What is a liberal arts school? This is one question that I never thought twice about when I decided to attend Manchester College. I chose Manchester because it had a small student body with small class sizes. I wanted to be recognized by my professors when I passed them on campus and be known by a name and not a number. However, I never thought about the fact that it was a liberal arts school. Little did I know that many of my connections courses, which were part of my liberal arts education, would turn out to be the most enlightening.

There were many times when I was sitting in western civilization, cultural anthropology, and religions and war when I could not figure out why I had to take these classes; they seemed so unrelated to my content area. So what if Alexander the Great was conquering all of Europe or what was the significance of the criteria of a just war? I wanted to learn more about Monet and Picasso and try my hand at outdoor sketching and sculpting, not in a class trying to focus my attention on a discussion about vegetarianism in my ethical decision making course.

Only after completing the majority of my general education courses and focusing on my content area did I realize how many of my previous liberal arts courses were overlapping with my current content area courses. The first unit in my art history course began with art created in Mesopotamia, which I had never heard about until western civilization. Who would have thought that I would encounter the Tigris and Euphrates
Rivers once again or be forced to remember what a ziggurat was? In religions and war we spent a lot of time trying to understand the Islamic faith and their beliefs. Now I not only knew what the purpose of a mosque was and what it was used for, but I learned how they were built and decorated.

All of the courses I have taken over the span of my time at Manchester College have forced me to make connections between everything. As a teacher, I feel that I will be more motivated to try and connect what I teach and the projects I will have my students do with what is currently happening or what has happened in the past. For example, if they are learning about the Renaissance in a history class I could give a lesson on art of the Renaissance and have them study various paintings, sculptures, and architectural styles from that time period. If my students can see a connection between what they are learning in other subject areas, they may see the relevance of learning about things that they may otherwise feel is a waste of time.

Through many of my experiences and courses I was forced to confront diversity face first. I had never been around many people with different backgrounds and cultures until I came to Manchester College. Not only are there many international students studying at Manchester, but they also integrate diversity into the courses. In cultural anthropology, art history, ethical decision making, and religions and war, I learned about multiple cultures and the customs they have. After looking at numerous examples, it became clear that many cultures have the same beliefs and ideals, we only show them in different ways.

Since I am an education major I was required to attend a celebrating diversity workshop that opened my eyes to ways that people are diverse other than ethnicity or
race. The students and faculty who attended were able to interact with people of various sexual orientations, family structures, and physical characteristics. It is always an eye opening experience when you are given the chance to hear for yourself how other people feel. Some people were brave enough to discuss openly what it was like to be looked down upon because she was the only openly homosexual female in her high school. Others talked about what it was like to be plagued with jokes about being a blonde, the fat kid, or the underprivileged kid that did not have the name brand clothes to wear. This really opened my eyes to the fact that I will be teaching students that deal with these issues on a daily basis and I need to be aware of what is happening so that I can help them.

Religion is another topic that can cause problems between people. However, the Christian faith course that I took not only taught me things about Christianity, but compared it to other religions and how their beliefs were similar and different. I discovered that even though many religions have different beliefs and understandings of life and death, many of them overlap and are break off groups of other religions. When I encounter students and other colleagues or even acquaintances of different faiths, I will have a better understanding of who they are based on the fact that I have a better understanding of what I believe and be able to realize that we are not as different as some may think.

I have come to believe that if we all were to take a closer look at diverse populations we would see that we all are striving for the same goals. If this became obvious to everyone then we may all feel more inclined to work together to improve current circumstances. However, I am not so naive that I believe that this is going to
happen any time soon if at all. However, I do believe that the more people that are more informed about people’s differences and are educated about why they believe the things they do then the world would be better off. People would no longer have reason to judge others for something they view as odd or immoral, because they would understand the reasoning behind others actions.

I have come to realize that my liberal arts background will also help me in job in ways beyond the knowledge I gained. When I have a colleague or a student from a different background I will hopefully be more informed about what there beliefs and if I am not then I will be intrigued to learn more about them. I view people who have different beliefs and backgrounds than myself as a chance to learn more about the world and find similarities between all of us.

My time at Manchester College has opened my eyes to look at the world in an entirely new way. To top it all off, who would have guessed that I would be able to identify the composers of various pieces of elevator music thanks to my experiencing the arts course. Even though there have been times along the way that I have drug my feet and grumbled about having to take various courses, I am glad that I did. They have helped to shape my present beliefs, the type of person I am today, and ultimately the teacher I will be.