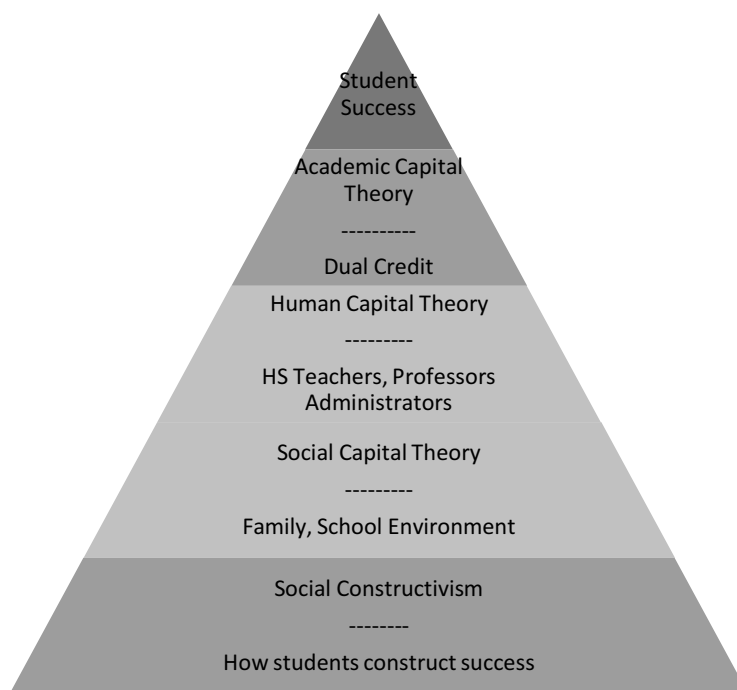


Figure 13. *Logic Chart - Tiered Theoretical Approach*

In this tiered approach, student success is supported using the layered constructs of social constructivism, social capital, human capital, and academic capital. Using this tiered concept, students construct their future success by the interactions they have access to. The early college program at Willow provides the social capital to move students

towards graduation, CCR, and collegiate success. The teachers, college professors, and school administrators, representing human capital, ensure that the implementation of the program is appropriate and individualized to help each student find success. Finally, the dual credit coursework represents academic capital, which allows students to achieve their individualized measures of success. To assist in measuring the tiered theory with practice, this study sought to determine the relationship academic capital, dual credit, on the outcome variables of graduation and CCR obtainment. For this study, there were many correlational quantitative methods available (Creswell, 2014). However, because dual credit is a continuous variable and both graduation and meeting CCR benchmarks are dichotomous variables, the logistic regression model was chosen. This method provides benefits that discriminant analysis cannot. Discriminant analysis is readily used for research where populations are distributed normally and have identical covariance matrices (Field, 2012). However, the populations within this study do not have identical covariance matrices nor are the populations between variables evenly distributed. In this study, dual credit is a continuous variable with a value of 0 to 60 and graduation and CCR are binary with a value of either 0 or 1. Therefore, this population and variables of interest is atypical and creates non-normality allowing the logistic regression model with maximum likelihood estimators to be utilized (Stevens, 2002).

Data Sources

Willow ECHS's district and the partnering community college provided access to the data. For this study, the researcher used three data sets spanning school years from 2008-2009 to 2015-2016. The first data set is the graduation cohort lists produced by the district's research department for each graduating year from 2011-2012, the first

graduating class, to 2015-2016 and included: (a) the necessary demographic data, and (b) whether the student met the on-time graduation and CCR benchmarks or not. The second data set, granted from the community college, included the longitudinal tracking of all students enrolled in dual credit and the number of credit hours they earned. WECHS's administrative tracking data set served to triangulate the district's and the community college's data when data was missing or needed clarification. WECHS's administrators have monitored the early college program over its implementation and have collected data on the students who have participated in the program and the number of hours they have completed. Together, these data sets provided the needed variables for this research.

Data Collection

In order to gain access to the needed data for this study, IRB approval was requested through the University of Louisville. The study was approved through an expedited review process and falls under Category 5: Research Involving materials (data, documents, records, or specimens) that have been collected. Additional research requests were made to WECHS's district, as well as the community college's data management department. Specifically, the graduation cohort lists (starting in 2011-2012 through 2015-2016) were requested from the district. These lists included each student's starting and ending enrollment date at WECHS and the individual student's gender, ethnicity, and FRL status. This report also detailed each student by his or her unique student code and included his or her final graduation code, graduation date, and CCR status. The graduation codes identify whether a student graduated, graduated early, transferred schools, dropped out of school over the age of 18, or dropped out of school with whereabouts unknown. The CCR status for each student was indicated by "met" or "not

met.” The data was then compiled to produce a cohort list, by graduation year, that was shared with the community college. To finalize the cohort list, the researcher ensured that all participating subjects started at WECHS in their 9th grade year and either persisted to graduation or dropped out of WECHS and did not enrolled in another academic program leading to a high school diploma. Additionally, the cohort list contained the following stratification categories: (a) graduated on time or did not graduate on time and (b) met CCR benchmarks or did not meet CCR benchmarks. Stratified random sampling helps ensure the likelihood of representativeness of the larger population, especially if the sample is not very large (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). Because of the small sample size, there was a potential of not having equitable data sets between the two different dichotomous outcome variables. As a result, random sampling was utilized to ensure the graduation sample met the minimum of 15 cases to 1 predictor variable (Field, 2012).

The college then reviewed the stratified list of cohort students, utilizing a unique student code that both the college and the school district share. The data management department added the total number of dual credit hours all individual students obtained during their four-year tenure at WECHS. Additionally, the data base from WECHS was utilized to spot check and verify and missing data in the finalized data set

The final sample provided the study’s population (*N*). The researcher initially estimated the total population to include approximately 680 students, with approximately 120 students who did not graduate. However, after utilizing a criterion sampling to ensure students reported by both institutions meet the guidelines of the study, the final sample included 498 students. Of these students, 79 (15.8%) did not graduate.

Method of Estimation

For the study, the researcher selected the regression methodology because it provides the researcher the ability to evaluate the relationship between variables (Osborne, 2014). With the logistic regression model, a prediction can be derived from a relationship of a continuous independent variable on a dichotomous dependent variable (Field, 2013; Stevens, 2002). This study's logistic regression model helps educators estimate the number of dual credit hours a student may need and provide a probability of that same student graduating on time and meeting CCR benchmarks.

In this study's model, the researcher will not assume linearity of relationship between the independent variables and the dependent but accepts that the variables will be linearly related to the logit of the dependent variables. To conduct the study, two models of the logistic regression were derived, dual credit on graduation and dual credit on CCR.

The binary logistic regression equation of estimation utilized is as follows:

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 DC + \beta_2 GN + \beta_3 ET + \beta_4 FL + \epsilon$$

Utilizing this equation, the models utilized for this study are as follows:

$Y = \text{Model 1} - (Y_G) - \text{Graduation (dichotomous); Model 2} - (Y_{CCR}) - \text{CCR (dichotomous)}$

Both Models

$\beta_1 DC = \text{Dual Credit}$

$\beta_2 GN = \text{Gender of Student}$

$\beta_3 ET = \text{Ethnicity of Student}$

$\beta_4 FL = \text{Free \& Reduced Lunch Status}$

e = error term

Operationalizing Variables in the Model

The following is a description of the variables entered into the logistic regression models for Dual Credit and Graduation and Dual Credit and CCR (See Table 10). Additionally, a description is provided to explain how each variable is operationalized.

This research was conducted using only one primary independent variable, dual credit (β_1DC). One reason for the choice of dual credit as an independent variable is its frequency of use in existing literature. As discussed in the literature review, dual credit is used in limited high school outcomes but various postsecondary outcomes. The choice to include only one independent variable comes out of sample size necessity (Field, 2012). Due to having a small population for the study, only one independent variable was included in the model. The independent variable of dual credit was recorded as a continuous variable (Field, 2012). Throughout a student's tenure at WECHS, a student can earn anywhere from 0 dual credit hours to over 60 dual credit hours. As a result, their hours earned was included in the data sets received.

Table 10. *Description of Independent, Outcome, and Control Variables*

Type	Construct	Description	Value
Independent Variable			
	Dual Credit	Number of Dual Credit Hours Obtained	0 - 60
Outcome Variables			
	Graduation	Graduation in 4 years	0 = No 1 = Yes
	CCR	College or Career Readiness Benchmark Met	0 = No 1 = Yes
Control Variables			
	Gender	Male or Female	0 = Male 1 = Female
	Ethnicity	White, Black, or Other-Dummy coded	0 = White 1 = Black 2 = Other
	FRL	Free or Reduced Lunch Status	0 = No 1 = Yes

The outcome variable of graduation (Y_G) was included in this study based on the need to grow existing research utilizing the logistic regression model. Currently, few bodies of research have found positive correlations between dual enrolment and high school graduation (Karp et al., 2007; Struhl & Vargas, 2012; What Works Clearing House, 2014). In this research model, graduation is a dichotomous categorical variable. Students were identified as meeting graduation benchmark with a 1 for YES and 0 for NO. Stevens (2002) suggests this logistic regression study provides information on a student’s probability of graduating over the probability of not graduating.

WECHS’s district outlines its requirements for graduation as completing a minimum of 22 credits, including demonstrated performance-based competency in

technology, and all other state and local requirements to graduate from high school in the district. Other graduation criteria include the requirement of a transitional course or intervention before exiting high school for students who do not meet the college readiness benchmarks for English and language arts and/or mathematics, possible addition of other requirements for graduation, and the completion of an individual learning plan that focuses on career exploration and related postsecondary education training needs. If a student meets these requirements, he or she will meet the requirements for graduation and receive a traditional high school diploma. In meeting the requirements mentioned afore, the student was coded as 1 = YES, providing the student met these guidelines within a four or less year time period.

The second outcome variable (Y_{CCR}) is meeting college and/or career readiness benchmarks. The selection of this variable is predicated on the lack of any literature specifically analyzing dual credit and the unique definition of CCR, though current research can link the relationship of dual credit to meeting ACT benchmarks and career preparedness (Bragg, 2001; Hughes, et al., 2005; Kim & Bragg, 2008). Again, this data is a dichotomous categorical variable, and students will be identified as having met CCR benchmark with a 1 for YES and 0 for NO (Stevens, 2002). The use of this variable in the logistic regression model will provide information on a student's probability of meeting CCR over the probability of not meeting CCR.

The state department of education's (2015) CCR measures are defined in two components. The first measure is by academic performance. The system wide standards of college readiness are measured by a student's performance on the ACT. In order to be considered college ready, a student must score an 18 for English, a 20 for reading, and a

19 in mathematics. If a student meets all three benchmarks, the school will be awarded one point. If a student does not meet these benchmarks by the ACT, he or she will be eligible to take the COMPASS, an online alternative assessment to the ACT. The COMPASS is produced by ACT, and it measures a student's performance in English, Reading, and Math. Acceptable scores within each domain are 76, 85, and 36 respectively. A student may receive college readiness by individual performance in the different domains across different assessments.

The second part of CCR, a school's career readiness, is measured by the level of preparation a high school graduate needs to advance to the next stage in his/her chosen career. This may be a student's choice to continue postsecondary coursework, receive industry certification, or enter the workforce. This measurement is completed by a student's enrollment in a minimum of three years in a specific Career Technical Education (CTE) pathway. Once a student completes the third course, they are eligible for career readiness status. In addition, a student must receive an industry certification for the CTE pathway they completed. Furthermore, a student must also meet academic readiness as measured by the ACT or the Work Keys Assessment. Once a student has successfully completed all three components, the student has met career readiness.

Three additional variables are included in the study as control variables. These variables include a student's gender (β_2GN), ethnicity of the student (β_3ET), and free and reduced lunch status (β_4FL). These variables are included in the models due to their established relationship with student success outcomes (Bragg, 2006; Karp & Jeong, 2008). Each of these variables are categorical. Gender is recorded as 1 for Female and 0 for Male. A subject's race is recorded with a numerical value of 1 - 2 based on their

assigned race within the data files. These were in turn, dummy coded, using white students as the reference group. Lastly, the FRL status was recorded as 1 for YES and 0 for NO.

Data Analysis Procedures

In this research design, the researcher utilized IBM SPSS software for analytical purposes. Utilizing SPSS, the binary logistic regression analysis was selected based on the necessary assumptions that can be met. While categorical data violates the necessary linearity of variables, the logistic regression makes assumptions based on an exception. These assumptions include (a) a linearity of the continuous predictors and the logit of the outcome variable and (b) an independence of errors (Field, 2013). The SPSS binary logistic regression analysis was utilized to answer both research questions. Furthermore, utilizing the binary logistic regression model of analysis to assess the probability of students graduating high school on time and college or career ready provided additional research to the growing acknowledgment that there is a benefit of preparing students for transition to college by experiencing rigorous, dual credit coursework (Andrews, 2004; Bailey, Hughes, & Karp, 2002; Bragg, 2001; Kleiner & Lewis, 2005).

Following the entry of variables into SPSS based on the random selection of the stratified data, the researcher utilized the Analyze, Descriptive Analysis, Descriptives function to provide the mean and standard deviation for the continuous variable of dual credit. In addition, the Descriptive Analysis, Frequencies function provided an analysis of frequency with the categorical variables including their occurrence frequency (Field, 2013).

Next the researcher utilized the Analyze, Regression, Binary Logistic Regression analysis tool to complete the analysis of dual credit for each outcome variable, Graduation and CCR (Stevens, 2002). While it is recommended to build models of analysis based on ordinary regression to ensure parsimony, this is only required if there is more than one predictive variable (Field, 2013). Because the researcher was limited to the use of one independent variable, dual credit, only one model was required to be created. For analysis purposes, the researcher used the Block Enter method because each of the control variables has been grounded in theory and presented in the literature review. As such, the Block Enter method suffices for analysis purposes (Stevens, 2002). For this procedure, the researcher selected the dependent variable of graduation in one analysis and CCR in the second analysis. For both, the primary independent variable of interest was dual credit. Once the analysis was complete, the researcher reviewed the Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients, including chi-square statistics and statistical significance, to determine if adding control variables increased the significance of fit (Field, 2013).

To gain additional information, the researcher re-ran the binary regression analysis and select additional options. The additional options were selected at the variable input screen. The researcher selected Classification Plots and Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness-of-fit to help assess the overall fit of the model. In addition, the researcher selected Iteration History to display coefficients and log-likelihood values, which is useful because this will also provide the $-2LL$ used to create the R value (Field, 2013).

Interpreting Results of Logistic Regression

With final analysis completed, the researcher analyzed and reported the Nagelkerke R squared values to indicate the strength of association between the variables in the model and the outcome variable. The Nagelkerke R squared value represents a pseudo R-square because they are reported using a similar scale (ranging from 0 to 1) with higher values indicating better model fit, but it cannot be interpreted as one would interpret an OLS R-squared, which reports the proportion of Y variability as explained by the model. In addition, the *b* values of coefficients were provided and utilized in the probability equation. If the *EXP(B)* statistic is higher than 1.0, then the data suggests there are strong positive odds that dual credit assisted a student in meeting graduation or meeting CCR benchmarks. Finally, the Wald value will help guide the researcher to determine if any of the control variables' *b* coefficient values are statistically significant from zero (Field, 2012).

With the logistic regression model, a prediction can be derived from the relationship of a continuous independent variable on a dichotomous dependent variable (Field, 2013; Stevens, 2002). Many studies have also utilized regression models to analyze the association between dual credit on various other collegiate success indicators (Bragg, 2006; Karp & Jeong, 2008; Karp et al., 2007; Struhl & Vargas, 2012). In summary, the researcher reported the *b* values for the independent variables, their statistical significance within the model, and the Odds Ratios. In addition, the researcher utilized the probability equation to assist in determining how many hours of dual credit predict graduation and CCR obtainment based on % probability (Stevens, 2002).

This study analyzed the continuous independent variable of dual credit and its relationship on the dichotomous variables of on-time graduation and meeting CCR benchmarks. The researcher did not assume linearity of relationship between the independent variables and the dependent, but accepted that the variables were linearly related to the logit of the dependent variables. In both models of the logistic regression, dual credit on graduation and dual credit on CCR, the researcher anticipated to reject the null hypothesis and instead, like prior studies, accept the alternative hypothesis. This will mean a student's acquirement of dual credit has a statistically significant and positive relationship to his or her gradating on time and meeting college and career readiness benchmarks.

Limitations and Assumptions

This study presents several limitations. First, the dual enrollment data used for this study was limited to credit hours earned at one high school through one local community and technical college during the courses for 10 semesters, starting in the fall 2010 semester and concluding in the spring semester of 2015. Future research could include an expanded data set, including dual credit for all schools for a longer period of time.

Second, the high school graduation data used for this study was limited to a traditional 4-year graduation diploma. Furthermore, the college and career readiness data used for this study was limited to achievement of the benchmark no later than the student's graduation year. Since WECHS's state allows for a five-year graduation rate for schools, a future correlational study could be utilized to include students who graduated within five years.

A third limitation is the sample size of this study. Current research on dual credit has traditionally been conducted with large, statewide data sets. Therefore, it may be difficult for an individual school to utilize the literature review to design a comprehensive dual credit program for its school. However, it is with this concern that the researcher also recognizes that the sample size for this research is not generalizable to an entire state wide system of schools.

In addition, with a limited sample size of approximately 500 subjects being utilized, using the continuous variable of dual credit and categorical variables of demographics to assess the relationship to graduation and CCR obtainment, the researcher recognizes the model may not be evenly distributed even though one sample set meets the n/k (n = sample size, k = number of predictors) assumptions. As a result, random sampling may be needed to set limits for the n/k ratio for research question 2.

A fifth limitation is this study's generalizability. Due to the uniqueness of the study, this study may only be replicable given a similar sample and a similar time period. It is acknowledged that the site of this study is not representative of a traditional educational demographic composition. Therefore, measures to find comparable demographic settings with similar implementation time frames must be given before replicating the study.

A final limitation is the choice of methodology. This study's choice to use a correlational research design will only be able to determine a relationship between variables. As a result, this study does not provide cause and effect analysis.

Summary

This study qualified for an exempt-status from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) from the University of Louisville. The reason for this exemption is because access to all existing data was coded institutional level data. The data creates the assumption that the individuals included in the study were passive participants and required no contact for additional data. Because the researcher had no interaction with the participants, there was no potential harm to the individual. The data was housed on a secured, encrypted, and password protected external drive and located in a controlled-access space. This provided minimal risk of data accidentally being released.

The study used the binomial logistic regression, a correlational research design, to determine if the completion of dual credit courses is significantly associated with on time graduation and CCR obtainment of the students at Willow Early College High School from the fall semester of 2008 to the spring semester of 2016. Descriptive statistics were also utilized to develop a demographic profile of the students included in the study. Results will be reported in the analysis section.

STUDY THREE: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

Introduction

This study examined the relationship between students' dual credit hours and their on time graduation and meeting college and career readiness benchmarks. This chapter presents the results of a quantitative study conducted utilizing the longitudinal data sets from Willow Early College High School's (WECHS) local district and partnering community college. Two research questions guided this study, both utilizing a binomial logistic regression. The questions are:

1. Is there a relationship between students' dual credit hours and high school graduation, while controlling for other variables in the model?
2. Is there a relationship between students' dual credit hours and meeting college or career readiness benchmarks, while controlling for other variables in the model?

There are four sections in this section. The first section reviews the descriptive analysis of the data. The second section presents the results of the two research questions. The third section provides a summary of the findings. The final section provides conclusions.

Descriptive Analysis

In this section, descriptive analyses of the data are presented. First, the initial data set is examined and discussed. An examination and discussion of student demographics

follow this section as they related to the sample used to conduct Research Question 1 (RQ1) and Research Question 2 (RQ2) respectively. Additionally, the descriptive analysis relating to frequencies and percentages are presented.

Initial Data Set

The initial longitudinal dataset contained 1,211 unique observations of students who enrolled in WECHS in their freshmen year. The researcher created this data set by combining variables from the three data sources used in this study. Of the 1,211 unique students, only 498 (41.1%) students met the specific classification requirements for this study. This was determined by removing students from the data set who either moved to another school, moved to another state, or who were classified as a second-year freshman during their four-year cohort status. The result of this stratification was a data set representing only the remaining students who persisted through four years at Willow or dropped out of school, with Willow being their last known high school. In this data set, 420 (84.3%) students graduated and 78 (15.7%) students did not. Additionally, 191 (38.3%) students earned dual credit and 307 (61.7%) students did not. However, to conduct the logistic regression for RQ1, it was necessary to balance the 1.0 to 5.4 sample size ratio of students who did not graduate, $n = 78$, to the number of graduates, $n = 420$. To do this, a random sampling of graduates was selected. The random group sample of graduates included 110 graduates, creating a ratio of 1.0 to 1.4, which is within the recommended 1 to 1.5 ($n-k$) ratio (Stevens, 2002). To conduct the logistic regression for RQ2, this initial stratified data set was utilized. Additional details pertaining to the descriptive analysis for both sample groups by research question are provided below.

RQ1 Student Level Descriptive Analysis

After the random selection of graduates, the final data set included 188 students in the sample (See Table 11). Of these students, 59% of students graduated, and 41% of students dropped out. Furthermore, 38% of students achieved college and career readiness (CCR), while 62% of students did not meet benchmarks. Of all students, 32% took dual credit, and 68% did not take dual credit. The sample was 60% male and 40% female and was distributed across three classifications of ethnic groups: white (37%), black (58%), and other (5%). Additionally, 85% of students received free or reduced lunch.

Table 11. *RQ 1 Sample Descriptive Statistics*

Variable	<i>n</i> = 188	%
Dual Credit		
No Dual	128	68.1
Dual Credit	60	31.9
Graduation		
Yes	110	58.5
No	78	41.5
CCR		
Yes	44	23.4
No	144	76.6
Gender		
Male	113	60.1
Female	75	39.9
Ethnicity		
White	69	36.7
Black	110	58.5
Other	9	4.8
FRL		
Yes	159	84.6
No	29	15.4

Further descriptive analysis is provided by graduation outcome in Table 12.

Upon analysis, 92.3% of students who did not graduate also did not earn college credit. However, 7.7% of non-graduates earned dual credit, ranging from 1 to 6 hours. Of the students who graduated, 49% earned dual credit while 51% did not earn dual credit. Of the students who graduated and earned dual credit, 13% earned more than 7 dual credit hours, with 6 students earning more than 24 hours.

Table 12. *Descriptive Statistics, Graduation Outcomes*

	<i>DID NOT GRADUATE</i>		<i>GRADUATED</i>	
	<i>n = 78</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n = 110</i>	<i>%</i>
Dual Credit				
No Dual	72	92.3	56	50.9
Dual 1 to 6	6	7.7	40	36.5
Dual 7 to 15			4	3.6
Dual 16 to 24			4	3.6
Dual 25 to 65			6	5.4
CCR				
Yes	1	1.3	43	39.1
No	77	98.7	67	60.9
Gender				
Male	50	64.1	63	57.3
Female	28	35.9	47	42.7
Ethnicity				
White	38	48.7	31	28.2
Black	35	44.9	75	68.2
Other	5	6.4	4	3.6
FRL				
Yes	66	84.6	93	84.5
No	12	15.4	17	15.5

Additional analysis shows that of the non-graduates, only one student met CCR benchmarks; yet within the graduating students, 39% of students met CCR benchmarks. Another descriptive to consider is the percentage of males who did not graduate. In this

sample, 64% of the participants who did not graduate were male. Furthermore, 49% were white, and 85% received FRL. In comparison, of the graduates, 57% were male, only 28% were white, and 85% also received FRL.

Table 13. *RQ1 Variable Descriptive Statistics*

Variable	RQ1			
	M	SD	Min	Max
Dual Credit	2.69	8.96	0	65
Graduation	0.59	0.49	0	1
CCR	0.23	0.42	0	1
Gender	0.40	0.49	0	1
Race	0.68	0.56	0	2
FRL	0.85	0.36	0	1

Additional information regarding the descriptive statistics for RQ1 can be found in Table 13 below. While the range of dual credit hours earned is 0 to 65, the mean of the sample is 2.69 credit hours per student.

RQ2 Student Level Descriptive Analysis

There were 498 students in the sample used for RQ2. Of these students, 84% of the students graduated, and 16% of students dropped out. Furthermore, 38% of students achieved CCR, while 62% of students did not meet benchmarks. Of all students, 45% took dual credit and 55% did not take dual credit. In terms of gender, 57% were male, and 43% were female. In terms of race, three classifications of ethnic groups were represented in the sample: white (29%), black (66%), and other (6%). Additionally, 85% of students received FRL. These descriptive statistics are referenced in Table 14 below.

Table 14. *RQ2 Sample Descriptive Statistics*

Variable	<i>RQ2</i>	
	<i>n</i> = 498	%
Dual Credit		
No Dual	276	55.4
Dual Credit	222	44.6
Graduation		
Yes	420	84.3
No	78	15.7
CCR		
Yes	191	38.4
No	307	61.6
Gender		
Male	283	56.8
Female	215	43.2
Ethnicity		
White	144	28.9
Black	326	65.5
Other	28	5.6
FRL		
Yes	423	84.9
No	75	15.1

Further descriptive analysis is provided by the dependent variable CCR in Table 15. Upon analysis, 73% of students who did not meet CCR did so without earning college credit. However, 27% of non-CCR students earned dual credit, ranging from 1 to 15 hours. Of the students who met CCR, 72% earned dual credit while 28% did not earn dual credit. Of the students who met CCR and earned dual credit, 35% earned more than 7 dual credit hours, with 23 students earning more than 24 credit hours.

Table 15. *CCR Descriptive Statistics*

Variable	CCR NO		CCR YES	
	<i>n</i> = 307	%	<i>n</i> = 191	%
Dual Credit				
No Dual	223	72.6	53	27.8
Dual 1 to 6	79	25.8	71	37.2
Dual 7 to 15	5	1.6	22	11.5
Dual 16 to 24			22	11.5
Dual 25 to 65			23	12.0
Graduation				
Yes	230	74.9	190	99.5
No	77	25.1	1	0.5
Gender				
Male	176	57.3	107	56.0
Female	131	42.7	84	44.0
Ethnicity				
White	89	29.0	55	28.8
Black	196	63.8	130	68.1
Other	22	7.2	6	3.1
FRL				
Yes	261	85.0	162	84.8
No	46	15.0	29	15.2

Additional analysis shows that, of the students who did not meet CCR benchmarks, 75% graduated on time, resulting in 25% not graduating on time. Another descriptive to consider is the percentage of males who did not meet CCR benchmarks. In this sample, 57% of the participants who did not meet CCR were male. Furthermore, 29% were white, and 85% received FRL. In comparison, 56% graduates were male, 29% were white, and 85% received FRL.

Table 16. *RQ2 Variable Descriptive Statistics*

Variable	RQ2			
	M	SD	Min	Max
Dual Credit	4.12	9.90	0	65
Graduation	0.84	0.36	0	1
CCR	0.38	0.49	0	1
Gender	0.43	0.50	0	1
Race	0.77	0.54	0	2
FRL	0.85	0.36	0	1

Additional information regarding the descriptive statistics for RQ2 are found in Table 16. While the range of dual credit hours earned in this sample is also 0 to 65, the mean of the sample is 4.12 credit hours per student.

Inferential Analysis

The binomial logistic regression modeling approach was selected for both research questions to predict the dichotomous dependent variables, Graduation and CCR obtainment in relation to the primary independent variable of interest, dual credit. Tables 3.8 and 3.9 are provided to show the models for both research questions. Two logistic regression outputs are presented for each research question: (a) Model 0 is the null model; and (b) Model 1 is the block enter model, which includes the dependent, independent, as well as student-level, categorical variables. Additionally, in the discussion that follows, the analysis of both research questions includes summaries related to the odds ratios, their significance, and the quality of the models.

Research Question 1: Dual Credit and Graduation

Table 17 displays the relationship of dual credit to graduation. In this study, graduation is a dichotomous dependent variable, with drop out (0) and graduate (1).

For RQ1, odds ratio change was analyzed by comparing the change between the null model (Model 0) and the enter model (Model 1). For the analysis of the logistic regression model, analysis must be conducted to determine a change in the reported factor of $\exp(\beta_1)$. A positive effect of dual credit improving the likelihood of a student graduating would be represented by a number greater than 1, while a negative effect would be less than 1. In addition, the model's overall significance, change in classification, and analysis of variance explained is reported.

Table 17. *Logistic Regression for RQ1 - Graduation*

	Model 0			Model 1		
Variable	B	Odds Ratio Exp(b)	SE	B	Odds Ratio Exp(b)	SE
Dual Credit	0.34	*1.41	0.15	0.96	***2.62	0.27
Gender				0.12	1.12	0.35
FRL				-0.41	0.67	0.49
Race (WvsO)				-1.19	0.31	0.37
<i>n</i> = 188 *Significant at .05 ***Significant at .001	Initial -2 Log Likelihood = 255.15 % correctly classified = 58.5			Initial -2 Log Likelihood = 201.22 % correctly classified = 58.5 Nagelkerke R Square = .336		

The null model provided an initial odds ratio of 1.41 ($p < .05$). However, Model 1, holding all other student demographic variables constant, increases the size of the odds ratio. Model 1 presents an odds ratio of 2.62 ($p < .001$). As such, for each hour of dual credit a student earns, the student is 2.62 times more likely to graduate than those who did not earn dual credit. In this analysis, no additional student level characteristic variables were significant in relation to the dependent variable of graduation on time.

To determine the model of best fit, additional analysis is provided. The significance of Model 1 was found by utilizing the Omnibus Tests of Coefficients. Similar to the F test in multiple regression analysis, the Omnibus Test provides the Chi-square and overall significance for the given model (Field, 2013). Model 1 was found to be statistically significant with the Chi-square value $(4, n = 188) = 53.93$, $p < .001$. This significant finding was consistent with the literature, which has found that dual credit has a positive relationship to high school graduation (Berger et al., 2014; Karp et al., 2007; Struhl & Vargas, 2012). Next, the number of cases correctly predicted was reviewed. The initial null model correctly predicted 58.5% of the cases. Moreover, Model 1 predicted 68.6% of the cases. The final measure of the model of best fit is the proportion of variance explained by the model. Like the adjusted R-squared model used in multiple regression, a pseudo R-squared can be provided to measure the overall strength of the relationship (Stevens, 1999). For RQ1, Model 1's Nagelkerke R Square value of .336 indicating a moderate, positive prediction that explains 34% of the variance for graduates utilizing dual credit as the intervention.

In summary, Model 1 analyzed the number of dual credit hours a student earned, including all student level demographics, to whether the student was likely to graduate on time or not. In this model, the odds ratio increased from 1.41 to 2.62. Next, Model 1's Chi-Square showed a positive prediction of this event occurring again. Finally, Model 1 accurately predicted more cases and explained 34% of the variance within the model.

Research Question 2: Dual Credit and College and Career Readiness

Table 18 matched the continuous variable of dual credit to CCR obtainment as the dichotomous dependent variable, with no obtainment (0) and obtainment (1). As

with RQ1, the output of the logistic regression model for RQ2 was analyzed to determine the significance of the model and determine the odds ratio change between Model 0 and Model 1. For the analysis of the logistic regression model, analysis must be conducted to determine a change in the reported factor of $\exp(\beta_1)$. Again, a number greater than 1 would represent a positive effect of dual credit improving the likelihood of students obtaining their CCR benchmarks. In addition, the model's overall significance, change in classification, and analysis of variance was reported.

Table 18. *Logistic Regression for RQ2 - CCR*

	Model 0			Model 1		
	B	Odds Ratio Exp(b)	SE	B	Odds Ratio Exp(b)	SE
Dual Credit	-0.48	***0.62	0.09	0.38	***1.47	0.05
Gender				-0.30	0.74	0.23
FRL				0.05	1.05	0.33
Race (WvsO)				-0.19	0.83	0.26
<i>n</i> = 498 *Significant at .05 ***Significant at .001	Initial -2 Log Likelihood = 255.15 % correctly classified = 58.5			Initial -2 Log Likelihood = 201.22 % correctly classified = 58.5 Nagelkerke R Square = .336		

The null model provided an initial odds ratio of .62 ($p < .001$). Model 1, holding all other student demographic variables constant, presents an odds ratio of 1.47 ($p < .001$). This increase indicates a stronger likelihood of students meeting CCR benchmarks for each hour earned. As such, dual credit students are 1.47 times more likely to meet CCR benchmarks than those who did not. In this study, no additional student level characteristic variables were significant in relation to the dependent variable of meeting CCR benchmarks.

Additional analysis is provided to explain the model of best fit. First, the overall significance of Model 1 was found by utilizing the Omnibus Tests of Coefficients. Model 1 was found to be statistically significant with the Chi-square value (4, n = 498) = 169.82, $p < .001$. This significant finding was consistent with Kim and Bragg's (2008) research, which found that dual credit has a positive relationship to ACT college readiness benchmarks. Next, the increase of cases correctly predicted was analyzed. The initial null model correctly predicted 61.6% of the cases. Model 1 predicted 76.1% of the cases correctly, indicating a growth in prediction accuracy. The final measure of the model of best fit is the proportion of variance explained by the model. For RQ2, Model 1's Nagelkerke R Square value of .393 explains 39% of the variance for students meeting CCR benchmarks utilizing dual credit as the intervention.

In summary, through analysis, Model 1 showed an increase in the odds ratio from .62 to 1.47. Secondly Model 1's Chi-Square value again predict a positive likelihood of occurring again. Finally, this logistical model could accurately predict more cases and explain 39% of the variance within the model. Additionally, in the discussion that follows, the analysis of both research questions includes summaries related to the odds ratios, their significance, and the quality of the models.

Summary of Findings

Research question one's null hypothesis was that there would be no statistically significant relationship between the number of dual credit hours a student earns and his or her likelihood of graduating on time. According to the results of the logistic regression analysis utilizing the model of best fit, controlling for student level demographics of gender, race, and free or reduced lunch status, dual credit

students are more likely to graduate on time from their non-dual credit peers. Based on analysis, if the continuous dual credit variable increases, each hour of dual credit increases the odds of graduating 2.62 times to that of a non-dual credit student.

For research question one, it is evident that the null hypothesis may be rejected, and the alternative hypothesis accepted. The findings of this study were consistent with the literature reviewed, which has found that dual credit has a positive relationship to high school graduation (Berger et al., 2014; Karp et al., 2007; Struhl & Vargas, 2012). There is a positive and significant relationship between the number of dual credit hours earned and the likelihood of graduating on time.

Research question two's null hypothesis was that there would not be a statistically significant relationship between the number of dual credit hours a student earns and his or her likelihood of obtaining college and career readiness benchmarks. According to the results of the logistic regression analysis, controlling for student level demographics of gender, race, and free or reduced lunch status, dual credit students are more likely to meet CCR benchmarks than their non-dual credit peers. Based on analysis, if the continuous dual credit variable increases, each hour of dual credit increases the odds of meeting CCR benchmarks 1.47 times that of a non-dual credit student.

For research question two, it is evident that the alternative hypothesis can be accepted. The findings of this study were consistent with the literature reviewed, which has found that dual credit has a positive relationship to CCR obtainment (Kim & Bragg, 2008). There is a positive and significant relationship between the number of dual credit hours earned and the likelihood of meeting CCR benchmarks.

Conclusions

Willow Early College High School appears to have adopted a reform model that assists students in meeting graduating on time and college and career readiness benchmarks. This finding is consistent with the few studies correlating dual credit obtainment with either high school graduation or college and career readiness benchmark obtainment. The findings of this study suggest that students are more likely to graduate on time and meet CCR benchmarks if they successfully accrue dual credit hours.

Additionally, this study found a significant and positive relationship between the number of dual credit hours earned and the likelihood of both graduating on time and meeting CCR benchmarks. Specifically, the likelihood of a student graduating on time is 2.62 times that of a student who does not earn dual credit and a student meeting CCR benchmarks is 1.47 times that of a student not earning dual credit. These findings help contribute significant literature for schools with diverse populations to improve students' likelihood of graduating within four years as well as meeting college and career readiness benchmarks.

STUDY THREE: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine if students who have earned a higher number of dual credit hours are graduating from high school on time and meeting their college and career ready (CCR) benchmarks compared to their peers who did not earn dual credit. This research was conducted, in part, due to the nationwide focus of ensuring that more high school students graduate on time and college and career ready. Currently, there is extensive research for the relationship between dual credit and college level outcomes (Karp, et al., 2012; Kim, & Bragg, 2008; Marshall, & Andrews, 2002; Martinez, & Klopott, 2005). However, there has been limited research focusing on high school level outcomes (Kim, & Bragg, 2008). Additionally, research has found that completing rigorous coursework in high school can be beneficial for students underrepresented in postsecondary institutions (Adelman, 1999; Le, & Allen, 2011). As such, dual credit programs are being implemented in schools with a high minority population and where students come from of low social-economic backgrounds.

If students who earn more dual credit hours graduate on time and CCR, then early college programs may represent a possible solution for schools seeking to meet or exceed their graduation and CCR accountability benchmarks. Therefore, this study sought to answer two research questions: RQ1 - Is there a relationship between students' dual

credit hours and high school graduation, while controlling for other variables in the model? RQ2 - Is there a relationship between students' dual credit hours and meeting college or career readiness benchmarks, while controlling for other variables in the model?

This final chapter of the study provides a summary of the findings, research recommendations, implications for the field of educational, policy recommendations, and concluding thoughts.

Summary of Findings

This study utilized a tiered theory design of Social Capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), Human Capital (Becker, 1975), and Academic Capital (St. John, Hu, & Fisher's, 2011) theories. Combined, these theories have identified attributes of "capital" and their relationship on student success. While the early college program at Willow High School provides both the social and human capital to promote student success, this study sought to measure the tiered relationship of academic capital, dual credit specifically, on the outcome variables of graduation and CCR obtainment.

This study relied on three data sets spanning school years from 2008-2009 to 2015-2016. The first data set is the graduation cohort lists produced by WECHS district's research department for each graduating year from 2011-2012, the first early college graduating class, to 2015-2016. The data sets include (a) the necessary demographic data and (b) whether the student met the on-time graduation and CCR benchmarks or not. The second data set, granted from the partnering college, included the longitudinal tracking of every student enrolled in dual credit and the number of credit hours they earned for the same time period. The final data set utilized was WECHS's

administrative tracking data set, including data on the students who have participated in the program and the number of hours they have completed. This data set was used to triangulate the district's and college's data.

The study utilized a quantitative correlational research design; specifically, logistic regression because both graduation and meeting CCR benchmarks are dichotomous outcomes. By utilizing the logistic regression method, the significance of the variable and the odds of graduating high school and meeting CCR benchmarks can be calculated. The following section summarizes the findings.

Research Question 1: Dual Credit and Graduation

The first research question sought to determine if dual credit increased the probability of students graduating high school on time. This study determined that the alternate hypothesis was true – there is a statistically significant difference between students who graduate on time than those who do not, given the number of dual credit hours earned. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Furthermore, this study found that for each hour of dual credit a student takes, he or she is 2.62 times more likely to graduate on time. When controlling for demographic factors in the model, a student who earns six dual credit hours, or two courses, is 16% more likely to graduate than a student who does not earn dual credit. The result for this research question confirms that dual credit hour obtainment is positively associated with a student's likelihood of graduating on time from high school.

Research Question 2: Dual Credit and College and Career Readiness

The second research question sought to determine if dual credit increased the probability of students meeting college and career readiness (CCR) benchmarks. As with

RQ1, this study determined that the alternate hypothesis was true – there is a statistically significant difference between students meeting CCR benchmarks than those who do not, given the number of dual credit hours earned. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Furthermore, this study found that for each hour of dual credit a student takes, he or she is 1.47 times more likely to meet CCR benchmarks. When controlling for demographic factors in the model, a student who earns six dual credit hours, or two courses, is 9% more likely to meet CCR benchmarks than a student who does not earn dual credit. The result of this research question confirms that dual credit hour obtainment is positively associated with a student’s likelihood of meeting college and career readiness benchmarks.

Research Recommendations

Early colleges are touted as having three purposes: (a) motivate students to take more challenging coursework in high school, (b) assist students in the transition to college, and (c) increase college completion rates (Hoffman, 2005; Jobs for the Future, 2008; Karp & Hughes, 2008). For an early college program to be successful, great care must be given to ensure that students are able to participate in a well-designed program (Muñoz, Fischetti, & Prather, 2014). By studying unique program goals, school administrators may determine which characteristics of dual credit coursework would best suit their student’s needs. Future research on specific program goals can provide the educational community with additional evidence of the effect of dual credit on student outcomes. Insight on additional research opportunities are provided.

This study utilized a sample from one high school nested within a large metropolitan community. The choice to study Willow Early College High School came

from the ease of access to known data from an existing dual credit, early college program. In choosing to study one school's implementation of early college, the study's population was limited. While the initial data set included 1,211 subjects, the study's specific subject requirements limited the initial data set to 498 subjects. Future research should include an expanded data set, including dual credit obtainment by student for all schools within a district or across multiple districts and additionally expand the data collection time frame to include future student cohorts. In doing so, future research may present opportunities to produce findings that are generalizable beyond a single school in a large urban school district. This type of research would be beneficial when exploring the graduation and CCR obtainment opportunities between ethnicity, gender, and students on free or reduced lunch.

Another implication for future research is to include additional independent variables to explain more of the variance in the models. These variables may include student's GPA, special education status, identification of first-generation college-going student, participation in CCR prep programs, participation in extracurricular activities, and access to mentorship within the school year, as well as other social and human capital attributes that are known to significantly affect student academic outcomes.

Finally, this study does not inform readers about the effectiveness of the program's implementation over time. While the school of study implemented the early college model in 2009, it undertook many changes over the five years of this study. Different courses have been added and removed over the years. Additionally, students who are participating in the "On Campus Experience," a feature not available for the first three years of the program, now have access to all courses offered at the partnering

college. Also, over the five years, additional support staff have been assigned to assist in the program implementation. Future research could include studying one cohort compared to another and identify changes in the program for that year that may explain the findings.

Implications for the Field

The results of this analysis provide practitioners, especially those in priority school settings, empirically grounded evidence to promote growth in school accountability models. With graduation and college readiness rates persisting into the most recent draft of the new 2018-2019 accountability model for WECHS's state, school administrators may want to look at dual credit as a means of improving individual student and school level performance within the accountability categories of graduation and college and career readiness. The continuance of graduation and college and career readiness in the redesigned state accountability model only reaffirms the national focus on preparation for student persistence to college. Suggestions are provided for consideration to effectively implement an enhanced dual credit program.

Given the unique demographics of the urban school that served as the context for this study, consideration must be given by principals attempting to develop a dual credit, early college program in a more evenly distributed demographic setting. The WECH's state already requires school level decision making councils to enact a school level policy that clearly states how students are assigned to and enrolled in advance coursework, including dual credit (Coldiron, 2014). While this study found that dual credit was positively associated with graduating on time and meeting CCR benchmarks, no significant relationships were found between ethnicity and graduation or ethnicity and

CCR obtainment. This may be in part due to the imbalance of ethnic representation within this study. However, it must be recognized that race alone does not effect a student's likelihood of achieving graduation or CCR status through their participation in dual credit coursework. As such, care must be given when developing programs within other local high schools to ensure equal access to dual credit options. School administrators must consult with their decision-making councils to determine the most relevant aspects of early college that can be systematically implemented within their building to ensure individual student success beyond enrollment.

Orr (1998) states that high schools and colleges must work together to ensure the needed skills and knowledge required for collegiate coursework is conveyed to the students to assist him or her in achieving his or her educational goal. At the high school, in pre-dual credit courses, an expectation would be to help students experience as many collegiate academic tasks and access as many collegiate resources to help the student acclimate to collegiate academic expectations. The early college model of delivering dual credit may provide guidance to school administrators when designing dual credit opportunities for all students.

With guidance from the decision-making council, it is the school's responsibility to provide all students with equal access to challenging coursework. One way of providing this opportunity for students is to offer dual credit at all grade levels. To best serve the needs of the students, Reid and Moore (2008) present increasing academic rigor and relevance as a method for improving student outcomes. Rigorous academic preparation, as well as an academic support network, such as social capital, is crucial for students (Martinez & Klopott, 2005). However, in addition to rigorous academic

coursework and access to social capital, students must be given opportunities to accelerate learning in meaningful experiences relevant to future educational and career goals. By gaining both high school and college credit simultaneously, students will be challenged to perform at a collegiate level while working toward a degree of their interest.

Muñoz et al. (2014) clarifies that the success of early college is partially defined by the school's ability to create support structures to improve success in college-bearing courses. A suggested method to improve non-cognitive skills that promote student success is (a) to provide a structured time in students' daily and weekly schedules so all students can get the individualized supports they need; (b) gradually increase student independence, while making sure that students are anchored to supports they can access easily; (c) develop projects with increasingly challenging aspects, while providing the scaffolding students need to step up their learning over time; and (d) teach students explicit skills for navigating college experiences (Le & Allen, 2011). As such, it is imperative that schools create systems to develop human capital skill sets for volunteer mentors, school based dual credit teachers, school based counselors, and facilitators of the dual credit programing. In doing so, these support staff members can develop and implement wrap around supports for individual students, leading to individual academic success.

Policy Recommendations

Dual-credit programs have become an important policy tool by which state policymakers have adopted to promote future collegiate success (Andrews, 2001). This study presents findings that warrant a review of current dual credit policy at the state,

collegiate, and local educational agency level. As evidenced by this study, dual credit provides a significant increase in a student's success for graduating on time and meeting CCR benchmarks. Both educators and policymakers should be encouraged to explore initiatives that blend high school with more intensive college coursework opportunities. As such, policymakers can take additional action to support the efforts of the current governor and assist all students in earning more than the two-course maximum current policy provides.

State Level: Improve Dual Credit Data Tracking and Management

Currently, the WECHS's state is lacking a unified data tracking system to monitor dual credit enrollment and success. This is evident in the request for data for this study. Instead of accessing one data source to collect all needed information, this study relied on three separate data sets. As part of the methods of this study, the three data sets had to be manually combined to create the necessary samples utilized in this study. An initial policy recommendation is to increase the awareness of dual credit for both the educational and political realms within the state. To do this, a unified reporting system must be created to allow all dual credit enrollment and performance data to be collected from all universities which provide dual credit for students. The need for a longitudinal data collection system has been cited in multiple studies (Bragg, 2006; Karp et al., 2004; Karp & Jeong, 2008). By creating the longitudinal data set, additional research is possible. This may lead to a better understanding of the effects of dual credit on the state's academic outcomes.

State Level: Increase Funding for Low SES students

Willow Early College High School's state must create policy that specifically allocates funding to provide the needed dual credit resources to the individual low SES student. Current funding allows for all students to enroll in two courses during either their junior or senior year. While this study warrants the need for additional dual credit opportunities for students, it is essential for policy language to designate state funding to students who come from low SES families who can neither afford the costs for additional tuition nor the ensued costs for textbooks and class supplies. Developing state policy to increase funding should focus on the allocation of these funds to include: (a) access to state awarded financial assistance to allow low SES students the opportunity to pursue more than the initial two classes, (b) all funds utilized for course required textbooks, and (c) to allow funds to be accessed by the individual student to purchase the needed class materials to successfully complete the course.

College Institutional Level: Increase Entry Level Course Offerings

For most institutions, students cannot access dual credit coursework until they have achieved the college readiness benchmarks to enroll. Most colleges require benchmark obtainment through traditional college placement exams, ACT or SAT, or by performance on a local college placement exam. However, the students in this study were given waivers for the academic readiness course prerequisites as part of the early college partnership between WECHS and the local partnering community college. This study presents research to support allowing students, particularly diverse, low SES students, to enroll in credit bearing courses even if they have not met the required benchmarks.

As mentioned before, students are 1.47 times more likely to obtain CCR benchmarks for each hour of dual credit earned. In doing so, students could utilize the knowledge gained in their dual credit courses to help successfully pass their CCR assessments. Furthermore, early college programs across the nation, as with WECHS, develop agreements with local college institutions to provide students entering ninth grade, who have likely not met CCR benchmarks, the opportunity to begin dual credit course work. In doing so, just as with WECHS, students have achieved CCR status before leaving high school. This likelihood is evidenced by Willow's schoolwide CCR growth from 4% in the 2009-2010 school year to 50% in the 2015-2016 school year.

However, it must be acknowledged that colleges should not simply just allow open enrollment for all students. Colleges and high schools must work together to select students for participation in these courses. In addition, students should be required to meet minimum expectations, including a minimum GPA, teacher recommendation, and a signed contract between student, parent, and school that clearly identifies the expectations of participation. Furthermore, the local high school should be required to define and provide the needed support services for each student enrolled in dual credit. These agreements can be documented in Memorandum's of Understanding (MOU) between the local high school and the partnering institution.

Local Educational Agency Level: Increase Community Partnerships

To provide dual credit programs that will benefit all students, local boards of education should be encouraged to explore initiatives that help fund additional dual credit courses beyond the six hours provided by the state. Because the dual credit scholarship of six hours can only be accessed by junior and senior students, local boards of education

should solicit funding and create policy on how these funds can be distributed for all high school students. In doing so, students will have the opportunities to take dual credit in their freshmen and sophomore years, better preparing them to graduate on time as well as increase their likelihood of meeting CCR benchmarks by their senior year.

Conclusion

Dual credit programs are intended to reduce the high school drop-out rate, reduce the need for course remediation at the college level, and encourage more high school students to enter higher education (SREB, 2014). By providing high school students with access to college courses, dual-credit programs contribute to student success in terms of matriculation and persistence (Bailey & Karp, 2003). This study provides empirical evidence that supports the likelihood of students being more likely to graduate high school on time, as well as meet CCR benchmarks before graduating based on the number of dual credit hours obtained. By increasing student participation in dual credit coursework, local high schools can make gains in the two-long-standing high school accountability model components – Graduation and College and Career Readiness. With these outcomes, it is evident why the current governor has set a new bar for all students to participate in and pass two college courses before graduation. By offering student programs designed using the early college principles, students will (a) have regular college students as role models, (b) increase their confidence in completing challenging coursework, and (c) be encouraged to continue their education with the expected outcome of graduating on time and meeting CCR benchmarks.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND JOINT IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

Student success and educational equity remain serious concerns in American public schools. In order to improve student success at both the secondary and postsecondary level, district and school leaders should consider the benefits of the early college high school initiative (ECHSI). By creating and implementing policies and practices that support the social and academic success of students, educators can ensure greater success in high school and in college. In three independent studies focused on early college, we explored the perspectives and lived experiences of early college high school (ECHS) students and graduates, as well as examined quantitative data assessing the relationship between dual credit and high school graduation and college and career readiness (CCR) obtainment. Through this research, we highlighted the significance of the formal alignment early college provides between secondary and postsecondary institutions. Our findings showed the importance of faculty and peer relationships on student success, as well as the importance of the early college tenants on improving students' transition to the traditional postsecondary setting. This combined study also emphasized the need for social emotional learning and non-cognitive skill development, both of which are rooted in the early college model. We asserted that, when these implications are enacted at the policy and practice level, students are successful. In this

section, we summarize our key findings and discuss important implications for policy and practice at the local, state, and national levels.

Synthesis of Key Findings and Implications: A Mixed-Methods Analysis of Early College and its Influence on Student Success and Experiences

While educators strive for student success, the definition of success is often vague and difficult to measure. We discuss findings for each study below along with key implications for policy change at the local and state level. The first study focused on the perspectives and experiences of graduates who lived the ECHS experience. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate how ECHS graduates described their high school experiences, as well as how those experiences contributed to their college readiness and transition to college. The second study sought to fill the void in research literature by adding narrative analysis to the small body of qualitative studies of ECHS programs and students. Combined, the first two studies capitalized on ECHS students' and graduates' lived experiences to inform, improve, and involve these stakeholders in conversation regarding goals, practices, and policy to create better pathways to success. The third study took a quantitative look at the number of dual credit hours students earned to determine if there was a relationship between the number of hours earned and a student's ability to graduate on time and obtain CCR readiness.

We then discuss implications for policy and practice as they relate to early college and its influence on student success and experiences. In the following sections, we analyze how the ECHSI, the early college model, and the implications of practice can increase student success. We believe there must be specific attention paid to core principles of the early college model and the effect they have on the success of minority,

low-income, first-generation college-goers, and English language learners. These populations of students are traditionally under-represented in postsecondary institutions, and our findings suggest the ECHSI is an effective approach to bridge this gap.

Support, Preparedness, Culture, Expectations, and Experience

Findings from the first study showed that early college holds great promise for addressing the issues of improving high school graduation rates and increasing the number of under-represented students that transition to the postsecondary environment. To ensure the persistent success of early college, program evaluation must include the voices of parents, students, teachers, counselors, graduates, and other shareholders as school and district-level administrators develop and refine strategies to meet the needs of students who are traditionally under-represented in college. The needs of these students, like all students, are ever-changing.

Findings from the first study revealed that students who attended WECHS were challenged academically, socially, and emotionally. All informants of this study credited participation in the early college program as contributing to their development of college readiness skills and preparing them to make the transition to the traditional postsecondary setting. Four themes emerged from informant interviews: (a) faculty support, (b) the impact of peer support, (c) early college as a foundation for the college experience, and (d) navigating college culture. These findings are consistent with the SEL conceptual and theoretical frameworks of this study, as well as Conley's (2007) characteristics of college readiness: (a) key cognitive strategies, (b) key academic content, (c) academic behaviors, and (d) contextual skills and awareness.

Informants provided accounts, which indicate that their early college experiences had the most profound effect on academic behaviors (including SEL) and contextual skills and awareness. Meanwhile, informants also indicated that, while they felt prepared for the academic, social, and emotional challenges of college, they struggled the most with key academic content. These struggles were most consistently faced in the content areas of math and science. Students cited struggles in adapting to the rigorous nature of these classes and shared their inability to study effectively for these courses. These struggles point to a greater need for academic supports and better alignment of content standards between high school and college.

Findings from the first study brought about several implications for policy. These implications are as follows: (a) better alignment between secondary and postsecondary systems, (b) formal structures that link high schools to a partner college, (c) expand early college to include more high schools, and (d) re-define college readiness. The first study also found several implications for practice: (a) improved academic rigor, (b) communicate expectations to parents, (c) SEL direct instruction, (d) build faculty-student relationships, and (e) implement cohort model. Each of these implications work together to create a reform model for education that supports the transition to college for all students, especially those not traditionally represented in postsecondary.

In addition to holding implications for policy, this study also calls for additional research on the topic of college readiness, early college, and social emotional learning. Additional research is needed in the areas of (a) curriculum alignment between secondary and postsecondary, (b) expanding college knowledge, (c) defining college readiness, and (d) expanding this study to include additional change agents. This study

calls for additional research in these areas in order to provide a more accurate picture of the early college model and to fill gaps that this study, and existing research, fail to address.

Relationships, Setbacks, Evolution, Multiplicity, and Sacrifice

Narrative inquiry has potential to yield valuable understandings of experiences as students see them. Findings from the second study revealed five themes related to participants' academic and social lived experiences while they were enrolled in the ECHS program. Among these findings, caring relationships emerged essential in both academic and social narratives. If we want typically under-represented students to succeed in collegiate coursework, classrooms must be filled with adults who nurture caring relationships. While many extraneous factors may have played a role, all participants attributed some collegiate achievements to caring relationships. This is consistent with Noddings' (1992) ethics of care theory, which undergirded the second study.

Another emergent theme from study two was overcoming setbacks. Faced with their first online courses and their first taste of collegiate rigor, students often found themselves perplexed about how to overcome these barriers; however, with the caring support of the early college advisor and the supportive structure of the ECHS model in general, participants in this study overcame these temporary setbacks to graduate with an associate's degree and/or the completion of one year of college. Overcoming setbacks aligned with the next theme related to participant academic experience—evolution. Participants in study two evolved from being ECHS students filled with doubt to ECHS students filled with pride of having completed one or two years of college while in the program. This theme echoed throughout the study.

The last two themes that emerged in study two were balancing multiplicities and sacrificing for goals. Participant social experiences were affected by the necessity to balance multiple campus locations (high school and college) while balancing multiple roles (secondary student, postsecondary student, athlete, friend, employee, son, or daughter), as well. Participant social experiences were also affected by sacrificing time with their non-ECHS friends and family due to the demands of the ECHS program. Each participant, however, iterated that the sacrifices were worth the loss of leisure time in order to accomplish their collegiate goals.

Findings from the second study brought about several implications for policy: (a) retain funding for a full-time early college advisor to assist in student success, (b) provide professional development for high school teachers and college professors who work with early college students to foster understanding the dualities of the program, and (c) promote deliberate delivery of programs supportive of developing relationships between caring adults and students based on care theory. The first study also brought about several implications for practice: (a) early exposure to rigorous curriculum to prepare students for collegiate coursework, (b) increase dialogue inside the high school such that all personnel understand the nuances of the early college program, (c) better inform students and parents of expectations and demands of the program, (d) boost awareness of curriculum and academic performance relevance, (e) require completion of online pre-requisite courses before students transition to the college campus, and (f) listen to student voice to understand how to support students in the ECHS program.

Along with implications for policy and practice, this study uncovered a need for additional research on several topics: (a) insights of different populations integral to the

ECHS operation (e.g. college professors who have early college students in their classes), (b) ECHS student outcomes in online classes compared to outcomes in face-to-face classes, (c) campus locations (stand-alone designs, school-within-a-school designs, or hybrid designs) and effects on student success and experiences, (d) reconciling role switching (high school student to college student and vice versa), (e) accelerated learning effects on students academically and socially, and (f) student self-perception and reality of academic performance.

Programs, Rigor, Access, and Support

Findings from the third study showed a significant positive relationship between a student's accrual of dual credit hours and his or her likelihood of both graduating on time and achieving CCR benchmarks. Because both on-time graduation and CCR obtainment are evidence of student success, school administrators can look to implement dual credit coursework as a means of improving individual student and school level performance. However, great care must be given to develop a supportive early college program, rather than simply offering opportunities for students to take dual credit. The need for rigorous academic preparation, as well as an academic support network (i.e. social capital) was a theme found in much of the existing literature discussing the effects of the ECHSI (Le & Allen, 2011; Martinez & Klopott, 2005; Muñoz et al, 2014; Orr, 1998; Reid & Moore, 2008).

The third study's finding of an increased likelihood of a student's graduating on time and achieving CCR benchmarks showed consistent findings with the available literature on the effects of dual credit on student outcomes. As such, this study presents the need to efficiently develop a school model that would support students in achieving

success through dual credit participation. To implement an effective model, four themes were identified: (a) identify the individual school level needs, (b) increase academic expectations in pre-dual credit coursework, (c) improve access to dual credit for all students, and (d) provide individualized support to students.

The findings from the third study also present the need for additional policy to improve a school's ability to effectively implement an early college program. This study makes recommendations at the state, collegiate, and local educational agency level. At the state level, policymakers should mandate the use of a unified data tracking system to monitor dual credit enrollment and success, and they must create policy that specifically allocates funding to provide the needed dual credit resources to the individual low SES student. At the collegiate level, institutions should identify entry level, without prerequisite requirement, courses that high school students can take. These courses can be documented in Memorandum's of Understanding (MOU) between the local high school and the partnering institution. Finally, the local education agency should explore initiatives that blend high school with more intensive college experiences. Therefore, local school boards must set policy on how to resource community partnerships to help students access the mentioned social capital opportunities.

In addition to study three's recommendations for practice and implications for policy, research can be conducted to further identify factors that contribute to dual credit's effect on low SES students. Additional research opportunities include: (a) research on the relationship of dual credit on other program goals, (b) research with an expanded data set, including dual credit obtainment by student for all schools within the Jefferson County Public School's district, (c) research an expanded time frame which

includes future student cohorts, (d) research additional independent variables to assist in identifying variance that can be explained utilizing the same research model, and (e) research that compares one graduation cohort compared to another to identify influential changes in the program year by year.

Implications

While there were multiple implications found within the individual studies, three themes emerged across all studies: alignment of secondary and postsecondary expectations, facilitation of caring relationships among all stakeholders, and inclusion of social and emotional support coupled with non-cognitive skill development.

The first collective implication that emerged across all three independent studies is the need for alignment between secondary and postsecondary systems. The ECHSI provides an opportunity to not only create a seamless transition that strengthens the secondary to postsecondary pipeline, but it also provides an opportunity for collaboration and alignment of academic and SEL standards, as well as collegiate expectations. Informants in study one and study two indicated the need for better alignment of expectations between high school and college, while study three identified a need for the alignment of skills in pre-dual credit course work to allow for better success in credit bearing courses. For students, navigating this misalignment posed challenges and was an added source of stress as they handled the realities of their dual identities as high school and college students.

In order to align secondary and postsecondary educational policy at the national level, policymakers must link high school exit requirements with college entrance expectations (Holowitz, 2011). Colleges must explicitly state what is expected of

incoming freshmen and high schools must ensure graduates meet these expectations. Additional alignment between secondary and postsecondary systems should not only be a merger of cognitive and non-cognitive considerations, but it should also be a merger that offers extracurricular opportunities, as well. For example, part of helping students navigate college resources could be partnering with the college to create opportunities for ECHS students to participate in extracurricular activities on the college campus. ECHS students could become members of the collegiate quick recall team or the art club, for example. By offering this merger of activities, ECHS students could potentially feel more connected to the collegiate side of the partnership, something that study two participants found lacking in their social experiences.

To ensure further alignment between secondary and postsecondary institutions, there is a need to improve access to dual credit, as well as support the alignment of skills in pre-dual credit coursework. To do this, policymakers, colleges, and secondary institutions must identify a measurable set of skill and attributes that students need to ensure successful completion of college. Recent research on college readiness has revealed that traditional indicators such as achievement scores, course-taking, class rank, and high school grade point average (GPA) do not tell a complete story of how ready a student is for college (ACT, 2005; Adelman, 2006; Conley, 2007; Wiley et al., 2010). A more complete story of college readiness requires moving from an assessment-driven definition to one that also includes non-cognitive skills that better reflect the skills needed for 21st century success. This new definition could reduce the number of students in remedial courses and can remove barriers to increasing dual credit enrollment for high school students.

Additionally, a school's decision-making council can set policy to provide all students with equal access to challenging coursework. One way of providing this opportunity for students is to offer dual credit at all grade levels. School administrators can work with partnering institutions to identify which courses would be beneficial to the student at various grade levels. Moreover, study three found that when a student successfully completes 10 credit hours, the student will be 26 times more likely to graduate on time and persist to college, as well as 15 times more likely to achieve CCR readiness and be academically prepared for entrance into college credit bearing courses.

However, simply adding dual credit courses will not ensure successful completion of the course. To best serve the needs of the students, Reid and Moore (2008) present increasing academic rigor and relevance as a method for improving student outcomes. Orr (1998) states that high schools and colleges must work together to ensure that needed skills and knowledge required for collegiate coursework is conveyed to the students to assist them in achieving their educational goals. To achieve this, as well as success in dual credit coursework, students must experience collegiate level academic tasks. Examples of this would include high school teachers developing course syllabi, providing meaningful tasks that include self-directed student learning, and require students to demonstrate their learning through large group presentations and critical writings. Additionally, teachers must utilize and allow students to access collegiate resources to complete assignments. By teaching students how to navigate college resources, they will be more prepared for transition into the postsecondary institution.

Another theme that underscored all three studies was the effect of positive and caring relationships on student success and experiences. This was particularly evident in

the first two studies. Study one found that the power of faculty relationships was the most prominent theme that supported success in early college and as traditional college students. Relationship building falls under Conley's (2007) facet of "college knowledge." According to Conley (2007), relationships with faculty reinforce appropriate ways for students to interact with professors and peers as well as how to participate as a member of an intellectual community. An implication of this study on practice is the need for school-level administrators to emphasize relationship-building as a means of enhancing students' abilities to navigate the academic and social expectations of college. Attention to this area is critical given the reduced quality of relationships with teachers at the high school level (Humphrey & Ainscow, 2006). The ECHSI encourages positive relationships between students and faculty through the cohort model. Informants in this study were members of the early college cohort for one or more years and formed positive bonds with the early college faculty. These bonds allowed students to seek advice, ask for help, and accept critical feedback.

Similar to study one, study two found the power of caring relationships and their effects on participants' academic and social experiences to be the central finding. Rooted in feminism and moral education, ethics of care theory (Noddings, 1992) is founded on four major components: (a) modeling, caring by example; (b) dialoguing, caring by discussing and evaluating as a community; (c) practicing, opportunities for practicing care and reflecting on that practice; and (d) confirming, affirming and encouraging the best in others (Noddings, 1992). An implication from study two on practice is the need for the carer (teacher), the one who initiates and builds connections with students, and the cared-for (student), the one who is responsible to and accepting of such caring, to develop

a rapport in a natural caring environment. When this caring person-to-person relationship is maintained, study two participant narratives revealed positive academic and social experiences. This is in contrast to their less positive experiences in online courses where they had little interaction with professors.

Based on social and human capital theories, study three found that when caring adults (e.g. volunteer mentors, dual credit teachers, counselors, and administrators) create systems to develop human capital skill sets that they can implement wrap around supports, leading to individual academic success. Implications for practice, then, are to involve as many caring adults as possible in creating such supportive programs.

The final implication that emerged across all three studies was the need for direct non-cognitive skill development, such as those discussed by Conley (2007) and those presented in the SEL framework. Study one suggested that implementing direct SEL instruction may be the missing piece in the quest to help underperforming students in underperforming schools reach college readiness. Direct, school-based implementation of SEL leads to positive outcomes for students, including increased social and emotional competence, increased academic attainment, improved behavior, and a reduction in mental health problems (CASEL, 2007; Durlak et al., 2011). However, because the implementation of these SEL interventions requires a significant investment of resources and time, there are implications for policy and practice at the national, district, and school-level. At the national level, policymakers need to ensure SEL standards taught in high school are aligned to collegiate expectations. District-level administrators need to ensure schools have adequate resources for this undertaking, including evidence-based training and support. In addition, school-level administrators need to ensure teachers

have training on SEL implementation and have reassurance that student outcomes are worth their efforts.

Study two likewise suggested the significance of non-cognitive skill development for underperforming students. For example, study two participant journals and interviews highlighted the importance of the school's mentoring program, job shadowing program, and the cohort concept and how each of these components helped students develop perseverance and professional etiquette necessary to be successful. Study two participants also attributed some of their successes to team building activities that acquainted them with how to develop trust. In addition, study two suggested a need for more research about self-perception versus reality of academic performance. Participants in this study admitted to overestimating their eventual academic outcomes at least one or more times during their ECHS journey. Last, study two revealed the non-cognitive skill of adaptability that was necessary when participants role-switched from the high school campus to the college campus. Together, these non-cognitive skills played a vital role in ECHS student successes; however, these skills did not come easily to participants.

In like manner, study three found a need to embed non-cognitive skills into the curriculum to best ensure potential student success. By doing so, students can understand the personal skills needed to be academically successful in collegiate work. Implications for practice are to follow the following suggested method to improve non-cognitive skills that promote student success: (a) provide a structured time in students' daily and weekly schedules so all students can get the individualized supports they need, (b) gradually increase student independence, while making sure that students are anchored to supports they can access easily, (c) develop projects with increasingly challenging aspects, while

providing the scaffolding students need to step up their learning over time, and (d) teach students explicit skills for navigating college experiences (Le & Allen, 2011).

Conclusion

Moving forward, early college high schools may continue to provide school leaders and students an opportunity for increased success. With the implications and policy recommendations provided in this capstone, stakeholders can begin to design and implement school-based plans supported by sound policy to increase educational outcomes. Future research may be conducted to refine and further clarify the needed processes for full implementation of the early college model across all high schools of varying demographics.

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STUDY ONE: APPENDICES

Appendix 1A: Interview One Protocols

Appendix 1B: Interview Two Protocols

Appendix 1C: Interview Three Protocols

STUDY TWO: APPENDICES

Appendix 2A: Demographic Questionnaire

Appendix 2B: Interview Protocol

Appendix 2C: Thematic Analysis Codebook

Appendix 2D: Reflexive Journaling and Memoing Excerpt

APPENDIX 1A INTERVIEW ONE PROTOCOL

Goal: Establish context for participants' experiences.

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewee:

Introduction to the study: I am here to talk with you today regarding the types of support you may or may not have received while participating in the early college initiative. It is important to me to understand how you describe support. As teachers and administrators, we often believe we know a great deal about how best to support young people maneuver through a program like early college or help you transition from high school to college. However, we never take the time to ask you if we are right nor not, we will never know what we could do better. So for the next hour I would like to hear from you regarding how you perceived the support from your teachers, your friends, your family, or perhaps some other group that I may not know.

Background Questions:

1. What is your current classification at your college?
2. How many of your dual credit courses transferred to your college?
3. Have you declared a major? If so, what is it?
4. What is your overall GPA?
5. Did you have to take any remedial courses when you enrolled in college?

Context of Experiences:

6. Talk to me about your past experiences as a student. What kind of student have you historically been? (Students can focus on all K-12 experiences.)
7. What experiences led you to participate in the early college program?
8. Tell me what it means to you to have been an early college student.
9. If I say the word "support," what comes to your mind? Define it for me.
10. Describe for me the types of support you had or did not have available to you as an early college student.

APPENDIX 1B
INTERVIEW TWO PROTOCOL

Goal: Allow participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurs.

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewee:

Details of Experience:

1. Describe for me a day in the life of an early college student at WECHS. (I do not ask for opinions but rather the details of their experiences, upon which their opinions may be built.) Reconstruct for me a day from the time you woke up until the time you went to bed.
2. Can you tell me what it was like having other students from your high school in your college classes with you? (probe: was it helpful or supportive for you? How so?)
3. Talk to me about your relationships with your peers, teachers, and professors.
4. Who were some of the people who helped you learn the college culture?
5. Describe your experience being a high school student and college student at the same time. (Follow-up question) Did you receive the necessary support to manage those two roles simultaneously? If so, describe that support. Or, describe what support you feel was lacking.

Academic Behaviors:

6. Describe your study habits. (Probe: How are they different from how you studied in high school?)
7. How did your early college experience impact your study habits?
8. How did your early college experience impact your time management skills?

APPENDIX 1C
INTERVIEW THREE PROTOCOL

Goal: Encourage participants to reflect on the meaning their experience holds for them.

Contextual Skills:

1. How did your years as an early college student influence your college plans?
2. How prepared do you think you were for your college education once you left WECHS?
3. How would you describe your transition from an early college student to a traditional college student?
4. Describe the level of support you received during your first year taking courses at [University].
5. How did your early college experiences prepare you for interacting with college professors?

Academic Preparedness:

6. How academically prepared do you think you were to continue with your college education after high school?
7. How prepared do you think you were for your college level
 - math class(es)?
 - English class(es)?
 - science class(es)?
 - social science course(es)?
8. Compared to other students in your college courses, do you feel more or less prepared for them?

Reflection:

9. If you could have been on the planning committee for early college, what would you have made sure was in place to help early college students be successful each year of high school?
10. If you were asked to speak with a group of parents and teachers, how would you advise them regarding the support of their early college students?
11. If you had to give advice to new early college students, what would you tell them?
12. How could the early college experience have better prepared you for college?

APPENDIX 2A
Demographic Questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed for you to provide some basic background information about yourself and your experiences at this early college high school. The information will not be shared with anyone else.

Name:

Pseudonym:

Age:

Race:

Gender:

GPA:

College Credit Hours:

Agree to Journaling:

Household Type:

Degree Path AA/AS:

Degree to which you feel Cared For in the ECHS program: (1=not at all; 10=a great deal)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

APPENDIX 2B

Interview Protocol

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

I asked participants to complete the demographic questionnaire before the first interview begins. I began each interview session with an icebreaker, and I provided the interviewee with a bottle of water and peppermints. I briefly reiterated all pertinent protocol as discussed in chapter 3, making sure I had all necessary documents on file.

Interview One: Context

1. Please tell me about yourself in light of your academic and social experiences that led you to become an ECHS student. Think about family, school, friends, neighbors, work, and any events that guided your path to Willow ECHS and becoming a member of the on-campus program.
2. What were your pre-school academic and social experiences like?
3. What were your elementary and middle school academic and social experiences like?
4. How did you come to participate in the program?
5. In what ways were you prepared or not prepared for the transition into the ECHS program?
6. How do you see yourself evolving into a college student, and how are your academic and social experiences different from those before you joined the ECHS program?

7. Thank you for sharing. Before we end our conversation, is there anything that you would like to add that we did not discuss?

Interview Two: Reconstruct

1. Please tell me what you actually do as an ECHS student Monday-Friday.
Also, please include what you do on Saturday and Sunday. Include as many details as possible. According to some mathematicians (Dyson, 2004), we see and hear things one event per second. In an eight-hour day, that is 30,000 events, so feel free to detail as much as you can reconstruct for me.
2. Please tell me about the rigor of your collegiate courses.
3. Please tell me about the relevance of those courses to your program of study.
4. Now please tell me about the relationships you have developed with fellow classmates and/or professors.
5. Please share with me about the level of care that you have felt while in the ECHS program. Think about a time when you have seen a vested stakeholder in the ECHS program (classmate, professor, director of early college, principal of Willow, community volunteer) model true caring.
6. Now please share with me a time when a stakeholder dialogued with you, talked with you about caring about you or caring for you.
7. Next, please tell me about a time when a stakeholder actually practiced caring for you. What did that person do to show he/she cared about you?
8. Please describe a time when a stakeholder confirmed, affirmed, and encouraged you to do your best. What would I see happening? What would be going on?

9. Last, please reconstruct a singular day for me, from the time you wake up to the time you fall asleep. Perhaps choose a singular day from this week, as it would be fresh on your mind. Yesterday, perhaps?
10. Thank you for sharing. Before we end our conversation, is there anything that you would like to add that we did not discuss?

Interview Three: Reflect

1. Given what you have told me about your life before you became an ECHS student in interview one, and given what you have said about your academic and social experiences in interview two, how do you understand the role of ECHS in your life? In other words, what does ECHS mean to you?
2. What are your favorite aspects of ECHS, and would you consider any of these to be supports?
3. What are your least favorite aspects of ECHS, and would you consider any of these to be barriers?
4. If you could change anything about your ECHS experience, what would it be?
5. How would you describe the type of supervision you have experienced while in the ECHS program?
6. Given that you have explored your past and what led you to become a part of the ECHS program, and given that you have explored your present and how past and present factors have interacted to bring you to this point in this interview series, where do you see yourself going in the future? In other words, if you were writing a book about your life, what would the next chapters include?

7. Thank you for sharing. Before we end our conversation, is there anything that you would like to add that we did not discuss?

APPENDIX 2C
Thematic Analysis Codebook

In Vivo First Cycle Coding (raw data, in their own words)

Context Questions

What led you to become an ECHS student

- Friend told me about it
- Ms. L
- Mom excited/supportive
- Dad clueless/proud now
- Kicked out of Brown; parents push me to be successful
- They [EC folks, I assume] told me, “School is what I make of it.” That’s why I joined EC program, to remain successful
- Never intended on becoming an EC student
- Mom’s stipulation
- Generations and generations of poverty
- More financially and academically safe future
- Didn’t have any problems getting in
- Dropped out of college survival course for culinary
- Dropped out of AP courses for culinary
- Dropped out of culinary for EC
- [willing to change direction for better path; to satisfy his mom]
- Speech impediment, but it didn’t stop me
- Wasn’t too social; shy, quiet person naturally
- Plagued by questions
- Harassed, chubby kid, bullied, fat gay kid
- The early years just really pushed me more to my academics because I realized that social life and school wasn’t going to be the best combination for me.
- Strove to do better but didn’t do homework
- Father fat-shamed
- Didn’t like elements of school except one year—5th grade—chess team
- Middle school wasn’t too much better
- Very insecure about being gay chubby kid
- Still didn’t do homework but academics didn’t seem to suffer
- Texted grandma some emoticons or smileys because I was a lot closer with her; she didn’t care or judge me for being fat or being gay.
- Parents divorced 7th grade; forced to attend after-school program and forced to do homework; grades improved; they fed me
- 8th grade all boys school, awful
- “Oh, watch out. That faggot might be looking at you.” But still had some nice times
- Heard about program
- Opportunity
- Talked with parents
- Nervous

- Got accepted
- Pumped, excited, unheard of, pursue it, people I know
- Factors: work, sports
- Once I learned, work it out, schedule/plan, handle all: college, work, sports, friends
- No pre-school
- Always talkative, friendly, always been this way
- Naturally competitive, strive for best, wanted to be top scholar, get noticed, lighten someone's day, natural leader
- Why not? Just try it
- Not prepared: didn't study in HS
- Struggled with HIS 109, made note cards study technique, grade increased
- Evolved as matured, first goofball, pros not having that, prepare for adulthood, HS just came to me

Prepared for the Transition into the ECHS program

- Advanced classes
- Friends/family support/push
- Work hard
- Find some way to follow through

Not Prepared for the Transition into the ECHS program

- Must get materials myself
- Long papers
- Deal with family issues and rigorous college courses
- Workload; always good at multitasking; this was on another level
- Still had high school mentality; Friends helped; they're the reason I didn't fall apart
- I was in human geography freshman year, and I thought that was a lot of preparation [for the EC program], but I was wrong. Even with [dual credit] classes, there's still the transition issue. It's still a big leap. Still twice as much work on college campus

College is for everyone.

Evolving as a Student

- Realized good fit for me; enjoyed challenging classes
- Better student
- Struggled in beginning
- Learned put aside worries and focus on school because that the only thing I have
- When go away to four-year college, will be able to focus more
- I have come a long way with struggles and personal obstacles, but I have gained a lot to become a more mature adult
- See myself growing
- Making mistakes
- Learning from them
- Knowing what to do, what not to do
- EC program has really helped me figure out my balance, see what I can tolerate
- How many courses I can handle, how many courses I can't handle

- I feel comfortable
- I recall a time, maybe last year, downtown campus, just completed five chapters of work I needed to do
- I put my headphones on, blocked out everything, and I just got to work
- Afterwards, I enjoyed free time, went down to the café, had a nice sandwich, socialized with a few friends for maybe 40 minutes.
- Went back to work
- That was a good day
- Rough days, triggered by stress, procrastination, try to knock it all out at once, doesn't work
- To relieve stress, I draw and put music on
- I see myself being very successful
- Being a hard worker
- Because of the trials I've had to go through
- Now I've been working my butt off
- I'm very, very focused
- Prayer; that's helped a lot
- overwhelming
- I can't do it all (HS, college, work, superintendent's council, figure out where to go to college, how to pay for college)
- I was put in so many classes

Reconstruct Questions

Routine

- All get up early
- All sleep little
- All ride many buses
- All same routine once get to community college
- 9:00 to class, or if no class, work on online class
- Probably not the best way to prioritize, but the online teacher won't come yell at me; that's what I'm worried about—getting yelled at
- Then math; I like math; we all like math in the family
- Most days I sleep a lot; really tired; just don't have the energy to do homework
- Stay up until eyes start burning
- If pertinent homework, skip nap and force myself through it

Time Constraints

- no job, no chores, no homework; sleepy all the time; naps
- I just never go out of my way to study
- Spanish test story; everyone was in a different taking Spanish test; Janey and I did the best we could; used google translate; ran out of time; hadn't studied; had a 10:33 class; had to stop and go to class
- Didn't budget time at all
- No internet at home; no printer at home; always print at school
- Bus, get to school about 7:27, we got like three minutes... eat my breakfast at school
- Room 109 where all the other college kids go; we head to college

- Always log onto BlackBoard, check online classes; make sure I'm caught up; make sure I have everything done
- Print out notes; write in notebook
- Bio class, I'm sitting next to two other college students, my two friends, not distracted, feel comfortable
- Bio, one of those funny type of days, some people ...are funny, professor lights your day
- My mom thought I wasn't going to be able to do it; I took sacrifices, came a long way, and I am what I am today
- Get bus, head back to Willow, time for lunch, meet with my friends, the friends I don't have in the EC program, given my little time to talk with them, cause I barely have it [time] cause I'm at the college all the time
- 5-10 minutes of lunch, that doesn't give me that much time to talk with my friends [outside the program]
- We take it [college algebra] at Willow with the math teacher there; everybody in there is in EC program but like one or two students
- [after school] I hurry up [to get to sports practice/games]; doing what we do
- So I don't get home until about 7:45 or 8:00, depending
- Mom already cooks something before; has my plate made and everything in the microwave; she cooks literally every night; we don't eat out that much
- Before I eat, always have to take a shower
- I work on weekends.
- My whole schedule sort of packed at times

Rigor

- Strict on turning in work on time
- Strict on coming to class on time
- I'm usually the last one sitting in the class on test days
- Emailed prof to turn in paper late; said okay; he was new; laid back
- Another time emailed to ask to turn in work late; no
- Sometimes would email asking us if we needed more time
- Did not know definition of rigor
- Most difficult class developmental psych
- Beginning of year, I wanted to drop that class because I had so much load on me already
- Already had five or six classes
- [we did not have any one on the college side to help us help her]
- Dev psych was not typical; other classes work balanced out; not every day; space between classes
- These online classes are always the most rigorous.
- I'm a forgetful person; I just stopped caring because there was no possible way to bring it up [so he thought]
- I'm more motivated to work for people I see because I'm more afraid they're going to yell at me
- I told Annie straight up that I didn't want to be in the [online] class that I eventually failed; I probably could have passed it
- I don't like getting yelled at; it bothers me a lot

He performs so as not to get yelled at. Sad. Doesn't want to get yelled at by mom or teacher.

- With HS classes I really didn't have too much studying to do...I already knew or ... easy to grab a hold onto
- But when it came to college courses, ... that's when the studying part came along
- Difficulty is very high, kind of expecting it so it didn't shock me
- [biology] hardest because in the lab, she would teach you how to do it like one time, but then after that, you were on your own...have to follow instructions
- Tests weren't even really tests
- I'm getting the hang of it [tests], sort of
- Get a hold of some

Online Classes

- Hard because of quizzes
- I forget to do work
- Must rely on email to communicate
- today I learned I do not like online classes. They are not for me. Both my senior and junior years in the program I have struggled in online courses. I personally do not like that you don't really gain any knowledge because you often forget that assignments are due. Also because you don't study because you know you have the opportunity to cheat. Although I have not cheated, I know others who have.
- Not prepared for ONLINE classes; first experience summer semester
 - o No face time, on your own, sometimes forget to do work, job and sports, a little behind, struggle, depend on "you," got to be more steady/more focused

Relevance

- All were relevant
- Psych and anthropology weren't relevant to me; more science; chose arts
- I feel like they are relevant because they are pre-requisites in order to get the degree [she understands this concept]
- Every teenager says this, but I really don't believe that I would need math for my degree; I'm going to do art. I want to be an art therapist.
- I'm just going to do what I need to do
- All of them are fairly relevant
- Biology, I just don't see it having much relevance to my life
- I don't know; we might study an animal that I might one day cook or eat
- Spanish seemed really relevant per cooking/food
- Some kind of political class I took last year
- I'm pursuing Political Science
- Watch current news, bring back 5-10 interesting facts
- "That class was relevant to what I'm trying to pursue in college, and I actually like that class."
- Teacher was helpful cause I'm not really in politics yet 'cause I can't even vote anyway, I wasn't really engaged..., but after taking that class, I actually seen sort of the importance of it
- That class actually helped me see another side of the world

Relationships: Professors

- No, mostly online classes; didn't meet the professor
- [even being from a social media generation, she felt she didn't get acquainted with prof online]
- A couple profs I would stop and say hi, just keep walking
- Yes, summer English 102 class
- Could not finish one final paper due to a loss
- Had me down
- Couldn't focus
- Ended up receiving an incomplete
- Told her circumstances, what I was going through
- She was very comforting to me
- She let me know that everything was going to be okay
- Gave me time to do my work
- Ended up making a B after turning in that paper
- Prof T (gender policy); I didn't even have a class with her; we email all the time
- No real standing relation here [at southwest campus]
- It was the Basic Public Speaking professor
- He was a real nice guy; me and him built a strong relationship
- He told me that I reminded him a little of himself at a time when he was my age; he was a sort of older guy
- He helped me a lot in that class
- He even told me that if I needed anything, like help during any classes...
- Every semester [developed relationships], somebody that I always talk to
- I like to talk and engage with somebody; it's easy for me to bring up a conversation...and just be quick to talking to them and getting to know somebody

Relationship: with friends outside ECHS

- It doesn't help me that this is the second time I've been put in an English class without any friends
- I have a few good ones. They're really helpful because we do a lot of peer review.
- Gained a few; art class; talk and text; don't hang out outside of art class
- Yes, I would say we communicate outside of school, but we always help each other when we do have our classes or sometimes before our classes, meet up, talk about what we need to do before class
- On-campus relationship
- Best friend in one class was 65 years old; pretty great; all are typically older
- I haven't made a lot of friends
- Kind of has really suffered; talk only during practice or lunch; I barely see them; it's just a hi and bye; they understand I'm in the program

Relationships: job shadow folks and mentors

- Feels very cared for
- Their actions show they care
- Mentor got him into culinary for next year; selective admission; different campus; he didn't know what to do; she got him in
- Sacrificing their time to come and talk to us and help us grow and mature as young adults stepping out of high school and having us not have it be a shock of what to expect

Relationships: ECHS College Director

- “College is for everyone” story
- She went out of her way to introduce him to Prof T
- Told me I could achieve it
- Pulled me aside and said “there’s actually people out here that care for you, you just got to see it”
- [she pulled me aside] multiple times

Relationships: ECHS Principal

- Sometimes I would feel like he would sort of forget about us at times; couldn’t participate in little social gatherings [at high school]
- Not with the academics, of course, no, he doesn’t forget about us at all; he knows that we are the top scholars; I appreciate him for that
- I emailed Mr. N [about missing the deadline for prom tickets]. He got back to me about 30 minutes later. ... my heart was racing. Emailed me back on a weekend. Sunday evening where he’s not even involved with school

Support System Overall

- Felt a lot of care from certain people, but also felt really uncared for only because of all the events that were drawn out that semester [because of coming out trans junior year], and it was a really big transition.
- Felt more cared for the second year of the program
- Grandma, lesbian aunts, mom
- Ms. W gave donuts
- Never felt so much love and caring all at once from a whole lot of people for me, and a lot of people just to believe in me; I appreciate that

Academics

- If it’s at least a D, I am not concerned
- I probably should be on top of my grade more

Ethics of Care Theory

Modeling

Dialoguing

Practicing

Confirming, affirming, encouraging

ECHS Teachers

- Ms. W sat down at a table at the college one time. She gave me a piece of paper and asked me to “map out” what I wanted to do with my life.
- Going through a rough time choosing and figuring out what I wanted to do career wise
- She encouraged me by mapping it out; would this make you happy? Encouraged me to go with what my heart told me to do
- Talked to me about her own situation and how she handled them
- Work load had gotten to me
- Grades had dropped
- Felt like I had no support; no one in my corner until I found out you and Ms. W would help me get through what I was going through
- Ms. W made sure I did my work; made sure my mental health was okay

- She would always ask if I'm okay; always motivated me
- "You can get through this. I believe in you."
- Showed me, "Hey, these women are here for me, and they really care about my future."
- I don't know if I should be saying this, but I remember one time I had missed my school bus, and I had class that day, and I had texted Ms. W to let her know that I was going to be late or to hold the bus for me where I was.
- She told me, "I'll be there in two minutes."
- She came and picked me up before...because she was running late as well, so she was like, "I might as well just pick you up on my way."
- That's exactly what she did. She made sure that I did not miss my class that day.
- Annie told him "I know you can do it."
- The number one spot always would be you and Mrs. W, of course; always PUSHED US, all not just one or two students; academic support
- I appreciate that because ... never really had a teacher that pushed you
- Actually be sort of strict on us and make sure we're on our A game; strictness
- When you guys seen my grade dropping... told me I can't go to the second floor of the library [had to stay on first floor with supervision]
- Next thing you know, ...my grade went up to a B, and then it slowly progressed even more
- Ms. W, she's somebody that would care for me. Sit down with me. She always know something's wrong with me. Sometimes I sort of have anxiety. Sit me down and ask me about it. Tell me about her study habits in college and what helped her. I feel like that was a time where she would care for me. You'd see her actually talking with me and being engaged; it actually worked!

Willow ECHS Teachers

- Ms. M. I still contact her through Facebook and sometimes see her outside of school.
- She really helped me with a lot of things emotionally and academically
- She helped me better prepare myself for the program before I entered the program
- She also helped me throughout the program with my English courses
- Major impact in helping me succeed
- Always talk to me about papers and ask me to send them to her
- Asked did I need any help with anything; just to be there if I needed anybody
- Second mother

Classmates

- One of the classmates offered to help me and read over my paper for me and help me add things ... to make it longer
- She was like, "Maybe try this, try that," and I ended up receiving a B on that paper
- Three girlfriends last year helped from falling apart: A, K, and M (but she didn't study much)
- I'm cool with every single one of them; I think they all cool with me; cause also you know being the person that I am; I'm just a cool person

Reflect Questions

Role of ECHS in Life (what it means to you)

- Really important part of my life
- Helped me go further in shorter amount of time
- Where I needed to be faster
- Meant a lot to me personally; helped me achieve my goals I probably would have given up on
- If I had waited until after HS [to go to college], I would have been scared
- Helped prepare me for four-year college
- Impacted my life in a positive way
- I think it's probably the most important thing that's probably happened to me throughout school in general, from kindergarten through high school. I'd honestly say that it's. Yeah, it's the most important thing that's happened.
- This program is a life-changer and definitely prepared and is preparing me for college
- This program has been tough, but I wouldn't change it for the world! I am so beyond blessed. I have learned so much from this program and have gained so much maturity it's unreal.
- Program means a lot to me
- Taught me a lot of things about college
- I know what to do and what not to do
- It's been a lot [implication that she took too many courses, failed]
- I can say that I'll be graduating college with like 50 college credits.
- "Who gets to say that?"[but she failed all but one class spring sem., earned only 40 hours]
- I'm another kid born generations into poverty
- Helpful to me financially
- Appreciate it academically
- Half a degree
- Once I actually got in, it was the most important thing on my mind like in my life so far.
- I could be that person that accomplished it [earns degree]
- I was just so proud of myself; like words can't even explain how proud I was
- I was like a different sort of scholar [high schooler walking with college students]
- I was proud to say [I was a high school student]
- All eyes on me at that moment [when he walked across the stage]
- Once I got that diploma, I was just like it's really happening

Favorite Aspects

- Having you and Ms. W guiding me because I feel like without someone pushing me, I probably would have gave up. I struggled a lot the past two years. I feel like having you two there to push me has helped me a lot and has pushed me to succeed because I've many times wanted to give up. You and Ms. W were there to help me and pick me back up and push me.
- I can be independent
- Do my own thing
- Venture out

- Network
- Meet new people
- Teaches me how to be professional
- Teaching me what I need to do to take care of business when I do go off to college
- Food
 - o Last year at the cafeteria, there were so many foods to eat and try, and I really like that.
 - o I'm usually a very hungry person.
 - o I just love eating; it's one of my coping methods in life, but it's also my favorite hobby.
 - o I appreciate that I've always had access to food and last year when I was crying in the library, Ms. Williams pulled out that package of donuts. I talk about that all the time....it came out very supportive
- Freedom
 - o Just to walk to class by myself
 - o Feel like a real college student
 - o Nice and liberating
 - o Don't have to adhere to a bell; I try to be prompt
- Exposure
- Connections
- Feeling of being on the college campus every day
- Like I'm actually like already grown

Least Favorite Aspects

Regrets (what you would change)

- I can just say instantly—workload—I would most definitely change that.
- Switching campuses; I felt like I didn't really care for the SW campus as much as I did the DT.
- DT was bigger; lot more people; grew connections better down there
- Feel like more of a college student at the DT campus
- Two things
 - o The way I've managed my time
 - o Also not being able to be a HS student and be involved with my friends here at the HS because I feel like I missed out on a lot of senior activities and meetings that I wanted to be a part of
- Only negatives is that I feel like I didn't get to hangout with many seniors and participate in many activities
- The only thing I won't miss is being hungry all day.
- At the beginning of this year, I really, really wanted to graduate high school with my associate's degree. I guess the person who had made my classes crammed me with a lot of classes that were very overwhelming.
- I'm taking six college classes, which is exceeding the amount any student should take at all. [true!]
- It has messed me up.
- Messed up my gpa
- I regret that.

- I wish earlier that I was like, “Hey, I don’t really care for the title. I’m just glad that I have the credits that I do, but it’s too late now. I just wish I could have took at least four classes to not overwhelm myself.”
- [She is right. This should never have happened.]
- “I took way too many. I was given way too many classes, and I can’t take that back.”
- I tried to juggle those classes, and I ended up failing.
- The grades have been raised, but it’s been preventing me from receiving scholarships because of those [failed courses].
- [profoundly honest here]
- So many classes that I’ve been given.
- I would say the transition was difficult.
- You take these dual credit classes, but there was no real transition
- I scraped by doing nothing; holy crap, if you don’t do every assignment, you’re going to fail.
- Didn’t like some classmates
- That failed class on my transcript
- Could’ve done more work last semester
- Scheduling
 - o MW class kids on MW; TR class kids go on TR
- Staying up late nights studying; I expected [classes] going to be tough and hard; didn’t expect to lose so much sleep
- Cuts down on sleep time
- A little tired
- Not as energetic
- Took toll on me at first
- Prohibited me from having a bond with them [high school friends not in EC program] as much

Supervision

- You and Ms. W are the only people that really supervise us during the day
- I feel like you always knew where we were unless we wrote down we were at this place and then lied and went to another place; you found that out quickly
- Y’all did overall a really good job of keeping us supervised and made sure that you knew where we were at all times
- I don’t feel like you were too strict or too lenient.
- It was a good in between because our academics do come first and that’s you and Ms. Williams’ jobs, to make sure we are focused
- At times, we didn’t like the fact that it was so strict, but I feel like that’s how it needed to be
- Last year, supervision wasn’t really pressuring on me, probably because I was doing so good last year
- Last year, supervisors just thought I was okay and that I could handle what I was going through right now; supervision was lenient towards me.
- I want to use the word lenient, because I feel like yes, I get a lot of supervision on the transitions back to Willow, but just during my normal, everyday trip to college, once we get there after nine o’clock, I feel like I’m not very supervised.

- For the most part, more of the responsibility lays on my shoulder than yours [EC teachers]
- I'm expected more so to supervise myself to do what I need to do.

Next Chapter of Life

- Amazing [to walk across college stage]
- Proud of myself. I haven't really felt that way in a long time.
- I couldn't believe it was really happening
- I'm just grateful for the program.
- Remain focused
- Remain a hard worker
- Doing what I need to do to make sure I don't get in this predicament ever again

Gratitude and Appreciation

- Thankful, don't get that many chances like this anywhere
- Happy I chose the program
- Thankful I am to have Ms. W and Ms. M to help me through my first two years of college. They have reminded me to stay on task, keep focus, and turn in all assignments. This program has helped me so much as a person it's unreal.
- The best decision I ever made in my life is turning in the application in for the Early College Program. [wow, love her]
- I want to thank God for this amazing experience I will miss this huge impact on my life.

Proud of Myself

- Today I applied to graduate; mix of emotions but I am proud of myself
- I graduated! I can honestly say I am so incredibly proud of myself
- My parents are so proud of me and today it definitely showed
- So proud of myself and all my accomplishments in the program and throughout my senior year
- Class of 2017! I did it!
- I am so proud of myself, words couldn't even begin to explain.
- My life keeps getting better.
- I'm finally happy.
- As this is my last journal entry, I just want to thank MN, SL, ML, DM, and AW for helping and supporting me along my journey. I would not be here today without them. This program I such a blessing, and I am forever grateful. So thank you to everyone who has ever supported, helped, taught, and pushed me along the way.
- I love Willow Early College!

Merge Multiple Roles

- Wouldn't change any aspects of the program but didn't like strictness at first
- I understand now; campus security, temptations, liability, responsibility
- At first I was like we're college students, we should have a little bit more pull, but I actually understand now. We're not there for the McDonald's or Taco Bell, we're there to learn at get college degrees and stuff
- Got to step up to the plate; not just a walk in the park; got to actually come ready, prepared for this

Final Thoughts

- When asked if HS classes and college classes are the same, “Oh, no. No, no, no. No!”
- I would like to say overall, any teenager or kid who is thinking about joining the EC program, the EC program is a good program, but it can make or break you. [it almost broke her]
- If you are dealing with something, speak up. [use your voice]
- Don’t think you can handle it by yourself because you can’t. You need help.
- “A part of me still wishes that I wasn’t enrolled in so many classes this semester, but I can’t do anything about it now. I’m just praying for the best, when it comes to my gpa.”
- As scared as I was, 2.8 gpa
- Thought I wasn’t going to graduate from HS
- Everything will be okay; positive vibes
- “All I can do is try my best, but that never seems to be enough....I don’t know what to do....”
- Passed MAT 150 enough to pass HS, graduate, not high enough to get college credit
- “I understand that I will not be getting the college credit, but I am just happy to be graduating when my whole family thought I couldn’t do it.”
- “This year was most definitely a lesson learned.”
- After being so liberated from HS just still being in HS with college, it just makes me want to do more of it and less of HS
- I’m very curious about the future, but I don’t want to set it down to stone, only for the fact that if it fails, then I don’t want my expectations to crumble along with it; so I have a very loose outline to how I see things.
- [doesn’t deal well with prospect of failure; doesn’t want to be yelled at]
- Like in 7th grade before if you were to tell me that I would be graduating with an associate’s degree coming out of senior year, I would have told you I wouldn’t have believed it. [now] I feel like anything’s possible. Sometimes had doubts. This has let me overcome fear.
- I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity and interviewing me. I feel like you picking me said a lot, and I just appreciate you guys and what you have done for me. I couldn’t have done it without you guys.

Journal

- Have to miss out on social experiences at times, sometimes hurts me
- Feel as if not a part of the school at times
- Like they forget about us
- Best night of my life: prom
- Have a feeling I will shed a tear: senior walk
- Nervous, different from the other times I’ve felt nervous: val speech
- First time Willow has had something like this: athletic banquet
- Never forgotten academically, but sometimes forgotten socially

Descriptive Coding, Second Cycle (researcher generated)

1. Reason joined
2. Family
3. Friends
4. Prepared for
5. Not prepared for
6. Evolution as college student
7. Gratitude/appreciation
8. Routine
9. Online classes
10. Rigor
11. Relevance
12. Relationships
13. Level of Care/Who Cared
14. Care in Action
15. Academic Experiences
16. Social Experiences
17. Favorite Aspects of
18. Least Favorite Aspects of
19. What I would change/Regrets
20. Supervision
21. Support
22. Best Decision
23. Mixed Emotions
24. Role of Program in Life
25. Transportation
26. Time Restraints
27. Communication
28. Merge Roles
29. Sacrifices/compromises
30. Transition
31. Prioritizing
32. Freedoms
33. Comfortable
34. Independence
35. Doubt/Pride
36. Take more leaps
37. Failures/want to give up
38. Feel grown/mature
39. Work ethic
40. Expectations
41. Independence

Process Coding, Second Cycle

1. Struggling
2. Negotiating
3. Surviving
4. Adapting
5. Evolving
6. Managing the day, waking, eating, showering, dressing, packing, catching bus
7. Deboarding bus, walking to lab, checking email, checking blackboard, prioritizing, doing homework, studying for test, going to class, going to library, boarding bus, eating lunch, going to 6/7 period class, practicing sports, going to work, going home, sleeping
8. Problemizing online classes
9. Saying one thing
10. Telling others
11. Emailing professors
12. Knowing what to do
13. Balancing roles
14. Rejecting
15. Not repeating mistakes
16. Caring
17. Not caring anymore
18. Adapting to the workload
19. Remembering past experiences
20. Finding out
21. Communicating
22. Learning a lot
23. Overcoming setbacks
24. Feeling comfortable
25. Managing transportation

APPENDIX 2D
 Reflexive Journaling and Analytic Memoing Excerpts
 (one participant's select data)

Raw Data	Reflexive Journaling and Analytic Memoing excerpts
<p>The online teacher won't come and yell at me, so I'm fine. That's what I'm worried about.</p> <p>I'm more motivated to work for people I see in person because I'm more afraid that they're going to yell at me or scold me.</p> <p>Some of them [chores] I will do, like dishes, because she [mom] can't complain.</p> <p>I really don't like getting yelled at. It bothers me a lot.</p>	<p>I am noticing that he does not like to be yelled at by anyone—mom, online teacher, face-to-face teacher—anyone.</p> <p>The context of this raw data takes me to the theme of overcoming setbacks. In each case, he brought up why yelling was difficult for him to overcome as a person and as a student.</p> <p>I found it odd that he prioritized doing schoolwork based on who might or might not yell at him. These experiences could go in my discussion of his social experiences in college classes.</p>
<p>I just texted my grandma some emoticons or smileys because I was a lot more closer to her. She didn't judge me for being fat or being gay. She didn't care.</p> <p>I haven't made a lot of friends [in college classes], but they're typically older. Last year, in my History 109 class, my best friend in that class was a 65-year-old woman. I'm not even joking. She was so nice. We always talked. It was pretty great. The closest friend to my age</p>	<p>I have noticed that he is the closest to older female figures. He particularly does not like to be judged.</p>

<p>currently that's not a high school student, she's 24.</p>	
<p>If you stand out, then you're doomed. I try to figure out how much of me I want to express. I never really had those venues at [name of high school] at all. Little did I know the drama to ensue that year, but I just took that leap forward. I've decided that college being so new, so open, so accepting. Sorry. I can finally write about people that I can relate to now because I can research famous queer scientists or these trans playwrights or something like that. Just people I can relate to on a level. I can understand their struggles, and I can understand that even when I have these struggles, that I'm not hopeless because people have done so much good in the past with the same struggles.</p>	<p>I am sensing that this student is finally exploring and feeling comfortable with who he is. The college experience has allowed him to express himself without standing out in a painful way. I did not expect him to cry during the interview. This was a touching moment that revealed to me the beautiful opportunities that an accepting environment can present to a student struggling with gender issues.</p> <p>I think I will talk about this under my theme of balancing multiple roles.</p> <p>Being in the ECHS program allowed him to take more leaps and choose how much of himself to express.</p>
<p>Before I joined the program, I would reach out to teachers, talking about my grades. Coming here and doing Early College, it makes me do it so much more.</p>	<p>Always communicated</p> <p>Much more now</p>
<p>I'm a very hungry person. I just love eating. It's one of my coping methods in life, but it's also my favorite hobbies, to eat.</p> <p>I usually take a nap until six, seven most days. If I'm feeling really bad, I take a nap 'til eight and then I get up and start</p>	<p>This student self-reports that eating is a coping mechanism for him, but I'm not sure he realizes that all this napping is a coping mechanism, too. He is balancing a lot. I think I will talk about this in my theme of balancing multiplicity: multiple roles and multiple campuses.</p>

<p>making dinner. Most of the time I just nap because I'm really tired.</p>	
<p>I'm very curious for the future, but I don't want to set it down to stone, only for the fact that if it fails, then I don't want my expectations to crumble along with it. So I have very loose outline to how I see things.</p>	<p>Scared of failure</p> <p>Put this in a discussion about academic experiences, RQ1</p>
<p>I dropped out all my AP classes for culinary.</p> <p>Culinary is very important to me, and it's what I want to do with my life, so I prioritized it up until May of my sophomore year when the applications came out, and then I put all my effort into becoming an Early College student.</p>	<p>Gave up AP for culinary</p> <p>Gave up culinary for early college</p> <p>Willing to change direction for betterment or just wishy-washy?</p> <p>A lot of switching. Feels he has to compromise, but these choices were his choices. No one forced him, did they? He had no choice of the online classes, though.</p> <p>Talked in circles sometimes</p>
<p>Failed; referrals; if it's at least a D, I'm not concerned; stopped caring; I told [teacher's name] straight up that I didn't want to be in the [online] class that I eventually failed; it was very visible; I didn't want to do it; I was uncomfortable with it.</p>	<p>Lots of negatives</p> <p>Did he purposely fail this class because it was online?</p>
<p>I was in human geography class freshman year, and I thought that was a lot of</p>	<p>Not prepared for workload</p>

<p>preparation, but I was wrong because my ... Even with those classes, there's still the transition issue.</p>	<p>Difficult transition to college rigor</p>
<p>With also the freedom, the lack of forced curriculum on some of the classes, how they don't have to have this certain book or this certain thing has also given just so much more confidence too with my first class being exploring gender.</p>	<p>He loved the freedom of the college curriculum electives. He was beside himself when the college adviser allowed him to take the Gender Studies class. A look at his transcript shows his best grades were in classes where he could explore gender and society.</p>

CURRICULUM VITAS

Sherry L. Lawrence

I am broadly interested in improving student success after high school through the development of a P-16 system. Particular areas of interest include the academic achievement of marginalized students, collegiate retention and success, the Early College High School Initiative, and social emotional learning.

EDUCATION

University of Louisville

Doctor of Education, Educational Leadership, Evaluation, and Organizational Development 2017

Dissertation: *Blending High School and College: Social Emotional Support and the Perceived Impact on the College Transition*

Indiana University Southeast

Educational Leadership Program 2012

Spalding University

Master of Art in Teaching 2007

Concentration: Secondary Education

Transylvania University

Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration 2004

Concentration: Business Management

Minors: Communication and Sociology

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Western High School

Teacher, English Department Chair 2008 -2010

Served as an English teacher; Chair of the English department, Writing Cluster Lead; Collaborative team (PLC) lead; Member of the Instructional Leadership Team; designed professional development geared toward school-wide writing initiatives; analyzed data and assisted new teachers with curriculum and instruction; assisted in the implementation of new curriculum for English.

Western High School

College Access Resource Teacher 2010 - 2013

Developed an advisory program at Western; designed structures and supports to facilitate student mastery of academic and social, emotional standards; collaborated and designed structures to improve teacher self-efficacy with respect to content-based knowledge for teaching; improved teachers' instructional practices with respect to engagement and challenge level in core content instructional time; increased teacher knowledge and attention to unique student needs and support during College Access Time.

RELATED EXPERIENCE

Western High School

Assistant Principal

2013 - Present

Coordinates and supervises instructional programs; supervises discipline; evaluates school programming and assists with job performance evaluations; maintains positive public relations/communications; works collaboratively with Career and Technical Education (CTE) PLC; coordinates all state and district testing/ accountability; oversees extracurricular activities as assigned by the principal; counsels 12th grade students in college and career planning; mentors students as they prepare to transition from high school to college; worked in conjunction with administration from Western High School and Jefferson Community and Technical College to foster growth of Early College Initiative; created wrap-around services centered on heightening college readiness.

CERTIFICATIONS

Professional Certificate for Teaching English, Grades 8-12, Commonwealth of Kentucky
(Kentucky Education Profession Standards Board)

Expires: 2023

Professional Certificate for Instructional Leadership - Principal, All Grades, Level 2
(Kentucky Education Professional Standards Board)

Expires: 2023

HONORS

Outstanding Masters Candidate for Leadership, Service, and Scholarship Awards
Louisville, KY

2007

SOFTWARE SKILLS

Word Processing Microsoft Word, Excel, Power Point

Video Editing Adobe Premiere 7.0

Graphics Adobe Photoshop

EDUCATION

Ed.D. College of Education and Human Development **2017**

Educational Leadership, Evaluation, and Organizational Development
University of Louisville, Louisville, KY

Dissertation Title: A Narrative Inquiry into Academic and Social Experiences of Four
Early College High School Students

+ 53 hours beyond Master of Science **1989**

College of Arts & Sciences, Department of English
College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences
University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN

Master of Science in Curriculum and Instruction **1982**

College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences
University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN

Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education **1979**

College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences
Middle School Concentration
University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN

EXPERIENCE

Western Early College High School **2014-present**

College Access Resource Teacher

Screened and interviewed applicants for the early college high school program. Conducted summer bridge camp and Friday seminars. Managed academic and social expectations of students. Served as liaison among high school, community college, students, and parents. Attended annual Middle College National Consortium. Planned interventions for struggling students. Facilitated support from community members. Monitored student attendance and transportation. Advised students on course selection and completion of the academic program plan. Provided assistance to students in navigating BlackBoard and other course software/hardware. Communicated with college professors per FERPA agreement. Tracked college textbook inventory. Tutored students on study skills, time management, reading, and writing. Acquainted students with college resources and support services. Organized field trips to area universities and other educational sites of interest. Led students through self-reflection and self-advocacy exercises. Helped students compose professional emails to professors. Developed rapport and trust among students for a positive learning environment. Orchestrated membership proceedings for Phi Theta Kappa. Coordinated high school/college calendars, job shadowing, and mentoring programs. Prompted students through the college application process. Wrote letters of recommendation for college admission and scholarships.

William Blount High School **1990-2013**

Maryville, TN

Served as English Department Chair (1996-2010) and as Dual Enrollment Professor (1993-2010). Taught English, Journalism, and AP Literature. Conducted professional development activities. Mentored and placed student teachers. Sat on English Education Admission Board at the University of Tennessee. Oversaw department progress on data analysis. Designed and implemented a school-wide writing strategy. Aligned department curriculum with district and state curriculum. Produced yearbook, newspaper, and literary magazine. Created elective courses. Led travel abroad program. Presented at Tennessee High School Press Assoc. and Columbia Scholastic Press Assoc. meetings. Co-sponsored regional academic festival. Spearheaded district textbook adoptions. Wrote and compiled department curriculum maps and program of studies. Collaborated with other department

chairs to create the school's master schedule. Managed department budget and purchased supplies. Consulted on sensitive curricular issues, such as banned books.

Pellissippi State Community College **1987-2013**
Maryville, TN **(occasional semesters; see below)**
Served as Adjunct Faculty English 1010 Professor (fall 2013, fall 2012, summer 2012, spring 2011, fall 2011, fall 2001) and Developmental Study Skills Professor (spring 1987).

Montvale Elementary School **1987-1990**
Maryville, TN
Served as 7th and 8th grade Language Arts teacher, departmentalized. Fulfilled role of lead teacher for middle school grades. Co-led school musical. Conducted after-school tutoring program.

Eagleton Middle School **1980-1987**
Maryville, TN
Served as 6th grade Language Arts teacher, departmentalized.

Alnwick Elementary School **1979-1980**
Maryville, TN
Served as 4th grade teacher, self-contained classroom.

HONORS

- 2016 Golden Key International Honour Society membership
- 2012 Outstanding Teaching of the Humanities in Tennessee
- 1998 Speaker at Columbia University, "Managing Magazine Madness"
- 1998 Who's Who Among America's Teachers
- 1990 Who's Who in American Education
- 1990 Tennessee Governor's Academy for Teachers of Writing
- 1989 Tennessee Career Ladder Level III
- 1989 Teacher of the Year, Montvale Elementary
- 1979 Phi Beta Kappa Society invitation

PUBLICATIONS

- *The Torchbearer*, 2008, "Rocky Top Round the World"
Featured on page 3 in an article recounting hearing "Rocky Top" while atop the Eiffel Tower with a group of William Blount High School students studying abroad.
- "getconnected" campaign
Featured in the advertising campaign "Pellissippi State connects high school students to college."
- *EF Educational Tours*, 2003, international travel for teachers and students
Featured on page 6 with a pulled quote about positive travel experiences with the company.
- *Magazine Fundamentals*, 4th ed., Columbia University, NYC, 2002
Featured on pages 38, 48, and 65 with pulled quotes from an article written for the Columbia Scholastic Press Association.
- *Student Press Review*, Jan./Feb., 1999, "To accept, reject or rewrite: That is the question

(for literary magazine staffs, that is)" Featured on magazine cover; article on page 12.

Michael Newman

EDUCATION

- (2013-2017) The University of Louisville**
Ed.D. College of Education and Human Development
- (2004-2006) The University of Tennessee at Knoxville**
M.S. Administration Supervision and Policy Studies
- (1995-1999) The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga**
B. S. Secondary Education

CERTIFICATIONS

- TN & KY – K-12 Principal Certificate (KY Professional Certificate For Instructional Leadership - Principal, All Grades, Level 2)
- TN & KY – Professional Certificate For Teaching English, Grades 8-12
- TN & KY – Professional Certificate For Middle Grades English And Communications, Grades 5-9

WORK EXPERIENCE

- Western High School** **2012-present**
Principal
 - Supervisor of all employees
 - Early College Program Development
 - Curriculum Leadership
- Western High School** **2007-2012**
Assistant Principal
 - Principal Intern
 - Early College Program Director
 - Curriculum Leadership (English Department Supervisor)
 - Master Scheduler
 - District Trimester Scheduling Design Team Member
 - District PLC Design Team Member
 - LEAD Report Chairperson
 - Buildings and Grounds Coordinator
 - Trimester Symposium Presenter
- Western High School** **2006-2007**
12th Grade English Teacher
 - Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) Member
 - Writing Cluster Leader
 - KTIP Mentoring Teacher
 - Participant in JCPS/UofL Writing Project Course
 - Head Girls Golf Coach
- William Blount High School** **2004-2006**
9th & 12th Grade English Teacher
 - Administrative Intern (500+ Hours)
 - Interim Assistant Principal (25+ Days)
 - School Improvement Team Member
 - 9th Grade Academy Planning Committee (Central Office)
 - Schedule Restructuring Committee (Central Office)
 - Writing / Reading Committee Chair
- WORK EXPERIENCE (Continued)**
- Austin East Academy High School** **2003**
9th & 10th Grade English Teacher

- Assistant Girls Soccer Coach
- Tyner Academy High School** **2000-2003**
9th, 10th, & 11th Grade English Teacher
- Prom Coordinator
 - Chairman of The Carnegie Portfolio Committee
 - Coach of a Critical Friends Group
 - Member of The Carnegie Grant Proposal Team (received)
 - Student Government Association Advisor
 - Head Boys Soccer Coach
- Chattanooga State Technical Community College** **2000**
Remedial English Teacher
- *Basic Composition*
 - *Essay Structure*
 - *Editing Skills*

CONTINUING EDUCATION

- (2017-current) UofL Education Superintendent Certification Program
- (2015) Kentucky Chamber of Commerce – Institute for Learning Cohort
- (2014) Middle College National Consortium Summer Leadership Conference
- (2013) Middle College National Consortium Principal Leadership Conference
- (2012) Middle College National Consortium Principal Leadership Conference
- (2011) ACT Education Summit – **Presenter** “*College Ready..... Now!*”
- (2010-2011) Woodrow Wilson Early College Leadership Convenings
- (2010) ACT Education Summit – **Presenter** “*The Electrifying Journey of Early College*”
- (2009) SACS Audit Team Member
- (2007) ASCD Summer Conference
- (2006) University of Louisville/JCPS Writing Project Initiative
- (2004-2006) University of Tennessee Graduate Studies
- (2004 & 2005) SACS School Improvement Conference
- (2004) High Schools That Work Conference
- (2002) NCTE National Convention
- (2000 & 2001) CES Fall Forum

INTERESTS & ACTIVITIES

- Jefferson County Administrators Association
- Jefferson County Assistant Principal Association
- Louisville Landsharks Multisport Club
- Kappa Delta Pi: Educational Fraternity
- Lambda Chi Alpha Fraternity
- SCUBA Instruction
- 2 Time Ironman Finisher
- Triathlon Training