

**The Educative Process as a Contributor to Self-Efficacy
In Adult Education Graduate Students**

by

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**A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
Department of Adult Education,
Community Development, Counselling Psychology
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the
University of Toronto**

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THE EDUCATIVE PROCESS AS A CONTRIBUTOR TO SELF-EFFICACY IN ADULT EDUCATION GRADUATE STUDENTS

Doctor of Education, 2000

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ABSTRACT

Self-Efficacy is defined as “personal judgments about one’s ability to perform a given task” (Lent, Gore & Brown, 1997, p. 307). The present research investigated whether the participants perceived that there was a relationship between their own self-efficacy to complete graduate degrees in education, and the educative process they must undertake to complete the degrees. The research explored the effect of participants’ self-beliefs on degree attainment. Further, the research studied the broader implication of transformative change attributed by the participants to the educative process. Previous research has indicated that self-beliefs influence learning and outcomes, and the review of the literature provided the framework for the research.

Two groups of students participated in this study - one of MA/MEd students and another of EdD/PhD students. Data collection for each group was identical and involved three meetings and maintenance of a journal.

The data were analyzed using coding methodologies as described in Miles and Huberman (1987). Analysis of the data generated by the participants in this study

indicated that the four criteria identified by Betz and Hackett (1981) to change self-efficacy - performance accomplishments, vicarious learning, emotional arousal and verbal persuasion - are present. The participants in this study believed that a change in self-efficacy occurred while obtaining their graduate degrees, attributed by them to the educative process. Further, these changes in self-efficacy and the more global self-perceptions on ability were believed by the participants to have wider application than degree attainment, with the participants in the study also attributing increased self-assurance in their everyday lives to the educative process.

The present research concurs with similar research done in other fields and demonstrates that certain teaching methodologies enhance performance. The research is significant in that it demonstrates that factors that can increase self-efficacy are not necessarily part of the formal process of learning and may come from unexpected sources, such as administrative statistics, departmental paperwork completed by the students, or even the freedom to use the “staff” kitchen. By comparing two groups of students at different levels, the results are further significant, in that they suggest that it is the environment and not the actual attainment of a previous graduate degree that largely influences self-efficacy, since no major differences in the two groups were identified.

The data suggested implications for further research, including a longitudinal self-efficacy study from entry to completion of graduate degrees.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As a result of my own educative process, I truly have changed as a person. A simple “Thank You” notation in a thesis to the people who helped to change my life seems inadequate, but it is a start.

Diane Higgins, for her generous emotional and financial support throughout this whole process.

My other family members, who contributed to this project in a variety of ways.

My thesis supervisor, Marilyn Laiken, whose constant encouragement and support kept me sane.

My committee members, Peter Gamlin and Budd Hall, who provided alternative ways of looking at the work and made it a tighter project.

The participants, Noah, Anne, Almira, Hillary, Kordell, Brianna, and Teri, who worked with me on this project.

J. Norris Ormston and his wife Rosina, who have been understanding and flexible employers from the first day.

The Doctors Hospital, a great hospital and employer, now closed, where the supportive and encouraging staff always let me do homework on company time.

My great friends, Lyle, Fred, Jim and Jeff, who supported me and encouraged me always.

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CHAPTER 1

“Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.”

Attributed to John Dewey

INTRODUCTION

The development of this thesis began many years ago when I was a child. In my family, there was much pressure to succeed academically. Unfortunately the methodologies utilized, including comparisons with siblings, verbal and physical abuse, became internalized beliefs that had an impact on most other areas of my life. The origins for these pervasive negative esteem beliefs are simple.

While growing up, my treatment at home by immediate family and relatives (with no understanding on my part as to why I was being treated this way), led to some deep-rooted and pervasive negative self-efficacy beliefs. These affected activities such as performing well at school, and caused general self-esteem problems, including feeling unlovable and worthless. These issues, combined with being an overweight and isolated child, contributed to pervasive negative feelings about myself.

I later found out the reason for my treatment. There was a family secret that I was not told about until I was an adult. The family believed they were protecting me and acting out of love in not telling me.

Shortly after the truth was revealed to me, in a conscious decision, which in hindsight was only a superficial solution, I changed my first and last name. In 1984, with my new identity, I moved to Toronto from the West.

In 1985 I enrolled at Ryerson Polytechnic University and studied fashion. In my final year I researched and designed a clothing line for older adults. My research into this segment of the population identified that clothing specifically designed for this market would be difficult to sell. The reason for this was that clothing that was perceived as being for older adults would not be accepted by older adults, as they didn't identify themselves as being "old". They believed they didn't need clothing that had easy openings or a relaxed fit. They felt they had the ability to dress "young" and use regular closures such as buttons and zippers, even if they physically were unable to use these fasteners.

I found this denial of physical abilities and perceived judgment of youthfulness intriguing, and decided I wanted to investigate other areas that related to the Self. This would include an exploration of how beliefs can be changed through education, since "in interpreting our experiences, we engage the experience with our intellect and/or our emotions; this engagement may happen simultaneously with the experience or at any time afterwards. This is the point at which the process diverges into either growth-inhibiting or growth-enhancing trajectories" (Merriam, Mott, & Lee, 1996, p. 13).

In 1992 I started my studies in education, with the above goal in mind, exploring the concepts of self-esteem, self-perception, self-actualization and ability theories, particularly as they apply to the learning process. My interest in this field is a direct result of my initial explorations at Ryerson and my own lack of a healthy self-concept since

childhood.

My personal history has provided the raw data for much of my scholarly production here. Instead of researching and exploring concepts related to the Self in an abstract way which only concerned other people, I have also turned inward. My goal of overcoming my past gave me the motivation to break the negative patterns, continue in school and prove to myself what my capabilities are. The educative process has increased my self-efficacy beliefs to those of confidence and capability.

I believe the educational process is the catalyst that changed my negative self-beliefs to positive ones. Change like this involves “some combination of the following four factors: (a) support networks; (b) recognition of a sense of personal agency (ie. the ability to take control) and resulting action; (c) the passage of time; and (d) shifting focus from the specific experience to a larger perspective” (Merriam, Mott, & Lee, 1996, p. 16).

The present research builds upon my earlier work with graduate students and how they perceived themselves and their own abilities in relation to their peers. In this earlier foray I realized, on a “person as researcher” level, that I was not alone and that others had self-efficacy beliefs that have had an impact on their own academic performance, and their self-perceptions of academic performance in relation to their peers.

My earlier research specifically examined the ability beliefs and self-perceptions of academic performance in graduate students at an Ontario educational institution, and

the influence of those beliefs on scholastic achievement. Prime determinants influencing motivation and esteem were past academic performance and family background. I investigated the role of family upbringing in developing/hindering a positive sense of self, and scrutinized pivotal incidents in the scholastic past of each student and their effect on the students participating in the study.

To accomplish that task, eight Adult Education students were each interviewed twice, one-to-one. No specific criteria of family background or personal history was used as a determinant for inclusion in the study, since I wanted a random sampling of participants. Open-ended questions were asked about family culture, school experiences, feelings about academic performance, and perceptions of academic performance relative to other students.

The findings indicated that family culture and past scholastic experience influence self-esteem and had an impact on the graduate students, to the extent that their desire to obtain an MEd degree was largely motivated by these factors. My research indicated that, for the first time for these students, the real grades achieved at graduate school by the participants corresponded with their self-perceptions of academic abilities.

My earlier research explored the concept of self-esteem experienced by students in the academic environment at the same institution as the present study. That earlier study was focused solely on the participants' internalized beliefs while undertaking the degree process.

The present study explores the participants' judgment to perform a given task; i.e., degree completion. Degree completion is the task that they act upon or strive to complete, but the educative process also acts upon them.

THE EDUCATIVE PROCESS

For the purpose of the present research, the "educative process" is broadly defined as the process of obtaining a graduate degree in education at the researched institution. This could include formal course work, interaction between faculty and students, socialization with other students, or any of the administrative details that are required during the process of degree attainment. The phrase was deliberately left broad and open in order that the participants would formulate a definition, based on their experiences and their beliefs, and not be bound by the relevant literature in this field. Their interpretations are outlined in Chapter 5.

The educative process is interpreted by each student based on his or her own life history. In doing so, the participants at some level create a judgment about their ability to perform that task. This may also have broader implications for the students, as high self-efficacy in degree completion may have broader implications in their lives. This is discussed further in Chapter 2.

The present study examines the other side of the coin, and explores how the students believe the educative process acts upon them and the implications this has on the process of degree completion. Additionally, I wanted to examine whether or not self-

efficacy increased with the completion of a Master's degree. Consequently, there are two groups of participants undertaking different levels of degrees.

The present research, therefore, generates a definition by the students of the educative process, explores the interpretation by the students of the process and its perceived impact on degree completion, and suggests ways to facilitate higher positive feelings while engaged in the process, which might lead to an increase in self-efficacy and degree completion.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

In this thesis, two key terms are defined in the following ways:

Self-efficacy personal judgments about one's ability to perform a given task (Lent, Gore & Brown, 1997, p. 307) (How I can)

Self-perception relating to oneself - faculty of perceiving (perception of oneself, self-image - how I am)
(Sykes [ed] 1988, p. 761/954)

At a deeper level, I believe self-efficacy can lead to more pervasive self-perception on ability beliefs. This is discussed further in the next chapter.

IMPORTANCE OF THE RESEARCH

My earlier research, combined with the review of the literature undertaken for the

present study, showed that beliefs have an impact on the learning of students and that learning is perceived by some students as a life-transforming experience. This has been detailed in studies done in other fields of learning, such as mathematics, by West, Hore & Beard (1987), Wieneke (1979), Lent, Gore & Brown (1997), Talbot (1996) and Zuber-Skerritt (1987). These researchers have deemed the field worthy of research. My own earlier research, combined with the present study, will add another dimension to understanding the process of learning, as experienced by the learner, by being grounded in the field of education.

My earlier work on ability beliefs and academic self-perceptions had wider implications by suggesting that certain teaching methodologies enhance students' performance, and the present research expands on these findings and delves deeper into this field of study.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM - PRIMARY QUESTION

Self-efficacy is defined as “personal judgments about one’s ability to perform a given task” (Lent, Gore & Brown, 1997, p. 307). The purpose of the research was to investigate whether the participants in this study saw a relationship between their own self-efficacy, in this case centered on completing graduate degrees in education, and the educative process they were engaged in. Further, if the data generated by the participants indicated a perceived relationship, the study could further explore any implications for

both the participants and the researched institution. The research focus can therefore be stated as “Do the participants in the study identify a relationship between the educative process and their self-efficacy to complete graduate level degrees?”

Before data collection, each participant completed a consent letter (Appendix “A”), which provided a question for them to initially concentrate on, stated as “Does the educative process change self-efficacy beliefs and self-perceptions about ability in MA/MEd and EdD/PhD adult education students, and if so, how?” This question provided only a framework for them to start thinking about the study and was not an actual question asked.

The present study includes MA/MEd and EdD/PhD students and provides a more conclusive result than my preliminary research in this field. As outlined in the literature review section of this proposal, there has been some research in the field of belief systems and their impact on learning in other fields, such as mathematics, at the university level. There has been little examination of the beliefs of students in education, particularly at the graduate level. Another important element which differentiates this research is the combining of students at Masters and Doctoral levels, in order to study whether previous attainment of a graduate level degree has an impact on current self-efficacy beliefs around the educative process and degree attainment. The master’s students are working on their first graduate degree while the doctoral students have completed one graduate degree and are working on their second. The research also

explored whether self-efficacy beliefs had changed as a result of becoming a student in education at an institution of higher learning, and whether the educative process was seen by the participants as playing a part in this change. Since the number of available participants for this research was small, the data seek only to provide a deeper awareness of the phenomenon.

OBJECTIVES

Based on my own background, my previous research undertaken, and recent relevant research on the study of students in learning environments, which is detailed in the literature review section in the next chapter, the objectives of the present research are identified as:

- 1) to explore the self-efficacy beliefs and self-perceptions on perceived abilities in a group of MA/MEd students near the beginning of their course work;
- 2) to explore the self-efficacy beliefs and self-perceptions on perceived abilities in a group of EdD/PhD students;
- 3) to compare responses for the MA/MEd and EdD/PhD students to see if there is a perceived relationship between beliefs on self-efficacy/self-perception and actual ability;

- 4) to explore which educative processes the participants believe have enhanced/hindered self-efficacy in their own learning at the researched institution and examine possible implications for the participants in the study, and for the researched institution.

From this database I can determine whether there are group differences between MA/MEd and EdD/PhD students. I can also explore how the participants in this study view the education process as enhancing or hindering these self-beliefs.

Although similar research has been conducted in other fields, there is a need to conduct research on graduate students in education, in order to validate self-efficacy theory and make it relevant to the field of education.

The following chapter presents a review of literature relevant to the present study.

CHAPTER 2

“Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest.”

The Book of Common Prayer

LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to ground the research in the literature in fields intimately connected to the present topic, or bearing on the topic to a certain degree. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) have said that “reviewing the literature is an ongoing process that cannot be completed before data collection and analysis. The data often suggest the need to review previously unexamined literature of both substantive and theoretical nature” (p. 18). Nevertheless, the present section reviews the knowledge gleaned to date, and provides a foundation upon which to build with the present study.

In reviewing the relevant literature a few issues became clear. First, some areas have been heavily explored, but will serve to provide background; second, some aspects of the research question, specifically, self-efficacy, have been explored to an extent - but in other academic disciplines such as mathematics and engineering; and, third, there is a relatively small body of research on graduate and higher level graduate education (EdD/PhD) on this topic.

In this review, I will briefly examine transformative change in the adult learner, as well as motivation and personalization as keys to learning, and the effect each has on self-efficacy and self-perception on ability beliefs which have an impact on the educative

process. I will then examine research focusing on these beliefs in other fields at both the undergraduate and graduate school level. After each section, I will summarize key issues and relate them to the present study.

Additionally, the theoretical construct of attribution theory has bearing on the present research and is therefore explored in some detail in this chapter.

THE PROCESS AND ATTRIBUTION OF TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE IN THE ADULT LEARNER

Basic epistemology suggests that knowledge is actively constructed.

Transformational theory (Mezirow, 1981) begins with the premise that people arrive at their own conceptions, based on their experiences. Interpretivism builds on this theory by suggesting that “experience is not just cognitive, but also includes emotions. Interpretive scholars consider that every human situation is novel, emergent, and filled with multiple, often conflicting meanings and interpretations” (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992, p.19). It has been argued that transformation by knowledge “presupposes that human beings are not altogether active [i.e., actively seek to shape their world], that they can indeed be unwittingly pushed to and fro by unseen and unknown causes” (Howe, 1998, p. 16).

In order to ground the present study, a discussion of the basic concepts of learning is warranted. Mezirow (1994), a leading scholar on the subject of transformative

learning in education, defines learning as “the social process of construing and appropriating a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience as a guide to action” (Mezirow, 1994, p. 222-223). Mezirow further states that “the process of learning...is focused, shaped and delimited by our frames of reference” (Mezirow, 1994, p. 223).

Since the purpose of the present research is not to debate how knowledge is constructed, we will accept these precepts as being true and concentrate on how knowledge is used and interpreted in the current study.

There has also been much scholarly production on maturation theory, examining which attitudinal changes occur in humans from birth to death (Neugarten, 1968; Vaillant, 1977; et al). Daloz (1988) summarizes this point concisely, saying “growing up continues throughout our lives...and a central part of growing up invites us to reconceive our earlier self and cultivate the growth of a more fitting and well-integrated new one” (p. 4).

Maturation theory explains what happens to people as they age, but theoretical application to specific situations, such as the process of obtaining an education, are limited. Maturation theory says, for example, that at age thirty-five a person should be going through “x” process, but doesn’t always account for developmental barriers within that individual that may have occurred, preventing this process from actually taking

place.

Brady (1993), in his unpublished doctoral thesis entitled “Perception of Personal Growth during Adulthood: A Study of Eight Adults to Midlife”, found, as in my own research, that adults develop through the “pursuit of self-understanding” (p. v).

His work, and the work of other maturation theorists, clearly indicates that people evolve over life. However, my earlier research, and educational theory work undertaken by researchers in similar fields, indicate that in an adult’s life, there often is a conflict occurring between where grounded theory on maturational development suggests they should be (the maturational theory approach), what they are actually doing in life, and, how they feel about the situation. This is important to note since, later on in this chapter, I will be discussing motivation and learning and the implications for graduate school students. Theorists such as Mezirow (1981) further note that perspective transformation may account for adult development growth changes, as defined by life-span theorists.

Transformational theory is seen by some theorists (Weinstein & Alshuler, 1985; Howe, 1998) as a higher stage of self-knowledge development and is premised on an awareness of internal thought patterns that are affected by and have an effect on knowledge attainment. Mezirow (1981, 1996) in discussing transformation theory, notes that he is essentially discussing what was earlier called “conscientization” by Friere and “emancipatory action” by Habermas. He defines transformative theory as a process

where meaning is made from learning, which can happen in a series of increments or all at once, which changes the learner in some way. It is important to note that “one does not return to an old perspective once a transformation occurs” (Mezirow, 1981, p. 8).

What we are actually discussing here is self-knowledge. Self-efficacy, and by extension, a more global change in self-perception on ability, can be learned and modified through four types of information that directly come from the educative process outlined above: “(a) performance accomplishments; (b) vicarious learning; (c) emotional arousal, for example, anxiety in response to a behavior or set of behaviors; and (d) verbal persuasion, for example, encouragement or discouragement” (Betz and Hackett, 1981, p. 400). It is important to note that “experience alone does not produce learning; rather, learning comes about as a result of making meaning out the experience” (Merriam, Mott & Lee, 1996, p. 9).

Related to this is the fact that “people attribute causes, primarily, to either the person or the situation” (Pennington, 1986, p. 129). This “attribution” forms a theoretical construct that may be useful in providing a framework for my data.

Attribution theory is recognized as “the connection between a perceived change and a person conceived of as causing this change by some action. The attribution has the effect of connecting the perceived change with the significant environment and especially with its more invariant features” (Gorlitz [ed], 1980, p.12).

At the core, these attributional conceptions are premised on the fact that external events or stimuli, noted as (S) do not directly activate reactions, stated as (R), such as emotions or behaviours. Any linkages between them are arbitrated by causal ascriptions (C). In summary, attributional beliefs can be described as a cognitive model of action, stated as S-C-R (Forsterling, 1986).

What attributions theorists essentially are saying is that attributions provide a context for our understanding of an event. They provide a basis for understanding not only the event, but also how it relates to the individual. "Attribution often means a unit-formation, a relation of belonging together between an event and a person" (Gorlitz [ed], 1980, p. 18). The relation between an "event and a person" is exactly what happens when a student pursues a degree, and will be further discussed later in this section.

Heider (1959) theorized that within us are "internally conditioned events, core events and externally conditioned events" (Gorlitz [ed], 1980, p. 20), which have an impact on our being. He named this the "cognitive field" and stated that, "when two parts of the cognitive field are similar (or proximal, and so on) this similarity can induce attribution, that is, one of these parts is likely to be seen as the cause of the other part. For instance, a bad action will easily be seen as committed by a person who already has a bad reputation" (Gorlitz [ed], 1980, p.13).

The conclusion reached is that a student who does well in school earlier should have an expectation that they will do well in school again. This is also called

covariation, which means that people attribute circumstances that occur to something that they identify was there when the circumstance happened, and which wasn't there when the event didn't happen. Conversely, "the expectation of failure can causally contribute to inducing failure" (Gorlitz [ed], 1980, p. 13). In sum, it's not the event/stimulus that is important; it's not the reaction by the individual to the event/stimulus that is important; what is important is an awareness by the individual on how the event is influencing their self-efficacy and producing the reaction. Every person interprets an event based on his or her history (Merriam, Mott & Lee, 1996; Pennington, 1986; Wall, 1992) in a way that is unique to the individual. There may be similarities among individuals concerning cognition of the same event, but ultimately the understanding of an event that is acting upon them, which in this case is degree completion, is individually unique.

This is directly related to self-efficacy and self-perception on ability because "self-efficacy beliefs may determine performance accomplishment and persistence in pursuing a difficult course of action" (Lent, Brown & Larkin, 1984, p. 357). My earlier brief foray into this field, however, showed that for most of the participants in that study, graduate studies provided a congruency in understanding their capabilities and accepting these abilities, in relation to themselves and others. My findings also showed that some of the participants in the past had negative self-perceptions about their abilities. Acceptance in graduate school caused all participants, some for the first time, to include

a positive element in their esteem beliefs. This sense of self was, for some participants, new and fragile. As early as 1974, Combs, a psychologist, recognized the importance of the educator in ensuring that these competency beliefs are recognized and nurtured. “It is apparent that if the self-concepts a person holds about himself are as important in determining behaviour as modern psychology suggests, then teacher-educators must be deeply concerned with the kinds of self-concepts students are developing” (Combs, 1974, p. 25).

The theories studied note that people always work to maintain harmony and balance in all things, “implying a reaching out, a changing of more and more parts of the cognitive field and of the environment to bring them into consonance with important seminal ideas and attitudes” (Gorlitz [ed.], 1980, p.17). In summary, we have to believe that humankind, narrowly defined for our purposes as students, works toward achieving inward and outward harmony.

Since the attainment of a graduate school degree is the goal of the participants in this study, the factors influencing attainment of the goal and the person attempting to attain the goal strive for synergy. The educative process may be the methodology utilized. If goal attainment is achieved, we can theorize that the four conditions, identified by Betz and Hackett (1981) have been met and that there would be a corresponding increase in self-efficacy and an increase in self-perception on abilities,

which may be somehow attributed to the educative process. The process of finding out how is the foundation of the present research.

Educational theory, including the present research, must go beyond maturational theory in order to attempt to understand why participants are doing something and how they feel about it, rather than only looking at what they are doing and assuming all is well.

MOTIVATION AND PERSONALIZATION OF LEARNING AS KEY FACTORS

HOW MOTIVATION TO LEARN AFFECTS SELF-EFFICACY AND SELF-PERCEPTION IN THE ADULT LEARNER

My earlier research in this field explored the theme of motivation. The present research only addresses motivation in terms of its impact on a learner's self-efficacy. In my earlier work, four motivational themes emerged. They were: motivation for self-worth; motivation to "escape" from family; motivation for career enhancement and motivation for parental recognition. These extrinsic themes of motivation were separate from self-perception beliefs of ability in my participants; i.e., the participants were motivated to attend graduate school but didn't necessarily believe that they could do it well, or at all. Heider (1980) concurs, stating, "classrooms are environments for the satisfaction of motivations other than achievement" (Heider, as cited in Gorlitz [ed], 1980, p. 40).

Clark (1992), who explored the motivation for learning, states the obvious but necessary. "To get anywhere there is one intractable rule - you must start from where you are "(p. 16). She urges us to reflect that where we physically are in time and place is not only our starting point for undertaking something tangible (a degree for instance), but this physical starting point is also a cognitive starting point that can be used to know and understand any changes that can occur from participating in the tangible task. She further states that "the present is where we live and where we are most accountable" (p. 16). These two statements are worth noting for the fact that "where you are" in my research on self-efficacy is in an MA/MEd or EdD/PhD program. Since an adult learner's "academic achievement is an important aspect of the judgments others make about them, and subsequently of their own judgments of their self-worth" (Biklen and Pollard, 1993, p. 91), the researched institution provides us with a physical locale and starting point for the study. Students are working towards degree completion, a task which can be used as a reference point for noting any self-efficacy changes that the participants believe may have occurred.

Wieneke (1979) had earlier found similar results to my first study in examining the importance of self-efficacy judgments and self-perceptions on ability in a study of university undergraduate students at the University of New South Wales. His research indicates that "it is apparent that even though these students are, by definition,

successful academically, they still...felt that some of the aspirations and expectations they held on entry were not fulfilled” (Wieneke, 1979, p.30). Motivation was high at the beginning of the school year, but measurably dropped off as the school year progressed, affecting self-efficacy and self-perception on ability beliefs, as noted by the students in this study. His work points out that the time in which to collect data should occur at a clear point in the participants’ journey in education. I will explore the implications for this study of this point in the next chapter.

As a participant in my own earlier research, I am cognizant of the fact that my own learning experiences have been much like those Knott (1987) describes, when she says “to be empowered involves the experience of powerlessness, of feeling defenseless and exposed to pain” (Knott, 1987, p.3). Condry and Dyer (1976) reiterate this same point in their own research, stating that “past experience defines the ‘comfortable’, but not the necessary, way to act” (Condry and Dyer, 1976, p. 79). As indicated in my earlier research, motivation propelled students into graduate school often to “escape” or “prove something” without taking into consideration personal readiness to perform the task. Students are accepted - but are they ready?

What these researchers seem to be stating, and as backed by my introductory study in this field, and the work of attributional theorists, is that the process of undertaking a graduate school degree creates a conscious self-evaluation within each student of ability

to academically perform and a self-measurement of ability *relevant to others at school*. These self-measurements are based on previous academic personal histories. These histories are also directly affected by extrinsic influences, such as a supportive or non-supportive spouse, since returning to school is a change in life pattern and “change demands a complex kind of renegotiation of relationships among spouses, children, friends, parents and teachers” (Daloz, 1988, p. 7). Change, as noted in my personal history in Chapter 1, can be growth-affirming or growth-inhibiting, with certain conditions needing to be in place before change can occur.

Knott’s (1987) later research concurs and states that “the decision to continue learning can be much more to do with whom you are learning [i.e., classmates] and the learning process than with the fulfillment of original instrumental motives associated with social roles” (p. 8). My own research in my earlier study bore this statement out, surfacing the fact that the majority of participants were not initially comfortable and were overwhelmed by the academic environment at the graduate institution, but quickly developed peer groups which assisted in restoring some measure of positive ability beliefs to the participant group. As noted by Scott (1997) and Mezirow (1994, 1996), learning is primarily a social event, and, even though some educational theorists such as Friere (1971), see social structures and culture as society-wide, and educational transformation primarily for the purpose of mass change, social structures and culture

can also be a school, with each individual undertaking a personal transformation.

From a review of the literature, the position can be taken that, despite an outward appearance of successful skills and abilities in obtaining an education by virtue of being in a post-secondary field of study, and an outward appearance of motivation to succeed at that task, there can often be an underlying self-efficacy, or self-perception of ability problem. Rudd (1985), in his work on postgraduate failure concurs, stating “it is very difficult, at postgraduate level [and we can assume at any graduate level] to discover from a student’s scholastic record and an interview whether he has the requisite ability for postgraduate study” (p. 40). The educative process, especially at the graduate school level, assumes a certain degree of academic expectation of success, and is not attuned to the possibility that people might have learning and belief problems, such as one might encounter in, for example, a street youth literacy program.

THE PERSONALIZATION OF LEARNING

A key process that adults go through to understand the experience of learning is a personalization of what they are learning. I take the position that adult learners come to school, in this case to a graduate degree course in adult education, for a variety of reasons. Whatever these are, learners cannot help but be changed because, in order to understand the new information they are receiving, they personalize it, and by doing so,

change themselves. I believe that the motivation to obtain a graduate degree implies an inherent desire to succeed in a specific discipline, and may be more intrinsic than in an undergraduate degree. In most cases, it involves the process of going back to school, which cannot help but stimulate an evaluation of the student's ability to undertake the task.

However, people will only learn and understand a subject if the information they are learning is paralleled with something previously understood, providing a basis for comprehension of this new information. Since each person brings a unique background to their education process, the process by which each learner knows and understands is unique. Research by Betz (1984), Mezirow (1996), Moore, Britt and Leary (1997), Richards (1983), Rogers (1993) and Wall (1992) concurs with this view.

From my past research experience, and as illustrated in the literature reviewed for the current study, it is apparent that individuals will be responsible for their own learning only to the extent that they allow learning to have an impact on their personal belief systems. If a student doesn't believe he or she is capable of learning at a particular level, it will be difficult, if not impossible for learning to take place.

The literature theorizing how adults learn, influenced by factors such as motivation and personalization, is vast. I have only attempted to isolate some of the current theoretical production in an effort to identify points of reference for the current

task. All individual factors influencing adult learning, regardless of what they are and where they came from, have an impact on the adult learner's self-efficacy, succinctly defined by Lent, Gore and Brown (1997) as "personal judgments about one's ability to perform a given task or course of action" (p. 307).

SELF-EFFICACY AND EDUCATION

There has been limited research specifically on self-efficacy and education. Recently, Lent, Gore and Brown conducted a large study of 205 college undergraduates and explored the self-efficacy beliefs of mathematics students. They note that:

Academic self-concept is commonly viewed as incorporating attitudes, feelings and perceptions relative to one's intellectual or academic skills. As such it represents a mixture of self-beliefs and self-feelings regarding general academic functioning. By contrast, self-efficacy is concerned more narrowly with context specific judgments of performance capabilities (Lent, Gore and Brown, 1997, p. 308).

They found that "self-concept and self-efficacy are not interchangeable constructs and that self-concept does not subsume self-efficacy" (Lent, Gore and Brown, 1997, p. 313). They further state that "a potentially useful direction for future inquiry would be to design and test multivariate causal models that incorporate different facets of perceived academic or career capabilities" (Lent, Gore and Brown, 1997, p. 313).

I take the position that academic self-concept (broad, self-evaluative questions) and self-efficacy (confidence in performing particular academic tasks) are intimately

related, since self-concept explicitly affects general self-confidence, which cannot help but interact with academic self-efficacy beliefs. My earlier work in this field examined the work of Combs (1974) who stated that “the need for adequacy is the fundamental motivation of every human being from conception to death...This drive has tremendous implications for education...Everyone is always motivated to be and become as adequate as he can be in the situation as he sees them [sic]” (p. 18-19).

In other words, and as noted previously in this chapter, intrinsic values and beliefs which, when encountering extrinsic influences have an impact on a graduate student’s belief system. These produce a unique evaluation of the process of attainment of a graduate degree, which may or may not be based on accurate self-beliefs, and may enhance or hinder academic performance.

As a further example, Talbot (1996) studied 100 college students in Quebec to assess their motivations and perceptions of ability in order to explore how different students responded to assistance. His findings indicate that “the students’ perceptions of effort are closely tied to their perceptions of ability” (Talbot, 1996, p. 4).

As early as 1987, Zuber-Skerritt noted that “there has been little educational research and development in post-graduate education” (p. 75). His research into this field explored self-directed learning at the graduate level. He concludes his research stating that “the students’ self-confidence was boosted” (Zuber-Skerritt, 1987, p.90).

At the graduate student level, a study on graduate students' self-efficacy beliefs by Phillips and Russel (1994), conducted while the students were undertaking research projects, "found that, in a counseling psychology course, the students' self-efficacy beliefs and their perception of their training environment each related significantly to their productivity as researchers. [The authors] imply that both factors, the training environment and self-efficacy, may play important roles in efforts to understand and promote students' performance as scholars" (as cited in Brown, Lent, Ryan and McPartland, 1996, p. 535).

Self-beliefs, and what influence them, are at the core of this study. "People do not behave according to the facts as *others* see them. They behave according to the facts as *they* see them" (Richards, as cited in Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 48). In the small sampling available for this study, extracting broader theoretical meaning from the data was the challenge, since self-beliefs are by definition situated only with the individual; however, commonalities were found, and will be explored in the Chapter 5 on "Findings".

OUTCOMES OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

From all of the literature reviewed, several things were made clear.

Learning is a powerful influence in life, and can be a life-long process that includes

formal and non-formal education. Learning can also be interpreted individually with varying results. The educative process may be recognized and attributed by some learners as being the catalyst for transformative change and the agent to which are attributed positive or negative experiences.

There is a clear need for research that investigates the self-concepts of students in education. There is little current literature examining education students at the graduate level. There is a clear need for research into any differences or linkages on self-efficacy and ability beliefs between MA/MEd and EdD/PhD students. The research reviewed to date has not examined participants at different academic levels in the same study. This is important because, as stated earlier, EdD/PhD students in the present research may believe they have had positive changes in their self-efficacy and self-perceptions on ability beliefs, as a result of attainment of a graduate degree. They may attribute the catalyst for this change to the educative process at some point during the attainment of their first graduate degree or upon actually obtaining the degree. It is here where an examination of the research question might provide greater theoretical understanding and suggest broader implications for the educative process.

CHAPTER 3

***“...the thing seemed simplicity itself
when it was once explained.”***

**Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
The Stock-Broker's Clerk**

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH APPROACH

In many of the earlier studies on self-efficacy, quantitative instruments of measurement were utilized within a large sample population (Lent, Brown and Larkin 1984, 1986, 1989). However, I wanted the present research to be participant driven, with each participant drawing their own interpretation of the meaning of “educative process” and more importantly, make their own assertions of any impact they believe the educative process may have had on their self-efficacy and self-perception of ability beliefs, relating to their graduate studies. I was able to create a research approach and conceptualize questions to pose to the participants from the knowledge gained during the literature review which is detailed in Chapter 2.

I wanted personally to enter into the project, *to a degree*, since in heuristic research, “the researcher’s own experience and the experiences of others are included in the data which are collected...Participation and interaction with the people and things that are part of the phenomena are essential to the discovery process. In the investigation, both those we interact with and ourselves are altered as we develop personal knowledge”

(Davies, 1979, p. 248). That was my hope. I wanted to see if others experienced through the educative process similar global changes to their self-concepts as a person as a result of attending graduate school.

I participated in my study in two ways - as a research participant and as an “active” interviewer.

In active interviewing techniques,

The active interviewer sets the general parameters for responses, constraining as well as provoking answers that are germane to the researcher’s interest. He or she does not tell respondents what to say, but offers them pertinent ways of conceptualizing issues and making connections, pertinence being partly defined by the research topic and partly by the substantive horizons of ongoing responses (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995, p. 39).

I didn’t introduce my own thoughts and feelings into the interviews, but probed, sought clarification and attempted to take the discussions to a deeper level. I also participated in the written segments of the data collection. In the interviews I did try to remember that “the fundamental principle of qualitative interviewing...is to provide a framework within which respondents can express their own understanding in their own terms” (Merriam and Simpson, 1984, p. 205).

I was a participant, yet I was an observer. Borg and Gall (1989) have stated that although “participant observation is not widely used in educational research, the method is well suited for the investigation of many educational problems” (p. 392). Smith (1978) developed seven criteria to meet in evaluating participant observer studies. These

are:

1. Quality of direct on-site observation - face to face meetings are more truthful than questionnaires. Each group in the study met with me three separate times;
2. Freedom of access - the information is freely given;
3. Intensity of observation - the longer you meet, the more an accurate picture of the participant is given. Each of the group meetings lasted at least one hour.
4. Qualitative and quantitative data - both have value and can be merged into a comprehensive whole;
5. multimethods - again, used to obtain a comprehensive picture;
6. Sampling of data - utilize different sample groups to provide comprehensive representation and to validate the data. My research consisted of two groups with four persons in each group. Other researchers, such as Behling (1980) concur with this approach, stating that “solid findings about a narrower population are better than marginal findings of questionable generalizability in a broadly defined population” (p. 485).
7. Unobtrusive measures - looking beyond *what* the data is saying to more

how the data is being said, such as body language (Borg & Gall, 1989).

Given the field of research, given the personal nature of the data, and given that “the participant observer, by virtue of being actively involved in the situation being observed, often gains insights and develops interpersonal relationships that are virtually impossible to achieve through any other method” (Borg and Gall, 1989, p. 391), this seemed to be the appropriate method to use. The present research successfully utilized these seven criteria in this study, with the exception that no quantitative data were gathered and the unobtrusive measures attempted were later discontinued.

I tried to conduct the interviews “in such a way that alternate considerations are brought into play. They may suggest orientations to, and linkages between, diverse aspects of respondents’ experience, adumbrating--even inviting interpretations that make use of particular resources, connections and outlooks” (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995, p.17). I provided a framework for the discussion based on participants’ background and the theories in the field. Where appropriate, I tried to place responses in a context which has emerged from my research on this topic, but of which the participants may not have thought.

Further, Jackson (1984) in his work on self-esteem, a concept explored in my earlier research, states that “each researcher and each critic could very well construct a different interpretation of the phenomenon [of self-esteem]. In fact, we expect them to do so, since each starts with his or her own particular preunderstanding” (p. 217). This

reiterates the importance, when researching self-concepts, of having the research be as participant driven as possible.

Attribution theory postulates that people operate with a certain belief system that is created *by* them. In order to understand how the educative process has an impact upon degree attainment, I needed to know about the respondent's background, to an extent, which can be an excellent resource for assisting the respondents in better describing their experiences and feelings. This enabled me, as researcher, to understand the context of the responses I received, and suggest linkages between the participants' backgrounds and responses to the questions, including any role the participants attributed to the educative process that produced their responses or reframed earlier beliefs.

In short, all participants in this research have generated responses to the written questions and participated in the interviews based on their own interpretation of the questions and premised on their background and beliefs. The process of social discourse during the group meetings may have contributed to new interpretations or meanings being made by the participants of the phenomenon studied. Further, any connections made between self-efficacy beliefs and their attribution to the educative process were initiated by the participants in the study, as were any broader applications resulting from these beliefs to their everyday lives.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Two assumptions premised my research design. The first assumption for this study was that, because of the nature of the questions and that the phenomenon I was exploring was participant driven, deep personal issues might surface. My second assumption was that my participants would trust me enough to reveal personal issues about themselves. I had hoped to build this trust by initially meeting individually with each participant and fully disclosing my research intentions to them, including providing background to the research, through a detailed description which is outlined in the consent letter. A concern arose after the first interview regarding access to the data, which is detailed in Appendix “E”.

There were three types of data collection:

1. initial one-on-one meetings;
2. participant journals;
3. group meetings.

The initial one-on-one meetings were brief meetings between myself and each participant with the purpose of informing the participants of my intentions, obtaining informed consent from them by way of the consent letter, arranging suitable times for the group meetings, answering any questions about the research they may have had, and handing out the journal for them to begin their journey with me.

Since informed consent was to be obtained during my initial one-on-one

discussion with each participant, I anticipated that this would soften the barriers to my asking very personal questions during this interactive process. The literature on interviewing indicates that “‘informed consent’ implies that the potential respondents should be given sufficient information - information about what they are actually being asked and the uses to which it will be put - to judge whether unpleasant consequences will follow as a result of disclosure” (Sudman and Bradburn, 1982, p.8). Open communication between myself and the participants, maintenance of confidentiality, and an understanding of how the data would be used were areas of protocol important to this research project and were clarified at this meeting. The consent letter is attached as Appendix “A”.

The journals which participants maintained provided a chance for them to critically reflect upon the educative process they were engaged in. These were successful to a degree. In any volunteer project, the commitment level of participants can vary, and this was the case in the present research. The journal was also intended to be used as a private communication tool between myself and the individual participants, allowing them to raise issues that they may have been uncomfortable discussing within the larger group.

I provided guidelines for the use of the journal and questions for them to reflect upon in the journal over the course of the study. These are outlined in Appendix “B”.

There were two groups running concurrently - one of MA/MEd students and

another of EdD/PhD students. Data collection procedures for each group were identical and consisted of several phases - obtaining informed consent; distributing journals to each participant and eventually collecting the journals; conducting initial group interviews; transcription and analysis; conducting second group interviews; transcription and analysis; conducting third group interviews and the final analysis. The questions for the group interviews are attached as Appendix "C".

DATA COLLECTION

Participation in the research was solicited three ways. The first participants were introduced to the project through an introduction of my research in her classes by my supervisor, Dr. Laiken. I also distributed a flyer, outlined in Appendix "D". I additionally attended doctoral level classes to explain my research and obtain participants. In consultation with my committee, and after realizing that there were few beginning EdD or PhD students enrolled, and fewer still who had the time to participate in my study, the parameters for this group were widened and non-beginning EdD and PhD students were accepted into the research. Forty minutes prior to the first meeting, one of the EdD students became ill and was unable to continue with the project.

After I contacted participants and met with each one briefly to obtain informed consent, group meetings were arranged. At the meetings, questions were asked, as outlined in Appendix "C". During the whole period of the study - February to April,

each participant, in his or her journal, also reflected upon the process of participating in the study, and answered questions posed by the researcher.

I had wanted each group to have their initial meeting by mid-February, in order to capture the participants' scholastic impressions to date, and near the beginning of a new term. Wieneke (1979) found measurable differences on the ability beliefs of undergraduate students from entry into studies to near completion of studies, indicating that the timing of the data collection in the school term is important.

The actual meeting dates were as follows:

MA/MEd

February 22, 1999

March 24, 1999

April 12, 1999

EdD/PhD

March 11, 1999

March 25, 1999

April 15, 1999

April 22, 1999

The second group sessions were conducted about a month later in the case of the MA/MEd group and two weeks after the initial meeting in the EdD/PhD group, as a result of the difficulty in obtaining participants. This meeting examined the participants' experiences midway through the term. The questions asked at this group session are also outlined in Appendix "C".

The third group sessions examined the participants' experiences as they completed

the term. It also enabled the participants to reflect upon the process of being involved in this study; to reflect upon how they felt about examining the very process they were engaged in; and to provide closure for the groups.

As indicated earlier, interview data were to be collected in three ways - on tape, on video, and in field notes completed by the researcher after each meeting. The video-taping of each session was to be done for the purpose of providing a second audio track of each session and to examine the body language of the participants while they were speaking. The initial group that was interviewed decided they could not continue with the video portion of the interview, as detailed in Appendix "E", and it was discontinued for all further meetings in both groups.

Data included information received from the group interviews, the individual responses to questions, along with reflections on the group process which emerged from the journals, and all sources were used in the final analysis.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Participants were given free access to their own data and were offered their own interview tapes back upon completion of the study. They were also advised that they could, at any time, request that I turn off the tape recorder, or ask to opt out of the study. They were also advised that the data would only be available to myself and my committee, an issue which was subsequently further tightened.

Each participant was also asked to choose a pseudonym to maintain anonymity within the written work.

DATA ANALYSIS

Coding was completed following guidelines and procedures as suggested by Miles & Huberman (1987). The code segments included adaption processes - self, peer, family or faculty directed; beliefs and belief sources about self, to self from others, about others, and sources within family, within self, from peers or from faculty; beliefs and experiences about degree attainment, internal and external support sources, perception of the school, faculty and grading, motivation sources, and coding of life chronologies and critical events at various stages of the life path. In addition to being coded, each question posed by the researcher to the participants in their journalling exercise was affixed to large charts for ease in reviewing responses as a whole.

Cole (1994), states that in her thesis journey “the information was plentiful and rich, and I did come to know when it was time to stop. Once again, I realized the importance of trusting my judgement and intuition” (Cole and Hunt [Ed], 1994, p. 37). I have strived to extract the crucial elements from the wealth of data available to me and I present and discuss these data in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 4

“The present contains nothing more than the past, and what is found in the effect was already in the cause.”

Henri Bergson

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

As stated in Chapter Two, it is important to understand the background, to an extent, of the participants in this study. This is fundamental to situating their present responses to the research in the context of their lives. The participants are not merely students; they are individuals with complex lives and backgrounds that impact upon them and influence who they are and how they act.

All quotations attributed to the participants in this Chapter are extracted from each participant's journal. As part of their journalling requirement, they were asked questions concerning family background (Appendix “B”). The journals were completed in various ways - from point form comments in the journals I had handed out to participants, to fully typed, page-numbered essays.

THE MA/MEd PARTICIPANTS

The participants in this group were Kordell, Hilary, Teri and Brianna. This group consisted of three women and one man, ranging in age from 28 to 41. Three of the students were in the MEd program and one was in the MA program. All had started in the Summer or Fall of 1998 and were at differing points in their studies. As will become

clear through this chapter, all members of this group had very distinct personalities which have had an impact on their learning and their self-efficacy judgments about themselves.

HILARY

Hilary is 37 years old. She is married with children. In her family of origin, she has two older siblings - one eleven and the other fifteen years older than she. She states that life at home was essentially like being an only child, since these older siblings had left home while she was still very young.

Life at home was stable. She states, "Although we were not rich, we did not want for anything - or at least until I saw what luxury was...I believed I was fine. Happy, healthy and yes, well fed - very well fed. Echoes of a pre-teen female weight problem - perfect for eroding self-esteem. Add coke bottle glasses to the mix and it gets fun."

Her mother had completed Grade 5 but when Hilary was in Grade 7, her mother returned to school and upgraded to Grade 8. Her mother's dream had been to become a nurse, a dream which she hoped to instill in Hilary.

Hilary states she was bored in high school until she attended an alternative school where she was able to "negotiate what I wanted and needed from a learning experience." She equates this experience with her present studies at the graduate school she now attends, where self-directed learning is sometimes negotiated between students and professors.

After high school she attended theology college for a year where she became conscious of the “meaning making” aspect of education. This conscious awareness aspect of education is very important to her and is noted throughout her journal.

Hilary then attended university and obtained a sociology degree. In her third year of university, she married. Her husband of seventeen years is fully supportive of her current goals.

Her current graduate studies, which will lead to an MEd degree, have been exciting and meaningful to her. She states, “when the educative process allows me to explore meaning it becomes valuable to me, and for me this may mean something different than it does to someone else, and essentially that gets me excited - Oooh let’s take a look at this.”

Hilary also believes that the educative process “was about more than creating good workers. It was about creating good people.”

BRIANNA

Brianna is 30 years old. She chose to not discuss her family life for this project to a large extent.

As an adult, she attended Queen’s University in the late 1980s and obtained a Bachelor of Science degree. She then was employed in a medical-based field.

She is currently undertaking a Master of Arts degree. She states that she had

initial self-doubts due to her relative youthfulness and her perceived lack of experience. She has come to appreciate the value of her own experiences, which has boosted her self-confidence.

In her previous medical-based career, she states that knowing the answers was important and she says “my facade was large.” As a result of her experiences here she has learned “that indeed it is okay to say ‘I don’t know’. I now openly say when I’m not sure. This is very freeing.”

Brianna says that her current educational process in graduate school has changed her in other ways, stating, “I have learned and grown in areas that I never anticipated. I am more self-reflective and a much stronger person. I value my past experiences and have learned how to draw on my own strengths. I have become more self-directed and goal-focused.”

KORDELL

Kordell is in his early forties. He is single. He has one sister in his immediate family. His mother completed high school, while his father completed school to Grade 7. Kordell states, “since my father attained just a grade 7 degree, he experienced my education vicariously. He insisted that I attain one of three professions: lawyer, doctor or accountant...I detested each of these three professions.”

As a child in a private school in Montreal, he felt that, because of his intelligence

he was “on stage,” which made him uncomfortable. He also was more attuned to arts and humanities studies, which were not appreciated by his father. He states that “my desire to please my father, and make him proud of me (in an academic context) caused me endless grief and conflict.”

When Kordell was twenty-five, he began a Bachelor of Arts in English literature degree, which was personally interesting to him. This degree was completed over a nine-year period, because he studied at night and worked during the day. During this time, his mother was not supportive of his liberal arts studies.

His studies in graduate school are proving a challenge. In his English degree, he was able to critically reflect and analyze the primary material he read. His present graduate studies, along with the requisite large volume of compulsory reading “took quite a bit of adjustment.” He further finds that “reading other’s works feels restricting to me, that I can’t venture forth my opinion in the way I am used to since I am accounting for and relating the opinion of so many scholars in my papers.”

His self-esteem has been challenged by graduate school, from an initial disbelief that he would be accepted, to issues concerning his grades in one course. He does feel that “self esteem has an enormous role in the educative process. If one accepts the metaphor of the mind as an elastic band, then it follows that education stretches that band to greater heights of understanding, maturity and self-awareness. Under these circumstances, self-esteem is an essential ingredient in determining the educative

outcome.”

Kordell does, however, believe that the graduate school he attends is an excellent school and states that the educative process here “has changed me.”

TERI

Teri, at 28, is the youngest of all the participants in this study. She is the fifth of six children and was born in Mauritius. Both her parents are university educated, yet she states, were not encouraging of Teri to strive for academic excellence. She says, “encouragement was never shown. We did not get praise either.”

In Mauritius, where the family lived for ten years, she endured the “British” school system, where misbehaviour or poor grades were met with corporal punishment. Needless to say, she was quite motivated to complete homework.

Teri says “although we did well academically, we all suffer (to different levels) from a lack of self-esteem. What we achieved was not good enough for my mother. She wanted a doctor in the family.”

Her childhood grades were varied. Initially, after moving to Canada her marks were similarly varied but, after she learned English, Teri’s marks became straight “A” levels, and continue to be so today.

In 1998, she started a Master of Education degree which is being completed at a rapid pace. The processes used at this graduate school have changed Teri’s orientation

to learning. She states, “being so academically and grade oriented resulted in a high level of anxiety in doing well in my courses. I had to let go of this need for an “A”, but rather enjoy and learn as much as I can regardless of the grade.” She notes “I’m relaxing more and focused on the process rather than the end goal” - a statement she reiterated in the group sessions.

In addition, she states she is enjoying the learning process and in particular the reflective discourse with her fellow students that this graduate institution encourages. For Teri, education is everywhere, and she says: “the educative process for me is about learning as I go about my life, learning every day in my interactions with others, my inner thinking, etc.”

THE EdD/PhD PARTICIPANTS

The participants in this group were Noah, Almira and Anne. This group consisted of two women and one man, ranging in age from 37 to 58. This group would have had three women but one woman withdrew from the study due to ill health at the last moment and was not replaced. Of the remaining participants, one student was in the EdD program and two were in the PhD program. All had started prior to 1998 and all were at differing points in their studies. As with the other group, all members of this group had very distinct personalities which generated some distinctly different responses in the data.

ANNE

Anne is 48 years old. She has an identical twin sister and from the moment of birth “would have to deal with the issue of self-identity.” She further states that having a twin “means dealing with issues of competitiveness and being compared to each other by family, friends and others.” She also has three brothers.

Both of her parents live in Toronto and are high school graduates. Anne’s father worked his way up to a management position with a large Ontario employer while her mother stayed home after marriage. Twenty-seven years into the marriage, Anne’s parents divorced.

In her teenage years, Anne experienced some upheaval in schooling with her father’s transfer to Montreal. During this period she grew closer to her twin sister. It was also during this time that her mother became emotionally ill and Anne and her sister, as the two female children, assumed more responsibility for the household.

She states that there was never any push to excel at school; however, she says: “although I was only an average student I did do a bit better in school than my sister and this continues to be an area of contention between us to this day.” She was encouraged to take a commercial program, rather than university, which was felt to provide a better chance for employment. Her older brother, it seems, was encouraged to attend university.

After high school, Anne worked for twenty-two years as a secretary. During that

time she endured two abusive marriages with little in the way of support. She eventually overcame a substance abuse problem.

Fourteen years ago, Anne found a loving, supportive environment within her third marriage. She returned to school and, as she says, “this provided me with the opportunity to consider alternatives for the first time...I found that I loved going to class, doing homework, and being in a learning environment. I also did well in terms of grades. This positive experience motivated me to consider going further with my education. The fact that my spouse believed in my abilities and further education, regardless of age or gender also contributed greatly to my pursuit of a university education.”

Anne had a strong belief while undertaking her early educational pursuits that good grades were the result of effort and not abilities. She says that it was only later that she learned to accept her abilities as a student.

“When I first started my educational journey, I could hardly imagine myself getting a bachelor’s degree, let alone consider that one day I would obtain anything higher. However, once I had got my master’s degree and was accepted into the EdD program I very much wanted to transfer into a PhD program because I didn’t think that the EdD program was as well recognized. In fact I had never heard of that degree before coming to [her educational institution]. Part of me figured that if I was going to do all this work I wanted to end up with a degree that people (particularly my parents) would

know.”

Anne is now in the second year of her PhD program.

ALMIRA

Almira is in her late fifties. Her childhood was complicated and she states that it was difficult to write about for this project. Her formative years were spent living with her mother and various stepfathers or with her maternal grandmother. Her adoptive father, who she assumed was her biological father, also lived with her for a time. She says “he was well read and rather intellectual. He probably had the greatest influence on my educational development and always encouraged me to get as much education as possible.” Her father died when she was 38. Her mother was deceased in 1993.

When she was fourteen and living with her maternal grandmother, an aunt, uncle and cousin came to live with them. Her aunt died within the year and her maternal grandmother raised Almira’s cousin. Almira considers her cousin like a “sister” now.

Almira has had extensive and varied schooling. Her most recent education has included the completion of a Bachelor of Social Work degree followed by a certificate program to be a Developmental Disability Worker. She completed an MEd degree in 1995 and is now in the final stages of her EdD program.

As a participant in the present research, Almira says “I don’t know why, but I feel a need to let out my feelings regarding the educative process and the classism that

hindered me from obtaining the education I wanted at an age when it would have made a vast difference in the route my life would have taken.” Classism is an issue with Almira and which she believes had an impact on her self-esteem. She is a proud member of the working class who she considers to be the “backbone of society.”

She has concerns about the EdD program which has tested her belief systems. “In the past year and a half all of the talk about Adult Education not having a PhD program has made me feel like everyone considers the EdD program to be an inferior degree, and I hesitate to say what doctorate program I am in lest they think I am not up to par.” She does attempt to refute these thoughts when they occur, as she says, “I try to be positive and tell myself that while perhaps the PhD carries more prestige with it than the EdD, students do the same work and that when I am finished I will be Dr. Almira with an EdD as much as I would with a PhD.”

Almira’s greatest asset is her ability to write poetry about issues that concern her. Her journals were filled with many original poems that were a great expression of her feelings, and a joy to read.

As an example, during a group meeting of the EdD/PhD participants, one member commented on whether they would ever be like the professors at the educational institution. Reflecting in her journal on that comment, Almira wrote a poem, which is reproduced on the following page.

I WONDER

I Wonder -
Am I ever going to be like them?
I Wonder -
Do I need to be like someone else?
or can I just be me?
an evolving me
that one day
may reach their status of being
but still be me
be like me
only me
Like no one else do I want to be.

NOAH

Noah is 37 years old. He is married with no children. He grew up in the Maritimes in a loving, supportive household with two sisters and a brother. The family moved several times.

Noah has a strong bond with his father. His father completed high school and worked his way to a senior management position at an international satellite and undersea communications company. There were incidents of heavy alcohol consumption among his parents in his childhood, which seem funny to Noah now, as they were never abusive and he can recall them with humour. He describes his mother as “intelligent and headstrong” and has found similar qualities in his present spouse.

About his childhood, he says, “for all the material benefits I received from them I believe the most precious gift [they] gave me was a healthy respect for

education....Money, material wealth and social status still mean little to me. These things can be so easily taken away. I want something that cannot be taken away; that is why I love learning.”

His father, like many in his generation is reticent in expressing his feelings and will look for other ways to express himself. For example, Noah’s father is interested in genealogy and has told him “that out of the six thousand people he has researched I am the only one who has attempted a doctorate. That was his way of saying ‘bravo’.”

Concerning his adult life, Noah says “I think I have it a lot easier than most. I am a white male, between the ages of 25 and 45. I don’t have any questions about my ethnicity or gender. Being a heterosexual, too, I have no issues to deal with either...My self-esteem was never in question because I never had to really face any serious problems of prejudice.”

He spent some years teaching overseas and has strong issues around the meaning of grading systems, especially given his experiences in Japan, where school marks can literally lead to success or failure in life. He says, “I think grading is rather detrimental in some ways. It shows us where we belong or what box to squeeze ourselves into.”

He completed a Master in Education degree at St. Mary’s University in the Maritimes and is now in his second year of a PhD program. He is in awe at the calibre of students and professors at this educational institution. Regarding his personal journey in the educative process here, he says “It seems to [be a] neapolitan mix of frustration,

elation, self-doubt, and confidence....really something up and down...really neurotic.”

He does feel that this institution “is the pinnacle.”

The next chapter will set out the data provided by these participants in response to my questions.

CHAPTER 5

Be not swept off your feet by the vividness of the impression, but say, "Impression, wait for me a little. Let me see what you are and what you represent. Let me try you."

Epictetus

FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

As noted in Chapter 1, the purpose of the research was to explore if the participants in this study saw a relationship between their own self-efficacy, defined as a judgment to perform a given task which is identified for our purposes as completion of graduate degrees in education, and the educative process they are engaged in. Further, if the data generated by the participants do indicate a relationship, what are the implications for both the participants and the researched institution? This second area is examined in the fuller context of the learner's life in the discussion chapter which follows. Given the fact that the available number of participants for this research was small, the data only allowed me to suggest interpretations, but it did allow for a deeper understanding of the nature of the question.

The findings now presented begin with the participants' interpretations of the definitions of the educative process and self-efficacy, which led to a discussion on belief in ability. The findings then explore how these individuals are experiencing the educative process at the researched institution, including anything that is of individual concern to each participant, but also includes their impression of the school and fellow

students, and factors that have had an influence on them, such as grading, administrative issues and isolation.

The next section sets out factors contributing to and processes used by the participants to deal with the above-noted issues. Again, faculty, grading, administrative issues and individual concerns are looked at, but now in the context of how the participants are dealing with these issues. The presentation of the data then continues with sections on the ownership of learning, personalization of learning, motivation and some unanticipated findings.

To begin, I will review the two groups of participants and briefly discuss the group attitude at the beginning of this study.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE

For this research project, some purposive selection of a sample population was undertaken. For ease of obtaining participants and to provide a theoretical context, students in one department were chosen. It might have been useful to have participants equally represented by gender, but given the preponderance of women in the chosen program, that would have been very difficult to accomplish.

I did not specify background criteria such as family class, birth order or geographic area of upbringing in selecting those interviewed.

There were two groups of participants, one group of MA/MEd students and

another group of EdD/PhD students, as detailed in Chapter 4.

GROUP ATTITUDE

The group of MA/MEd students were the first to be interviewed by me. The students in the Master's level group were eager to undertake this research project, for a variety of reasons:

I'm looking forward to this study. What attracted me was helping out a doctoral student (I might be in the same boat one day); the topic was of interest; sharing my thoughts with others who are interested in this topic; potentially learn more about myself, rise in my self-esteem through the process; connecting with other students. (Teri)

Should be some self-learning from my participation. (Brianna)

I'm delighted to have the opportunity to meet with other students and discuss the educative process of obtaining a degree...I am very interested in the quest for personal awareness and learning. (Hilary)

After the first meeting with this particular group, problems arose. There were concerns about confidentiality, given that the supervisor for this research project was a professor for some of the students.

By the time the first meeting of the EdD/PhD group started, these earlier problems had been resolved and anticipation to participate in this project was also high for this group:

I don't know why, but I feel a need to let out my feelings regarding the educative process. (Almira)

I like the idea of participating in Croft's study for three reasons. First, as a student who is also starting the research interview process, I thought it would be a good idea to experience what it would be like to be "the researched". Second, I'm also planning to do focus groups interviews and I thought I could learn from being part of a focus group. Third, I liked the idea of having an opportunity to reflect on my learning experience here and my journey of obtaining an MA and PhD degree. (Anne)

I want to do this research [and see] how it feels to be researched. (Noah)

The meetings all flowed smoothly, with the exception of the third meeting, where one of the participants forgot to attend, despite being called the day before. This person was subsequently interviewed separately.

The group's final thoughts on the process reflected a high degree of involvement with the project.

I think that the main thing that I have learned is that I am not alone in my feelings of inadequacy, but that other students who appear to be altogether and intellectually on top of things have the same feelings and fear of failure and not belonging as I do. (Almira)

I have benefitted from being a participant because it has helped me understand focus groups better and I have also learned what being "the researched" is like. It also gave me the opportunity to reflect on my educative process, something I don't think I would have done to the same degree on my own. (Anne)

I believe being a participant in Croft's group has helped me a great deal. (Noah)

THE EDUCATIVE PROCESS

For the purpose of this research, the educative process was defined as the process of obtaining a degree at the researched graduate adult education institution. The participants had their own definitions.

If I were to be really romantic, I would call it a journey. A cliché of Dickens: the best and worst of times. (Noah)

It is not limited to the process of obtaining a degree here, but rather includes the learning that took place while I was a student in elementary and high school, while I was working and while I was completing an undergraduate degree...My “educative process” will also include the learning that takes place once I leave here. (Anne)

I would define “educative process” as both formal and non-formal education. The process of obtaining a degree at here is the formal educative process. The non-formal educative process in my opinion is two fold: firstly, it is education in a school setting that does not lead to a degree, diploma or certificate; i.e., courses taken for general interest, life enrichment or to help one advance in their work position; secondly, it is also what we learn daily in all of the experiences of life as we travel life’s journey from birth to death. Learning or the educative process is a life long journey. (Almira)

To me the educative process is not about the degree. That’s a very nice benefit...it’s become part of my life. (Teri)

The process has now sort of been an extra add-on. (Brianna)

The process is really life-encompassing. (Hilary)

[It's] an education that's very much incorporated into my being in terms of the way I look at the world, the values that I'm developing, like I see this as a workshop for my own self-development and growth. (Kordell)

These far-reaching effects that the participants equate to their educative process will be discussed in the following chapter.

SELF-EFFICACY

Self-efficacy is defined as “personal judgments about one’s ability to perform a given task” (Lent, Gore & Brown, 1997, p. 307). The participants were asked whether this judgment, applied in this particular case as the ability to complete a degree, could sometimes be inaccurate.

There are so many things that can cloud a person’s judgment. The stigma alone that one is doing “doctorate work” is enough to baffle anyone who cannot get used to the culture or is intimidated by it. (Noah)

I do believe that a person’s judgment about their ability to complete a course, or even a degree, is sometimes not accurate. (Anne)

A person may be more intelligent than they think or even less intelligent than they think they are. Whichever is the case may cause a problem in completing. (Almira)

I suppose some people may believe that they can complete a course/degree but for some reason are not able to do so. (Hilary)

A person's judgment about one's ability to complete a course can be inaccurate. (Kordell)

Many undermine their ability to complete the program successfully. (Teri)

Again, both groups were in agreement on the point that a person's judgment about their ability to complete a degree may not be an accurate reflection of their abilities.

BELIEF IN ABILITY

The participants were asked whether they believed that if a person perceived that they have an ability to do something, then they could actually do it. The responses varied.

Absolutely...It's a matter of focus and encouragement. (Noah)

I believe that if a person perceives that they have an ability to do something, that they can actually do it. However, it may take longer to perceive your abilities in one area than another. (Anne)

I believe that any person capable of going through the admission process of being accepted into a graduate program here is intellectually capable of completing that program and obtaining the degree they set out for if they put their mind to it. At least this is what I keep telling myself. (Almira)

If a person believes that he has the ability to do something, he's halfway there. (Teri)

Yes [through] positive thinking, different approaches, trial and error. (Brianna)

Believe in yourself and your creative abilities and go for it. Easier said than done.
(Hilary)

A belief that one can do something is helpful to accomplishing something.
However, it is not an absolute prerequisite for learning or a successful outcome.
(Kordell)

On a more specific level, the two women in the EdD/PhD group recounted in their journals personal histories reflecting barriers to learning, which had an impact upon their own beliefs in ability. Almira and Anne were the oldest participants, and had been socialized by their families to believe that advanced learning was not for women. As EdD/PhD participants in this study, they were still working to overcome these issues, even though academically, they had advanced to a high level of accomplishment. They state:

It's a very important degree for me and not necessarily for what it may be able to do for me in the work force, but I think that as a woman, and, as a woman who was not encouraged in her upbringing to see a university education as important.
(Anne)

I was taught the same things...but for different reasons. It wasn't because I was a woman, but we're poor people and poor people don't go to university...because even if you did, especially with those people, we're not on the same level, you wouldn't have anything in common with them because you're poor. (Almira)

As a result:

I wanted a PhD and I wanted it because that was the only name that I knew. I didn't know what an EdD was and I thought that nobody else did - certainly no one in my family, and it brought up a lot of issues for me...So a PhD meant a lot to me. (Anne)

The EdD means something for me for the same reason because I never imagined that I would ever have anything that had a doctorate in it and one of the reasons I decided not to switch [to the PhD program] was because I didn't want to be rejected. I couldn't have handled it. if I asked to switch and couldn't. (Almira)

These two participants believe that the educative process, both in previous studies and in their present graduate studies, has had a great effect on their efficacy beliefs.

This issue of belief in ability will be discussed further in the following chapter.

THE CULTURE OF LEARNING

THE SCHOOL

The particular institution that the participants attended was generally seen as a unique learning environment, which will be shown later in this chapter to have an impact on the learners in certain ways.

It is different from anywhere else because it stands so high and different from other schools. This place shouts out research. (Noah)

The educative process differs here because of the nature of the participants. (Kordell)

I think that the educative process (the formal education process) here is the same as it is at any other university or college. Emphasis may be placed on different types of learning styles, however, the ultimate goal is the same. (Almira)

The impression from the participants is that, even though the ultimate goal may be the same as at other institutions, (i.e., obtaining a graduate school degree), the processes available to obtain that degree, and the academic setting itself is unique.

THE STUDENTS

The students in this study were asked for their impressions of their fellow students at the researched institution and whether they felt like an equal in the student body. This was asked in order to provide a comparison to their own perceptions.

I definitely feel like an equal. I feel that it is because of my upbringing...I am so much a part of the dominant culture that I don't know how else I would feel. (Noah)

My initial impressions of the students...were that they were interesting, experienced, qualified, educated, and intimidating. (Anne)

In one class both persons involved [in mistreating the student] were in the MEd degree program, whereas I was in the EdD, and both registered verbal and physical shock when they learned that I was a doctoral student. (Almira)

I have found that students whom I consider to be the most intelligent treat me like an equal whereas the less bright ones are very condescending and patronizing. (Almira)

I think that some people have more extensive professional and academic scholarly experience than I do. I think I can 'hold my own' in classrooms and recognize that there will always be someone who is brighter, taller, richer. (Hilary)

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SELF-EFFICACY BELIEFS

The data revealed some factors in the educative process which had an impact on the self-efficacy beliefs of the participants. These are outside issues that have a direct impact on the students' educative process and by extension, their self-efficacy. The purpose of detailing them here is to demonstrate the students' adaptive processes in dealing with these issues. These contributory factors to self-efficacy beliefs are detailed below. The adaptive processes the students used to address these factors will be outlined in the section following this one.

THE FACULTY

Some of the participants had certain views of the faculty, which had a direct impact on their own beliefs.

How the hell will I be able to compete with the people I see teaching here? It is my relationships with the pros that make me feel inadequate. (Noah)

The factors that lead to our judgments about our abilities are determined by our levels of self-esteem and also by information or misinformation regarding expectations of the program and/or professors. (Almira)

A negative comment from a professor may also unduly influence or even undermine a student's confidence. (Kordell)

I struggle with getting rid of that preconceived notion of "them here, we here" thing but it's that hierarchical thing which I did come in strongly with from any undergrad training or whatever and I'm really struggling getting rid of that. (Hilary)

GRADING

As might be expected in an education facility, there was some discussion around grades. Both groups identified that the actual course grades were not important for the most part, although:

At the end of the day, this fellow learner is a judger. This fellow learner is an evaluator. This fellow learner takes some letter and assigns it to you. (Kordell)

What was important to the participants was the amount of learning that took place.

One participant summarizes the general feeling:

I just want to make one more comment about writing papers and you don't, you look at grades usually, you know? I'm not like that any more but I used to be really, really anal and now, I'm realizing that when you write a paper, it's really, it's sort of like, as long as I know I'm growing inside, I know I'll do fine on the paper. And it's taken me a long time to get there. (Teri)

ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

The participants in both groups discussed certain administrative issues that affected their educative process. An understanding of the impact of these issues on the

participants' self-efficacy beliefs is important to note, only to the extent that they caused discomfort and frustration in the participants, but did not have a long-term impact on their self-efficacy beliefs about completing the degree. Administrative paperwork, in fact, assisted in some of the participants' beliefs, and is detailed in the section on individual issues.

ISOLATION

Several of the participants in each group commented on the isolation they feel in their educative process. This can have a direct impact on self-efficacy and will be discussed in the following chapter. Possible solutions will be addressed in the final chapter.

I don't really know who I can talk to, or you know, where to go. I kind of feel like, when you come here, you're kind of isolated. (Kordell)

They don't give you a chance within the class to connect with the other students. Like there's grouping and all that kind of stuff...I had classes last year where I went in and I left the class not knowing anybody. (Teri)

I have noticed that the women seem to be able to come together a lot easier than the men around here. (Noah)

Classes are one term long. Very short. Over very fast. There was no, I felt, no connection, and I found that very hard. I was very isolated the first term. (Anne)

This socialization aspect to the learning process will be detailed in the following chapter.

INDIVIDUAL ISSUES

Some of the participants had issues regarding their educative process that they were wrestling with during the course of their participation in the study. In this section, the particular issue each participant was grappling with will be illustrated. The next section in this chapter will examine their adaptive processes regarding their particular issue, which for each participant, resulted in an increase in self-efficacy.

As noted in Chapter 4, Kordell is a critical thinker, who seeks to read every page, every nuance in the books he is currently studying.

I'm in a bit of a crisis...I have to read like a maniac and, on the one hand, it imposes an outside discipline on me but on the other hand, I feel that I can get lost in other people's thoughts and lose my own voice. I have to compromise what I want to think or want to say and interject my voice less and I'm daunted by the amount of stuff I have to read...I'll end up reading two books in a course and neglect ten and I don't know why I'm like that but that one of the ways I am. So, in many ways, I feel that the school's like a big ocean and I'm like this little trough. (Kordell)

Hilary was coming back to school after several years.

What am I doing here? And, then that just, you know, sort of floating around and trying to figure out where and how my needs can be met and where I can think about myself. But that, I mean, even that was a process and a struggle with personal confidence. (Hilary)

Teri likes to be in control of her learning process.

I'm thinking, let's talk theory, let's get concrete stuff here and they're happy being over there! And I'm going nuts! I'm like, you know, I will say something and they'll say, okay Teri you're right, let's try and address Teri's needs. Two minutes later, they're out there again! So, it's been really hard for me in that sense, trying to get, you know, concrete stuff and it's not there...so you have to do a lot of extra work. So it's been a huge struggle but I'm learning so much more in this adult education environment than I am in the traditional class. (Teri)

Anne sets very high standards for herself.

I established an expectation of what I needed to do and so I just continued in that mode and had that framework and I really haven't varied from it...I've got this paper due, I guess I've always sort of, well I plan my papers quite well so I usually start them fairly early but this one is particularly based on my research, so I had to get some of it done first. So everything has been sort of waiting and now I'm finding the process is quite huge, and I'm panicking thinking I can't get the work that I hoped to get done for this paper. So I realizing I'm going to have to give something up here and it's not going to be my own research so it's going to be something for this paper. (Anne)

ADAPTIVE PROCESSES

The students had developed adaptive processes in their educative journey. These adaptive techniques had the dual benefit of assisting them in overcoming the difficulties they had in terms of administrative problems, and also influenced their self-efficacy beliefs in a positive way. They are outlined below on terms of factors contributing to self-efficacy beliefs, and in terms of how the participants dealt with situations that arose.

THE FACULTY

There was discussion in both groups on the impact of the faculty on the individual. The faculty at the institution where the participants attend make concerted efforts to treat the students as equal. Sometimes that has not been an easy lesson for the students to absorb.

[The professors] have that in place, like they try to remind people don't be deferential, don't really think of us as Gods on high. I can't help feeling that way...I had two separate meetings with two people on my committee once, basically it was the same paper. It was like a mini-proposal...I worked on this thing for two solid weeks and had about 45 revisions. I mean I worked on it. I gave it to different people to look at it and I couldn't see anything else I could change and I wasn't feeling nervous before the meetings. I wasn't feeling nervous during the meetings but after it was just like I felt like a total schmuck, like a real idiot...because they would look at it and say, no you can't say that. Ding, ding, ding, ding. It was like they changed so much of it ...I feel a lot better than I was say a month ago or two months ago because I was just way out in left field. I know I'm getting so much closer ...but it's that time afterwards, when I feel, I'm never going to feel like them. You know, like they're in another league and I felt like - I'm talking to myself for an hour or two hours and it takes about 24 hours for me to get over that. Before it was really bad. (Noah)

You know, one of the biggest, and this is really a funny story, one of the most evident examples of this in an adult environment is there's a little kitchen over here, right? And I always thought it was for the staff and I would not go wash my dishes there. I'd go to the bathroom to do my dishes. And, so one day I asked a staff member, well, you know, are students allowed to use that kitchen? She looks at me, and she gives me this really funny look. She goes "well, of course you're allowed to use it. It's there for everybody to use". And I realized that I was coming from a mentality of when you're in school, the teachers have their staff lounge. The kids don't go there, and you have your kiddie sink, which happens to be the bathroom sink, right? And she's saying "we're all equal here. You have as much, you know, equal right to use that kitchen as we do", and all of a sudden it clicked to me, Ah, I'm equal here. Totally unrelated to academia. That was one of those very clear things that was "oh", it's me as an equal. (Teri)

GRADING

One participant had an increase in self-efficacy as a result of the grading process. My earlier research into self-esteem and the learning process indicated that a person can have excellent grades, yet still not believe in their abilities.

The two courses in which I received a grade of A+...the professor I received the A+'s from was one I considered to be an easy grader, why else would I get an A+ from him twice? When I learned that there were only 3 A+'s given in each of these courses of over 20 students and that he also assigned several B+'s and that the person who treated me as a 'dummy' obtained an A-, I realized that maybe I was a student after all. (Almira)

ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

The EdD student group in this study made particular reference to a form that was handed out at the beginning of the year, which is used to indicate progress in their studies. There was pleasure in the process of completing the form.

It's this great checklist they did. I took great pleasure out of ticking those boxes as I moved down the list. That I felt I enjoyed - that was far more meaningful to hand that out at the beginning of the year to students just starting so they have a - it might be overwhelming to do that, I don't know, but to me, it gave some sort of structure to a process that can be confusing or very mystical. (Almira)

They had these sheets which, yes, could be overwhelming but at least laid out the process, which could be comforting to some people and then for me, because it was my second year, ya, I'm able to tick off quite a few, so I felt a great sense of accomplishment, of moving forward in the process.
(Anne)

This illustrates the power on beliefs that a simple piece of paper can have on a person.

In addition, there was a major increase in confidence and self-efficacy around education in Noah through the clarification of a misunderstanding of the number of students accepted into the doctoral program. Noah believed that he was one of many students accepted into the doctoral program in the year he became a doctoral student. When other group members explained the actual statistics to Noah and convinced him that he was actually one of only a few that were accepted, he became very excited and proud and recommitted himself at that moment to completing his studies. Noah's realization is detailed in Appendix "F".

INDIVIDUAL ISSUES - COPING METHODS

As noted in the previous section, some of the participants had certain personal issues that they were dealing with as part of their educative process. These issues had an impact on their judgments about their abilities - the definition of self-efficacy. Outlined below is how they dealt with the earlier problems later in the term.

Kordell was a deep critical thinker, getting behind in his reading.

So now, what I did, was I took some books and I didn't read them in my old anal way because I don't like how academics write anyway, but what I did do was I scanned, found pertinent sections and the stuff did enlighten me, like there's no question and so, I did this presentation which went well and it allowed me to have, like to be on firm foundations and for me that was just quite exciting. (Kordell)

Hilary was adapting to school.

I feel much better now than I did then. I'm glad that term is over. (Hilary)

Teri liked to be in control of her learning.

One of the things that's been really powerful for me is that one, is to let go and trust the process. This is very heavy, heavy-duty stuff, because, I'm a controller by nature. (Teri)

Anne set high standards for herself.

Even though I didn't give an outline to the professor saying these are all the things I'm going to achieve, I still sort of had that setup. They were my goals and I think I had to realize that they weren't realistic and they weren't realistic based on my lack of knowledge, my lack of knowledge of the process. So once I started moving through the process, I had to re-evaluate . . . And then I realized, no, no, it's okay because that work will still have to get done for my own research and I have to look at this assignment as purposely to help me in my process and say, okay, and so I was just acknowledging. I think it was hard to acknowledge initially but then once I acknowledged...It doesn't mean my learning is less...In fact it's probably more and coming to terms with something, acknowledging it, you know, your plans or commitments or whatever and working through that probably are beneficial. (Anne)

OWNERSHIP OF LEARNING

The participants in both groups cited ownership of their learning as a key factor in enhancing their self-efficacy beliefs. They have felt involved to an extent in the educative process in several ways.

I would say yes on some of those things. I don't think I've had any input into course content but I've had choice in that I haven't really been told what I've had to take. (Almira)

Well, I guess you have some control over content because so many of the courses here you are required to do presentations, so it's pretty much up to you what area you want to present on. So you have some control over it from that perspective. Your segment. (Anne)

Teri and I were teammates, and that was fabulous - a great learning experience. Unfortunately, in the other classes, for whatever reason, I haven't taken the initiative, or done that. It seems almost as if, unless it's a requirement, people's natural tendency is just to leave at the end of the class. (Kordell)

I chose to be involved. I chose to make it a struggle. I chose to give my heart and just jump right in because I know a lot of people have, you know, turned off and that's it, you know, they're just sort of showing up, kind of thing and I didn't want to do that. I wanted to be really involved, and the learning that's going on, for me, how much more empowered I feel after...how much more confidence and self-esteem I have. (Teri)

I would say that "yes" I have felt personally involved because I do feel that the whole graduate process is so self-directed so, if you're not personally involved, I don't know what would happen to you. (Brianna)

This is a graduate program. You're left to figure it out yourself. They're not there to handhold you...That's not the point of graduate school. (Teri)

The issue of self-directed learning can be a source of anxiety and indeed was, for two participants - one from each group - in particular.

Once I realized that coming here was very much self-directed learning, then I took far more control in that I stopped fighting...coming from a very structured undergraduate program, it was a big change and so I would be drifting. I didn't even know what it was at first. It wasn't well explained, just sort of there. (Anne)

Some of the points they're trying to teach you are about teaching adults and adult learning, and they forget to tell you how they in fact are planning to educate you. If they had given me an orientation in what self-directed learning was in the first course, it would have made a world of difference. (Anne)

I find I'm coming in here and I'm picking up the tools along the way as opposed to having those tools ahead of time. (Kordell)

Anne was able to readjust her anxiety over self-directed learning, and her efficacy and perceptions of ability have improved.

I feel very fortunate about how things have moved along and, I feel, I appreciate the fact that I've been through it before and have something to look back at and contrast that experience and learn from. If anything, I feel more prepared, perhaps more capable. (Anne)

Her group-mate comments:

So, it's one of those things - the suffering was good. (Almira)

PERSONALIZATION OF LEARNING

As noted in the previous chapter, if learning is personalized and becomes meaningful to the learner, not only does a greater understanding of the material being learned occur, but also an increased self-efficacy belief develops as a result of that

understanding. There were some examples in this study.

To make those decisions that, you know what, this is going to be upsetting, this is going to be...earth-shattering! But those were your decisions, because you could have sat on the sidelines and potentially made it easier on yourself, but you wouldn't have had the learning. (Brianna)

I walked in here, feeling that I had devalued my own experience and yet in my theory, in my head, experience is a great source of knowledge and I valued other people's experiences, and I would go to them for my learning and whatever, and somehow, somewhere along the line, it was just like "hello", if you devalue your own, how can you possibly value so highly these other people, and then it clicked for me. Like, you know what, you do have something to offer. Get over it. (Hilary)

You come back and ground it in the personal, ground it in what we feel passionate about. That's what keeps me on track. (Hilary)

What's happening is you're pulling the stuff out of your system and you can actually label it now...because I knew I knew stuff, but I didn't know what it was, and now, with time, I can say, "oh", I actually knew a lot about "x", and I know a lot about "y" but before it was just mumbo jumbo in my head and I didn't know what it was. (Teri)

MOTIVATION

The motivation to undertake a graduate degree took many forms for the participants.

I came because I wanted the degree and the initials after my name. (Brianna)

Motivation to learn also plays a big factor in all of this. Two people with the same experience may each learn differently based on their level of motivation. (Teri)

I have felt that I am in the middle ranks in terms of my understanding of course materials. This has posed a challenge to me, and served as extra motivation to dig deep and make a solid contribution to the class. (Kordell)

Regarding outside influences, participants said:

My desire to please my father and make him proud of me (in an academic context) caused me endless grief and conflict. (Kordell)

My father wanted me to succeed where he did not have the chance. (Noah)

UNANTICIPATED FINDINGS

The EdD/PhD group raised two issues that were exclusive to them, one of which was then taken back by the researcher to the MA/MEd group for their reaction.

FEELING LIKE A FRAUD

All participants in this group had comments on this issue.

Every year at start up I go through this awful panic. I have so many self-doubts. I think I can't do the work, how am I ever going to manage, I'm not going to be able to do the readings, I'm very intimidated when we go around the class and introduce ourselves and talk about their past, their experiences, and you know I'm almost ill and I go through that for about six weeks. It takes me usually until Thanksgiving before I start to pull together and realize, I can do this, of course I can do this... I've been doing this for eight years and I feel the same way every year and I don't seem to be able to learn from that process. (Anne)

I feel like a fraud sometimes as far as I tell myself, well I have the same kind of feelings, and I tell myself, I can't be that stupid because I've got a master's degree and I've got some level of education beyond a bachelor's, but then on the other hand I tell myself okay I really got that master's degree and it really didn't seem that difficult, gee, what was all this big hype about a master's degree, people with master's degrees aren't that bright. So it's a circular kind of thing, because I feel like I'm a fraud because I don't know what the hell I did to accomplish this. (Almira)

I think too, where I think as a fraud, is where I go back to where I talked about the class issue. I feel like I really shouldn't be here. (Almira)

I mean I've got this paper that says I'm educated but what's it really done to prepare me to do anything? That's why I feel like a fraud, that I'm not really any better prepared now to do anything than I was when I started. (Almira)

I think also these feelings of being a fraud are natural because you're coming in contact with people who do this for a living and have been doing it for a living for quite some time, and they're at a certain level because they keep themselves at that level, you know, being very inward, being very scholarly...you feel a little intimidated. (Noah)

The MA/MEd group was presented with the concept of "feeling like a fraud".

They responded as follows:

I think in a lot of programs that it's very frequent and very common, that whole fake thing. But for some reason, I think here is different in a way, because if I was in an MBA program, I'd feel like a fake like you wouldn't believe. I'm not one of them. I don't want to compete. Here, I feel like I'm changing so much inside that, I'm not a fake that no matter what, I still went through that experiential learning, I still went through that process. It isn't possible to fake it. (Teri)

You said that the PhD students were saying about that whole fraud thing and that's what's really interesting to me, because I hadn't felt that at all, and still don't and, I had shared with you the last session that I actually found the opposite...I've thought back to that many times and that was interesting that so many people here feel that way. I would think that would be an upsetting feeling, so I feel liberated because I can say "I don't know it" and feel okay about that now instead of people feeling that they're caught trying to, feeling that they're a fraud and trying not to act that way. (Brianna)

I think that's what's so nice about here...there is so much encouragement of self-reflection and that it's okay to say "I don't know". You don't have to put on a fake front and say I am the expert in this ...then you're fighting for titles, and fighting for placement in your class and here it's okay and you can let go of that. (Brianna)

THE FUTURE

Another unanticipated finding was that all participants in the EdD/PhD group were very concerned with the future. The researcher found this group to be more introspective than the other group. The MA/MEd group gave the researcher the impression that they were very outwardly driven, wanting the degree for specific reasons, unlike the EdD/PhD group.

What can I do with it? What can I do with it - what's it do for me - nothing! It's just a useless piece of paper and some letters after my name. (Almira)

Yes, yes. That's how I feel. (Anne)

And Anne impresses you as being so together. You'd never dream that she'd have a doubt in her life. And in a way that makes me feel good, not that I want you to feel that way, but my goodness, if she feels that way, no wonder I feel like I do! (Almira)

When I think about the future, then I really feel insecure. (Noah)

These two issues, feeling like a fraud and concern for the future could be rooted in the participants' self-esteem. A further explanation for these particular feelings could be that, unlike the MA/MEd participants, the participants in the EdD/PhD group were all full time students and generally older than the other group. Their motivation to complete the degrees, as indicated earlier in this chapter, seemed to be less career-oriented and more self-focused. They were more probably not working during the pursuit of their degrees, whereas most MA/MEd students remained employed.

SUMMARY

The major themes that emerged from the data are: people are motivated to undertake a graduate field of study for a variety of reasons; degree attainment for the participants is affected by self-efficacy issues, the sources of which can be their own beliefs that they bring *to* the educative process or beliefs affected *by* the educative process; and certain people are able to develop coping methodologies better than others to enhance self-efficacy beliefs about their ability to complete the degree.

What was universal in both groups was the fact that the process of obtaining a

graduate school degree at the researched institution is a profound, life-changing experience.

I definitely feel that I am part of the educative process here and that I have changed as a person...I attribute the change to the people that I have met and opening myself up to new worlds. (Noah)

I don't think you can go through the educative process without changing as a person. (Anne)

If there have been any changes they have been mostly to do with my feelings of self-confidence and self-esteem. (Almira)

After succeeding in this type of work, one gets the sense that one can tackle any topic of interest, and really attain mastery of it. (Kordell)

The clear thing was the confidence within, not only what the degree has been about, what the learning for each portion has been about, what the learning for each course has been about, but where the direction of that is taking you and then linking that together and how you feel about yourself, how you are when you're out there on the soccer field with the kids. (Hilary)

These sentiments, and their broader implications, will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

***“Discovery consists of seeing what everybody
has seen and thinking what nobody has thought.”***

Albert Szent-Gyorgyi

DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

Carl Rogers (1977) has said that “the individual has within himself vast resources for self-understanding, for altering his self-concept, his attitudes and his self-directed behaviour - and that these resources can be tapped if only a definable climate of facilitative psychological attitudes can be provided” (Rogers, 1977, p. 7). The graduate adult education environment is one of the places that can help to meet adults’ “self” needs, in addition to their learning goals. It is an excellent environment for examining the impact of beliefs on individuals, since the process and end result (degree attainment) is the same for all, yet is interpreted differently by each person.

The research project to this point has explored self-efficacy beliefs and the more pervasive self-perceptions on abilities of four MA/MEd students in their first year of study, and three EdD/PhD students. The participants have generated a wealth of data on the subject, along with some unanticipated findings, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Any variances between the groups in self-efficacy or self-perceptions on ability were identified in the previous chapter. Educative processes have also been identified

that the participants believe have enhanced or hindered their progress, which resulted in certain feelings and beliefs by each participant.

This chapter will ground the data in theory and attempt to provide some understanding as to what was observed. Specifically, I will examine: the educative process as a change agent; self-efficacy theory as it applies to this study; and finally, I will summarize the findings within a framework of relevant theory.

As indicated in the previous chapter, the participants in this study are on a journey. The tangible end of the journey is a degree. However, the journey is never-ending because the process of education has a transformative impact on the participants' lives.

THE EDUCATIVE PROCESS AS CHANGE AGENT

For the purpose of the present research, the educative process was defined in Chapter 1 as the process of obtaining a degree at the researched graduate adult education institution. As noted earlier, "knowledge and learning do not easily transfer across contexts. Knowledge and learning have to be understood as inextricably integrated with the setting in which they occur" (Wilson, 1993, p. 73). As such, the learning and knowledge production that occurs as a result of experiences at this particular learning institution may be unique to the institution. As noted in Chapter 5, the participants concurred, reaching a consensus that the researched institution was "unique", and they

questioned whether learning outcomes and extrinsic benefits, such as enhanced self-efficacy would be the same elsewhere.

I don't think the process here is like anywhere else. I think that it is a culture all of its own. (Noah)

I do not think that the "educative process" as defined...is the same as it would be elsewhere. (Anne)

It must be stated that not all learning involves growth or transformative change, and indeed learning may not even occur in some situations (Daloz, 1988; Merriam, Mott & Lee, 1996). It is important to remember that we are discussing the learning and changes in beliefs that were researched and may be occurring at this graduate institution of learning, at this time.

The participants in this study noted that they considered their educative process as a mix of formal and non-formal learning experiences. Merriam, Mott & Lee (1996) note that "experience alone does not produce learning; rather, learning comes about as a result of making meaning out of the experience" (p. 9). As one of the participants in the study notes:

Educative process to me is about learning as I go about my life, learning every day in any interactions with others, my inner thinking, etc. (Teri)

All the participants in this study came into the program with certain goals, among which was the attainment of their particular degree. They each had built up a lifetime

of individual beliefs, which were tested by the educative process. Goal motivation theory does state that “goals operate through self-referent processes [and] it is partly on the basis of self-beliefs of efficacy that people choose what challenges to undertake, how much effort to expend in the endeavour and how long to persevere in the face of difficulties” (Bandura, 1989, p. 1180).

As noted before, obtaining a graduate degree involves the process of going back to school; it cannot help but produce a conscious self-evaluation within each student of ability to academically perform, and a self-measurement of ability relative to others. Since “adults have acquired a coherent body of experience - associations, concepts, values, feelings, conditioned responses - frames of reference that define their world” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5), for the educator it becomes important to understand these situated beliefs and their impact. Some of the participants stated how they initially devalued their own experiences:

It's the department's style to have everyone introduce themselves in the first day of class. I found hearing about everyone's work and educational experience quite unnerving...I felt like everyone knew far more than I did and had far more experience. As a result, I found I contributed less in class than I had as an undergrad. I didn't want to take the chance of saying something that might be wrong and make me look bad to my peers. (Almira)

When I went into [a particular] course and there were these older, seasoned students, you know, because there were a lot of part timers in the [particular] program, where I felt a little bit intimidated because, they had the experience, they'd been there, they knew what they were talking about. (Teri)

For me that's the biggest thing. To be able to really value my own experience, because I didn't. (Hilary)

Rogers (1993) notes that “all individuals, when faced with new material (for example, in a work situation or in an adult education program), make a judgment about the material in relation to themselves. They evaluate it (perhaps unconsciously or semi-consciously) in terms of its compatibility with their own self-view” (p. 201).

The participants provided examples of the general challenges they faced within the school structure and the methodologies they used to overcome them. This led to action, either externally as renewed diligence in undertaking their studies, or internally, such as increased self-esteem, or an awareness of the impact the educative process had on their individual lives.

This cognitive reassessment of the Self is occurring at the researched institution, and is part of the educative process, whether deliberately included or not.

There are times the boat is rocked and the beliefs are put in question. You question your worth...everything. That is just part of the learning process. (Noah)

Maturation theorists would argue that the very decision to return to school is in itself a learning process. Clark (1993) agrees, and ties the maturation process into learning, stating that “transformation learning is, in short, a normal part of our lives and intimately connected to the developmental process” (p. 47).

Returning to school has an impact on the individual's whole life and development

as a person.

Anyone who is doing this is really going against everything that society says is normal. I mean, for one thing you have to put yourself in debt. You have to take away years of your life to get where you want to and I think all of us are really trying to pursue our dream and doing things that people said we couldn't or shouldn't do. (Noah)

Rogers (1993) concurs, stating, "since the expectations which adults bring to the learning process are at least as important as the experience they bring (indeed, the expectations which are frequently built on this experience may be even more influential in promoting or hindering learning), it seems essential to explore the nature of these attitudes, the way they have been built up and how they may be changed" (p. 199). There were two clear examples of this in the present study, as the two women in the EdD/PhD group, for example, had overcome an unsupportive family background and overcome their own beliefs that they shouldn't attend university. Their perseverance to the doctoral level involved a process of change and reflection of their whole beings.

While learning can be defined as "a matter of more fully realizing the nature of a culturally-defined frame of reference or of acquiring new meaning schemes of the culture" (Mezirow, 1996, p. 162), as noted also by Mezirow (1994), Wall (1992) and Merriam, Mott & Lee (1996), meaning making begins with the learner coming to understand something new, based on what they previously knew and understood.

How am I doing? I think I'm doing very well. I'm basing this on how much I'm learning. I have no idea what my grades are going to be. (Teri)

I'm being challenged to think instead of being challenged to absorb and duplicate. It makes me sad in a way too, because I had to wait until I was in my late 30's before it happened. (Noah)

Roger (1993) states that, "All the knowledge of surrounding reality we possess is the result of our own active mental process. In this sense, it is our own construction. Similarly, learning is an active process on the part of the learner, changing that knowledge and understanding" (p. 200). This learning can also change the whole person or it can be "self-contained and specific, involving one dimension of the person's life and not resulting in change in other areas" (Merriam & Clark, 1993, p. 135).

As noted in the summary of Chapter 5, some of the participants in this study very clearly identified the more global context that the educative process had in their lives.

What is also important to note, is that the participants in the educative process perceive and react to the very process they are undertaking. It should be stated again that it's not the actual process we are studying, it's the reaction to the process. We are also talking about how an event, such as obtaining a degree produces a cognition change, or as Mezirow (1996), or Merriam, Mott & Lee (1996) would say "meaning making", which initiates a reaction. "The interpretation of the experience is a crucial factor; the experience in and of itself is *neutral*. This explains how different people can learn different things from the same event..." (Merriam, Mott, & Lee, 1996, p. 9).

Since self-efficacy is defined as a "personal judgment" (Lent, Gore & Brown, 1997), I will now explore how the educative process and self-efficacy theory are linked

and make them applicable to the researched setting.

SELF-EFFICACY THEORY AND EDUCATION

Each person in the study was affected and changed by the educative process in different ways which have a direct correlation to their self-efficacy beliefs.

It should be noted that it was only upon reflection as a result of this study that some participants acknowledged their learning development to date. This increased their self-efficacy in relation to the educative process. Suggestions for enhancement of self-reflection will be discussed in the following chapter.

Bandura (1990) states that:

In the transitions of everyday life, beliefs regarding self-efficacy and environmental controllability are not divorced from experiential realities. Rather, they are products of reciprocal causation. Thus, when people believe the environment is controllable on matters of import to them, they are strongly motivated to exercise fully their personal efficacy, which enhances the likelihood of success. Experiences of success, in turn, provide behavioural validation of personal efficacy and environmental controllability. (Bandura, cited in Sternberg & Kolligan, 1990, p. 338)

Kordell recognizes this, stating “I believe that confidence begets ability.”

As noted in the previous chapter, the participants generally cited ownership of learning as a key factor in enhancing their self-efficacy beliefs. The issue of self-directed learning was seen for a time as a source of lower self-efficacy beliefs, rooted I believe, in anxiety, because it was a new teaching method and not understood by some participants. When the process was better understood and control over the process

increased, self-efficacy around the educative process of self-directed learning also increased.

As noted earlier, Betz and Hackett (1981) have stated that self-efficacy judgments can be changed in four ways: (a) performance accomplishments; (b) vicarious learning; (c) emotional arousal and (d) verbal persuasion. In the present limited study we have individuals whose self-efficacy beliefs should have been modified through their experiences; yet some of the participants still had lower than expected self-efficacy beliefs. Almira, for example, received excellent grades, but broadly attributed these marks, both in her past Master's work and her present doctoral studies, to a sweeping belief of "easy grading by the professors."

As noted in the review of the literature, intrinsic values, combined with extrinsic factors unique to each individual, have an impact on a graduate student's belief system. These produce a unique evaluation of the process of attainment of a graduate degree, which may or may not be based on accurate self-beliefs, and may enhance or hinder academic performance. Earlier I had stated that, since graduate school involves the process of *going back* to school, it cannot help but instigate an conscious evaluation of ability within each adult learner.

Additionally, these self-beliefs are woven into the participants' own motivations for pursuing the degree and their previous life experience; previous academic pursuits; and the myriad of variables that make each person unique. The participants themselves

indicated that the process of obtaining their graduate degree was a profound, life changing event and as such, there needs to be self-efficacy theory that more accurately reflects that.

Comparing the researched institution with Betz and Hackett's (1981) work, the four criteria to modify self-efficacy expectations are met.

Performance accomplishments are indicated by and reflected in the grades that are given to each student. Sometimes the grades are an enhancer of self-efficacy and sometimes not. When grades were considered by the participant to be excellent, there was a corresponding increase in positive feelings. When grades were not perceived to be good, the results were more globally significant to the participants.

Kordell states in his journal:

One experience that had a profound effect on me was during my first course. The first course is really pivotal in terms of determining one's comfort level with a Master's level work. During a break in this course, one student commented that everyone in Adult Ed. gets an "A". This comment really affected me, especially when, in a subsequent course, I got a "B+" and felt like a failure.

Anne concurs, citing an earlier experience:

When I first started my undergraduate degree, I believed more in my efforts than my abilities. I thought if I worked hard enough, put in the hours, did all the required readings and assignments that I would get good grades. When I got good grades, I then attributed them to my efforts. It was not until third year that I started to appreciate my abilities. (Anne)

Vicarious Learning can be accomplished through discourse. "Human beings communicate through continuing discourse to find a best judgment of the validity of a

belief” (Mezirow, 1996, p. 237). Each individual is influenced by others, yet also is an influence, and each individual can effectively develop a perspective, or a change of perspective, through discourse.

I find that there is learning that you can do from your peers and the people in your classes. (Brianna)

As far as people that I meet and my interaction with other students or even being involved with this group for you, that’s part of the educative process and I’m learning through that. That really has nothing to do with my degree. (Almira)

It was interesting to note that the participants in the EdD/PhD group admitted they had wanted to participate in the research when it was first announced, but were excluded from the original parameters. When the parameters were expanded slightly and they were now free to participate in the research, they were thrilled, as they wanted to share their experiences, and also be a participant in the researcher’s own educative process. People enter a program of study with a lifetime of beliefs, but “transformation theory holds that our acquired frames of reference and the beliefs and values that they endorse may be transformed through critical reflection on one’s assumptions and the resulting interpretations validated through discourse” (Mezirow, 1996, p. 237).

The following chapter will suggest ways of furthering discourse among students at the researched institution. If we build on vicarious learning and social discourse, and as previously discussed, assume that learning is primarily a social activity, we can further situate the four principles of self-efficacy change in the educative process.

Emotional Arousal. All the participants, as noted in Chapter 5, were extremely involved in their learning. Each participant stated that his or her learning has been interesting, exciting, challenging or engaging. For instance :

I'd go "Oh my God, this is amazing!" The stuff that I'm learning, I'm just lapping it up, so I'm really on a high right now. (Teri)

It's only when you're in sort of panic mode, that, it's in your reflections afterwards, that you realize how much learning you've had! (Brianna)

Verbal persuasion. In addition to the support and encouragement from the faculty, some of the participants also discussed the importance of support from their peers, to encourage and guide them in their academic pursuit.

I really know that it is more helpful for me to talk with others - this stimulates my ideas and is more helpful to assist my thought development. (Brianna)

Peers are accomplished professionals, learned and articulate. (Kordell)

I took a course that required students to work with a partner for the term paper. We had to meet several times and this gave me an opportunity get to know a student outside the classroom. During those meetings I was able to share some of my fears and concerns about being a graduate student, especially about feeling intimidated by my peers, and discovered that my partner also had similar feelings. (Anne)

In addition, most of the participants indicated that they had outside support through a partner, which helped them in overcoming some of the issues. However, most indicated that they would benefit from sharing school-related issues with someone also

going through the process and indicated that this would particularly enhance their self-efficacy beliefs.

The participants generally were also admiring of the faculty at the researched institution. As noted earlier, the professors were held in great esteem and were also a contributor of stimuli precipitating self-efficacy change, as premised on Lent, Gore & Brown's (1997) definition.

The quality and efficacy of teachers is higher than at other institutions.
(Kordell)

There are times when I listen or watch some of the professors work. My God, she or he is absolutely brilliant. (Noah)

I have the deep feeling that I can do this. This has come from the encouragement of the professors here. (Noah)

What we have then, are the four recognized criteria for modification of self-efficacy beliefs met through the educational processes conducted by the researched institution, and in the adaptive processes the students have initiated and demonstrated in this study.

It must be stated that, since self-efficacy is a judgment, it only has meaning to individuals. If they can perceive in themselves a change, which they may attribute to the educative process, then a change in self-efficacy has happened.

The educative process here has developed my self confidence and built my self-esteem. (Anne)

The educative process here has changed me. Master's level work is painstaking, exciting, and exhilarating. (Kordell)

The results suggest that the participants in this study have identified a relationship between the educative process and their self-efficacy beliefs, which may influence their ability to complete their degree. The results further suggest that some individuals have undergone a more global transformation than a change in self-efficacy. For some, it has been small, such as learning to trust the process, or learning that it is okay to say they do not have an answer. Others have had more significant change. They credit the school for the change, but the change occurred within them.

The educative process has the power to change, not only people's judgments about themselves and their abilities, but also their way of interacting with the world around them.

SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH

The data presented and analyzed has explored: beliefs in ability challenged; the power that small administrative details can have on belief systems; the fear and awe that the faculty inspires in the students and the students' feelings related to that issue; and the perceptions of the students who were able to reflect on their educative process while they were in fact, undertaking it.

From the review of the literature we have seen that learners develop their own meanings in a situated learning experience which have an impact on their attitudes, feelings and belief systems.

Jackson (1984, p. 219) says that “the multiple case study is capable of generating knowledge that is valid, and, in the most important sense, objective. Such a study is based on a dialectical process that moves in the direction of greater understanding”.

The objective of the research was to explore the self-efficacy beliefs of two groups of students - one of MA/MEd participants and another of EdD/PhD students - and to investigate whether the participants perceived a relationship between their own self-efficacy beliefs to complete graduate degrees in education and the educational process they are engaged in to complete the degrees.

The data indicate that the participants in this study believe that a change in self-efficacy occurred while obtaining their graduate degrees, attributed by them to the educative process. Further, these changes in self-efficacy and the more global self-perceptions on ability were believed by the participants to have wider application than degree attainment.

Another objective of the study was to compare responses by the participants in the study to see if there is a perceived relationship between beliefs on self-efficacy and actual ability. As noted in the previous chapters, some of the participants in the study initially had diminished self-efficacy beliefs around their ability, despite having previously

completed either graduate level classes or in fact, graduate level degrees.

By the final interviews at the end of the term, where the participants in the study have recognized that they have succeeded, they expressed correspondingly higher self-efficacy beliefs to complete their degrees. The attribution of success to the educative process may provide a more global sense of personal confidence which was perceived by some of the participants to have broader implications in their lives.

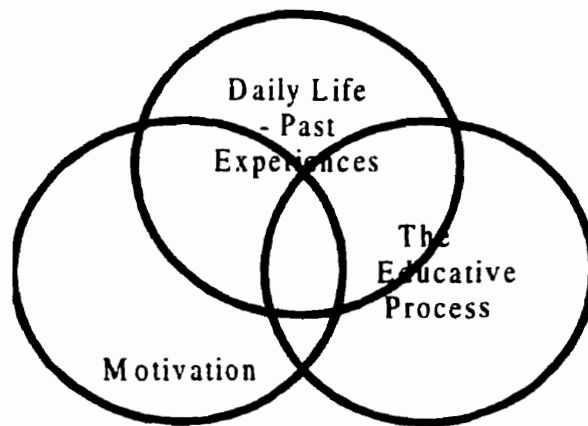
As noted in Chapter 1, another objective was to explore which educative processes the participants feel have influenced their self-efficacy beliefs in their own learning, and examine possible implications and solutions.

The data generated by the participants in the study offer increased understanding of the issues raised by the current research as illustrated by the following example.

Let us assume that an adult learner is about to return to school to study. As such, he or she is motivated by some reason to undertake schooling. They have lived a life that has included many varied experiences and may have included previous schooling. This has made them the unique person that they are. They are therefore entering studies with their own unique makeup as a person, coupled with their own unique motivation for undertaking the schooling. Each of these three components - motivation, life experiences and beliefs, and the educative process about to be entered - has the power to influence belief systems, since "the impact that a particular experience has for a person varies from individual to individual" (Merriam & Clark, 1993, p. 129). As such, an

educational model affecting self-efficacy might be suggested as outlined below.

FIGURE 1.0 SELF-EFFICACY AND EDUCATION MODEL



The centre section, where all three circles intersect, is the locus for self-efficacy judgments, influenced by each of the three circles. Clark (1993) has said that “by construing learning as meaning making that results in a change of consciousness, we can examine the process of learning from a different perspective” (p. 54). Further, “classrooms are environments for the satisfaction of motivations other than achievement” (Gorlitz. 1980, p. 40), so the impact of daily life is influencing school, while success or failure in school in turn, has an impact on daily life.

The participants in the present research have clearly stated that:

- life influences motivation to a degree;
- life influences the school experience to a degree;
- motivation influences life to a degree;
- school influences motivation to a degree;
- school influences life to a large degree.

Where the circles overlap each other indicates these influences.

My illustration expands on Betz and Hackett (1981), in that it provides a more global placement of the factors that influence self-efficacy beliefs, and places them, and the learner, directly in the context of education. Further, since self-efficacy is defined as a judgment to perform a task, the model holds, because any task is influenced by motivation, even of a minute amount, to complete that task. Wilson (1993) concurs, stating “in the situated view, experience becomes activity and takes on a much more dynamic relation to learning. Adults no longer learn from experience, they learn in it, as they act in situations and are acted upon by situations” (p. 75). Merriam (1993) states that “it would seem that a complete theory of adult learning must take into consideration the learner, the learning process, and the context” (p.108). In the participants at the researched institution, this identified engagement among outside life, academic life and conceptual change is clearly illustrated by the data.

Life experiences ground the task, and process is needed to complete the task. Life

and process create a judgment of any educational pursuit. Tennant & Pogson (1995) note that “the self in effect stands in a dialectical relationship to experience, both forming and being formed by the experience it encounters” (p. 169).

I suggest that this model could be used anywhere that an educational process is undertaken, such as in the workplace.

As a brief example that is situated in the workplace, suppose a person suddenly becomes unemployed after having held a manufacturing position for twenty years. Now he finds himself having to be retrained through a government-mandated program. His only memories of school, which occurred outside Canada, were unpleasant and happened a long time ago. His self-esteem is low and his self-efficacy about his ability to complete the educational task at hand is lower still.

The circle with the essential characteristics of this person’s daily life and past experiences is by their nature, fairly static. However, by increasing his motivation and/or making him more comfortable with the educative process, these other two circles move inward on the chart, increasing the overlap of all three circles. This centre overlapping should correspond to increased self-efficacy to complete the task at hand.

The following chapter concludes this study by examining ways in which the educational institution might contribute to such a change, and suggests implications for future research and practice.

CHAPTER 7

***“First say to yourself what you would be;
and then do what you have to do.”***

Epictetus

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The educative process is a process that has the power to change lives. This is effected through the attainment of a degree for career enhancement, but also as an intervention that can be utilized by the student to redefine their very being. As with any powerful tool, it must be used wisely and both the user and the provider have responsibilities to ensure the students' own safety and progression toward program completion.

As such, educators are forced to walk a fine line, in that they have power and influence that can forever affect a student's life. As noted as early as 1974 by Combs, "it is apparent that if the self-concepts a person holds about himself are as important in determining behaviour as modern psychology suggests, then teacher-educators must be deeply concerned with the kinds of self-concepts students are developing" (p. 25).

The present research concurs with similar research done in other fields and demonstrates that certain teaching methodologies enhance performance. This research points out that factors which can increase self-efficacy are not necessarily part of the formal process of learning and may come from unexpected sources, such as

administrative statistics, departmental paperwork completed by the students, or even the freedom to use the “staff” kitchen. The results suggest that it is the environment and not the actual attainment of a previous graduate degree that largely influences self-efficacy, since no major differences in the two groups were identified. In terms of the environment, there are simple ways that the educator can assist in the process of increasing self-efficacy in students. These suggestions are outlined on the following pages.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

THE POWER OF THE “LITTLE THINGS”

As evidenced in Chapter 5, it is sometimes the little things that have the most power to affect people’s judgment about themselves and their abilities. Noah’s transformation in the group and his attendant rise in motivation and perception of abilities about himself, all because of a simple statistic, was a moment that his group was privileged to be a part of, and will not forget. (See Appendix “F”).

Additionally, there was the checklist that the EdD/PhD group took considerable pleasure in completing. Their comments that they were, indeed, proceeding on their journey, was an affirmation and acknowledgment of their own abilities based on a tangible record of their progress. Sometimes affirmation of abilities needs to be first introduced through external factors, before inward acknowledgment can occur. This

research has clearly indicated that “an individual’s own standards of self-evaluation may or may not coincide with the standards that others use to judge his performance” (Sanford, 1976,p. 60).

I defined these as “little things” only to suggest that they may not perhaps be seen by some, including the researcher at the beginning of this study, as having value and worth measurement. I now recognize that these tools can mediate self-efficacy beliefs in students and, as such, deserve recognition and respect.

JOURNALLING/FORMALIZED REFLECTION

Many professors already utilize journalling as a teaching methodology. Through journalling for this research project, the students in the study were able to specifically reflect back on their educative journey to date, and appreciate and acknowledge the process. They welcomed this opportunity. Mezirow (1997) addresses this issue, stating that “self-reflection can lead to significant personal transformations” (p. 7).

It’s given me an opportunity to also compare because I’ve gone through eight years, consecutive years so it’s been nice to reflect back and see where some of the changes, some of the growing, why the changes, how did I react to different educative processes, because they have been different, and I think that’s been good in understanding and seeing myself and the journey I’ve taken. (Anne)

The EdD group particularly wanted the researcher’s questions incorporated into a more formal format.

Now your questions in writing... answering your questions was very helpful. I needed those guidelines and I felt I could address each question and I didn't have to think up what I wanted to write on. So from that perspective, you could. You could introduce it into a segment or even in a research class. (Anne)

You could have a course on it at the same time. (Almira)

I think it would be a very valuable thing to do because I think that we get very blinded by the game that we have here that we don't really question why we want to be here, or how we got here, or how difficult it was and honoring that difficulty. (Noah)

The data suggested a need for a required, non-credit core course at the Master's level, similar to the doctoral support group which is offered, that could be used by the students as a regularly attended forum to discuss issues of concern to them. This course would be taken early in their program. Learning styles could be discussed, as well as methodologies that the student could use to maximize learning from the courses, utilizing strategies that would best suit the individual student's learning style.

It's ironic in an institution of learning. First thing you learn is there's countless learning styles but if an institution favours one over the other, then the people who have a different type of learning style are made to feel left out or odd or you know, uncomfortable and in an institution like that, there should be some kind of vehicle to talk about that. (Kordell)

Peters (1991) states that the "range of individual differences widens during the life cycle, and because of this increasing diversity it is especially important to individualize program options" (p. 235).

First of all, I'm talking about something that's voluntary. I'm talking about something that will improve the efficacy of the student who desires to take it and I don't see it as hand holding...As a teacher, I want my students to have every single tool possible to succeed. Period. There was a criteria to get into this place. The people in here have passed the criteria. So, if I have a deficiency because I haven't been exposed to this type of environment, I don't see it as a big deal for them to offer a voluntary course for people that could, you know, feel more comfortable about the process. (Kordell)

This desire for a foundation course was the result of the self-directed learning discussion outlined in Chapter 5.

MENTORING

In my earlier work on self esteem as it affected the learning process, mentoring was suggested as a way to boost the student's self esteem. It is applicable also in the present study and, indeed, was mentioned by the participants as an educative tool they would like to see in place. Research shows us that "mentors support our best aspirations, challenge us to reach beyond ourselves" (Daloiz, Keen, Keen, Daloiz -Parks, 1996, p. 14).

In hindsight...I may have benefitted tremendously from a mentor-like role. Educationally and professionally, I have always felt strongly the need to have a mentor. (Hilary)

I have learned and grown in areas I never anticipated...I have become much more self-directed and goal focused...This learning has resulted by my own efforts and the mentoring of others. (Brianna)

Fleming (1991, pg. 28) says that “as a training and development tool, mentoring is not new. It has its origins in Homer’s epic poem, the *Odyssey*”. The researched institution has teamed each student with a faculty advisor; however, meeting with your faculty advisor is voluntary. The practicality of formalizing these meetings into required attendance was not explored in this research project, and could probably be handled by an non-teaching educator acting as an academic advisor; i.e., an administrator who is qualified as a professor, whose sole purpose is to act in a counselling/consulting capacity with graduate students.

Both sides would benefit from the mentoring experience. “The mentee develops new skills through the coaching and establishes a new identity” (Fleming, 1991, p. 29). The faculty members experience recognition and feedback for their own ideas. “The interest and respect shown by the mentee builds the mentor’s self-esteem and this in turn may rejuvenate them and increase their creativity” (Fleming, 1991, p. 29-30).

PEER PARTNERS/TEAM LEARNING

Research has indicated that peer partners have been shown to be useful to “help others increase their academic performance” (Gentile, 1984, p. 141). Wall (1992) also identified this in her research, stating: “the real learning has come through relationships with faculty and other graduate students and it is learning about self” (p. 3).

Learning partnerships work very well for me. (Brianna)

I always know that when I talk to a peer I will learn something valuable. (Kordell)

I took advantage of every class opportunity where we had to work in partners, or teams or whatever, to help me through...and that was an opportunity to talk so you knew you weren't alone in a lot of these things. (Anne)

Team learning also emerged from the data as a method of empowerment.

Another experience that has impacted me about how I feel about myself as a student occurred during the first year of my doctorate program. I was taking a research course and initially six and then finally four students worked together on a research project for the term paper. Working as a team and dealing with group issues and dynamics proved to be as challenging as doing the research. But it also provided opportunities to get to know fellow students on an individual and personal level as well as an academic one. I enjoyed the friendships that developed as a result of that experience, and I also appreciated the acknowledgment I received from the other team members regarding my contribution to the research. (Anne)

IF WE DO THESE THINGS... IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STUDENT AND THE EDUCATOR

There is a clear need for a more formalized support system in the researched institution. The research has shown that what is required are ways "to provide vehicles through which students can share and collectively explore their experiences in the various roles involved in being student professionals" (Singer, 1982, p. 47). I did not examine the practicality or costs of any of the suggested methods that may require financial outlay by the institution. Journalling, peer partners and team learning are no-

cost methodologies that have been demonstrated in accepted research as able to increase self-efficacy, and are implemented in *some* classes already.

I propose another model for support. I suggest that a volunteer “buddy system” be implemented in the school, where a student who has completed at least three courses in their program of study (essentially one term), be assigned a beginning student. The beginning student would be able to contact their “buddy” for support and help with questions or problems, or perhaps to find out from their “buddy” the appropriate staff member to speak to who could assist them with their particular problem. This would, of course, be strictly voluntary, since sharing of things like telephone numbers would occur; however, I am convinced that there are enough people in the researched establishment who would be willing to act as a “buddy” and assist new students in their educative journey.

The pairing could continue until the junior buddy is comfortable with his/her journey in the program, at which point s/he could, in turn, become a “buddy” to someone else.

Alternatively, mandatory intake interviews could be undertaken for accepted students, which would serve the same purpose as the voluntary orientation sessions, but be a required component to beginning the school year. These could be undertaken by administrative staff, faculty or both. Given the numbers of new students entering each year, this may be not practical with the current compliment of staff available, but may

again be a role for the administrative professor indicated earlier.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The research presented in this study should be read with the following four limitations in mind.

First, the research participants are from one department at one university. This lack of randomness in selecting participants suggests that one would have to be somewhat cautious in making broader generalizations from this study. The small number of participants in the study further emphasize the need to be cautious. However, this investigation is still important for the reasons outlined in Chapter 1.

Second, the teaching methodology and administrative practices that occur at the researched institution which can influence students' self-efficacy beliefs may or may not occur at other graduate institutions in education. As previously noted, Wilson (1993) states that, "knowledge and learning do not easily transfer across contexts. Knowledge and learning have to be understood as inextricably integrated with the setting in which they occur" (p. 73). In other words, individual growth and learning that may occur at the researched institution may be different if the same individual is at a different school.

Third, my own bias to explore only the concept of self-efficacy needs to be noted. There are other self-concepts that could have been examined, but the limitation to only explore self-efficacy provided a conciseness and depth of research, and highlighted the

areas that I wanted to examine, based on my own history and my earlier research. Further, in any research on self-concept or in qualitative research in general, there is the need to be constantly aware of not having “the answers go looking for the questions” (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 137). This caution emphasized to me the need to have the study be as participant driven as possible, to try and eliminate my own biases about what I wanted to find in the study versus what I actually found.

Fourth, the time in the term in which the data were gathered, and the short period of data collection, may have influenced results. I tried to follow Wieneke’s (1979) example and interview participants as close to the beginning of a term as possible. I also limited my data collection to one term. In the Implications for Further Research section which follows, I propose a longitudinal study for further verification of the present research.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

A further study like this could be undertaken that would track the efficacy of beginning students upon entry into their degree program and continue to track self-efficacy beliefs until the final student graduates or ceases to be in the program. This longitudinal study could be repeated each year with new beginning students. This would be useful, since it would increase the number of participants in the study and provide a fuller picture of the process, rather than just a snapshot, which the present research has

provided. This broader study would provide a wealth of data that the adult educator could then use in program planning, decreasing lapsed candidacy, possibly enhancing student grades and increasing the morale and self-efficacy of future students.

It would also be interesting to undertake a longitudinal study that examines the role of extrinsic or intrinsic motivation in degree completion. This study could also examine performance accomplishment relative to motivation and resultant impact on belief systems.

A third idea for further study at the researched institution would be a longitudinal study based on McClusky's Theory of Margin. The outward impression given by the current study participants is that they have a high degree of capability and confidence. The reality, based on the current research, as well as on the previous study reported, seems to be somewhat different. The educative process is predicated, it seems, on the degree at all costs, including financial difficulties, isolation, and devalued self-concepts. These can be explored using the Theory of Margin. This theory postulates a theoretical relationship between demands and resources available to the adult learner, defined as the margin. The higher the numerical value of the margin, the more energy/resources the individual should have for tasks that can benefit him/her, such as education (Main, 1979). This was not researched with the participants, but is introduced here as a related field for an interesting future study.

CONCLUSION

The participants in this study, while presenting outward appearances of confidence and achievement, by virtue of being in advanced studies, are wrestling with efficacy issues that work against degree attainment. The results were surprising, given the participants' outward appearances of confidence. There are, however, methods that can be utilized to improve their efficacy and perception of abilities that are relatively simple to implement.

Given that I have included selected poems or contemplative thoughts in various parts of this document, it seems entirely appropriate to include another poem over the next few pages, from Almira's journal, which summarizes the journey undertaken by her, and is indicative of the profound life-change that can occur through the educative process.

What if I had stayed in my 9 to 5 job?
 What if I had not plunged into the sea of academia?
 What if
 What if
 What if
 Where would I be?

Would I still be in a 9 to 5 job?
 With no skills---with no hope
 maybe with no job at all
 with a narrow world view
 an "old lady" with no where to go
 no where to go
 no where to go
 no where to go
 Where I was I don't want to be

Where I am is a much better place to be
 I can't imagine me any other place
 I have new skills---I have new hope

My world view has expanded and exploded
 I may be an "older lady" biologically
 and have no job at all
 but where I am is a great place to have gone.

Mentally I am young
 I have somewhere to go
 I look back and say I did it
 I did what I wanted to do
 there is no looking back to say
 what if I had done it
 why didn't I do what I wanted to do
 I did it
 I did it
 I did it

My pockets may be full of plastic
 I may owe my soul to the CIBC
 but I did it
 and I don't regret it
 Yeah persons
 I sure enough did it
 and
 when this earthly journey has ended
 it will have been a better journey for having done it.

Almira

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX “A”
CONSENT LETTER

Dear:

The time has come for me to undertake my EdD research. As a fellow student, I would like your help - by being a participant in my project. Listed below are the details of the research, the kinds of questions I will ask, how you get to see what I am doing and, most importantly, how I will maintain anonymity and confidentiality.

The research question I intend to examine is: **Does the educative process change self-efficacy beliefs and self-perceptions about ability in MA/MEd and EdD/PhD Adult Education students, and if so, how?**

I have been led to this project as a direct result of several papers that I have undertaken while at this institution. I have investigated the topics of self-esteem and the learning process, intellectual abuse in childhood and adolescence, discussed my own personal experience and explored the impact this past has had upon my present studies here. All of these issues influence self-efficacy and self-perception about ability, which have an impact on the educative process, the topic of the present research.

I am interested in exploring these issues with a group of graduate students at this institution, ideally including you; investigating the role of family upbringing in developing/hindering a positive sense of self; and exploring critical incidents in the scholastic past and the effect this has had on you and on your educative process.

This will be accomplished in several ways. We will meet in a group setting, which will provide a forum for generating the required information. This meeting will be audiotaped and videotaped. There will be a series of discussion questions that will be presented to the group, which will be discussed within the group.

There will be a second group meeting, which will re-examine what occurred in the first group session to clarify any unclear issues I may have. We will also discuss new questions which relate to your present studies at approximately the midway point through the winter term.

There will be a third group meeting, which will enable us to reflect on the process that has taken place and to provide proper closure to the groups.

You will be asked to keep a journal throughout the process. In this journal, I would like you to critically reflect upon the process of participating in a group that is examining the very process that you are undertaking. I will also ask you to reflect upon questions relating to the present topic. Your answers and reflections will become part of the research and I require your permission to reproduce your writings in my research.

In the group sessions, you may, at any time, request that I turn off my tape or video recorder, or ask to opt out of the study.

I will ensure that the study maintains confidentiality and anonymity by using pseudonyms of your own choosing. The only people who will have access to the data are myself, my three committee members and a peer reader. The data will be kept in locked storage. At the end of the study, I will destroy the data after a suitable period of time, to be decided by my committee.

The participants in the group meetings will know who you are, but this will not be reflected in the paper, since any direct quotations from the group sessions will only be identified as "participant", and any direct quotations from your journals will be referred to using your pseudonym.

You will be offered the opportunity to review copies of the transcripts that will be made of your interviews. You will also, if you choose, receive a copy of the final thesis.

The research is centered partially around your academic performance, past and present - but not in the context of evaluation - only in the context of perception. I will not be investigating how someone (i.e. teachers) evaluate you - only how you see yourself in your role as student, how this perception has been influenced by your past and how it continues to influence your self-efficacy beliefs and your perception of your own abilities.

I truly hope that you like what you have read above and want to participate in my study. I would like to make it an interesting and enjoyable experience for you, and a learning experience for me. Please indicate below on each of the two copies, your understanding of my study aims and your agreement to participate. I will keep one copy and you receive one for your records - marking our first sharing in this project.

Thank you very much,

CROFT CAMPBELL-HIGGINS

I have read the above letter, understand the content, and understand the goals and objectives of your research. I agree to participate in your study.

DATE

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

APPENDIX “B”

**JOURNALLING FORMAT
AND QUESTIONS**

JOURNALLING FORMAT & QUESTIONS

Name: Pseudonym:

The purpose of this sheet is to provide you with instructions for your journaling experience. These are guidelines only and how you choose to proceed is completely your decision. I only ask that you record something in your journal on a regular basis and that you ensure that the journal is handed back to me at the end of the data collection period, which will be two weeks after the final group meeting.

You may record in your journal any way you see fit. You may write in prose or poetry, or add materials to your journal - what I want is a reflection of “you” during this interactive process with me and some response to the experience.

I would like you to start your journal by recording your initial thoughts about participating in this study, and prior to our first group meeting. Remember that you will be a part of a group of people that will be exploring the “educative process” - in short, you will be critically reflecting upon the very experience you are engaged in - the process of obtaining a degree.

I would also like you to make a journal entry after each group session, where you reflect upon what has emerged from the group and how it relates to you, or how you experienced the session.

The following are questions that I would like you to reflect upon and answer sometime over the course of the study, but prior to the final group session.

1. For the purposes of this research, I have defined “the educative process” as the process of obtaining a degree at this institution. How you would define “the educative process”? Do you believe that this process is the same here as it would be elsewhere? Why or why not?
2. Self-efficacy is defined as “personal judgments about one’s ability to perform a given task”. Do you believe that a person’s judgment about their ability to complete a course, or even a degree, is sometimes not accurate? What factors do you believe may influence these beliefs?
3. Do you believe that self-esteem has any role to play in the educative process? Explain.
4. Do you believe that if a person perceives that they have an ability to do something, that they can actually do it? Why/why not?

FAMILY BACKGROUND

I would like you to tell me about your family. This is important for me, since your past has a direct bearing on your present. I would like you to tell me about your parents and your siblings, which family member had the most influence on your life and why; your birth order; the educational background of your parents; and generally, what life was like for you at home, while you were growing up.

Is there anything in your family history that you believe may influence your present academic journey? These could be positive or negative incidents. As an example, you may believe that a positive sense of self-esteem which came from your formative years is influencing your self-efficacy beliefs and the educative process now. Reflect upon this.

SCHOOL BACKGROUND

I would also like you to reflect upon your prior experiences at school. What would you like to tell me about prior school experiences, as they relate to your studies now? Was the “educative process” different?

PERCEPTION QUESTIONS

1. What was your first reaction when you learned you were accepted at this institution?
2. What are your impressions of the students here? Do you feel like an equal in the student body?
3. What experiences here as a student have impacted most on how you feel about yourself as a student?
4. Do you feel that by being a part of the “educative process” here, you have changed as a person? If so, how have you changed and to what do you attribute this change?
5. How do you see your academic performance, relative to that of other students at this institution? How does that make you feel? What do you attribute your feelings to? What criteria are you using to judge your response?
6. Do you believe your academic performance is the best possible for you and is an accurate reflection of your abilities? What criteria are you using to judge your response?

APPENDIX “C”
QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

QUESTIONS FOR INITIAL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. You have all had a chance to reflect upon the phrase “educative process”. What does it mean to you? Let’s discuss as a group.
2. How related do you believe a student’s self-esteem is to their self-efficacy and self-perception of ability, within the context of the degree? What criteria are you using to judge your response?
3. How did you initially feel when you were first accepted; when you had your first class, and how do you feel now? To what do you attribute any of these feelings?
4. You have been in your program of study for approximately the past four months. How do you believe you have done in the program since beginning? What criteria are you using to judge your response?
5. How have your beliefs about your ability to learn effected your actual learning here?
6. What processes here have assisted you or hindered you in your academic progress so far? What methodologies are you utilizing to enhance/overcome them?

QUESTIONS FOR THE SECOND MEETING

1. It’s been a few weeks since we last met. How are you proceeding in your studies this term? What do you believe are your strengths or weaknesses for completing this term? Where do these beliefs originate?
2. Now that you have had more time to reflect in your journals, how has your experience here affected our beliefs about yourself as a learner?
3. What do you believe will be your challenges to completing this degree program? What role does the approach at this institution play in overcoming these challenges? Have there been any hindrances? Have your own beliefs about your abilities helped or hindered you in overcoming these challenges?

QUESTIONS FOR THE THIRD MEETING

1. Has the process of being a participant in this group and being part of my “educative process” reflected on your other studies? If so, in what ways? Has this group been a form of intervention?
2. Have you felt personally involved in your educative process here? Examples could be input into course content or developing relationships with other students that have helped or hindered your studies.
3. What have you learned about the “educative process” that you can take away from here?
4. Since this group can be considered part of your “educative process”, have you learned anything about yourself by being a participant? If so, what? How does that make you feel?

APPENDIX “D”**FLYER**

PARTICIPANTS WANTED!!

My name is Croft Campbell-Higgins. I am a doctoral student here who is examining students' judgments about ability to complete their degree and the effect this has on their own beliefs as an individual. I will be examining how you perceive your abilities as a student - both your self-beliefs and your beliefs relative to other students; how this perception has been influenced by your past; and how it continues to influence you. This is an opportunity for you to reflect upon the very process you are undertaking - completing a degree at this institution.

You will be a student who began your degree in September, 1998 or January, 1999. You could also be a continuing degree student who is returning to complete your degree after an extended absence. You can be in the MA, MEd, EdD or PhD program. You can also be a full or part time student.

You must be willing to meet once a month here in a group setting, beginning in mid-February, with the final meeting in mid-April. You must also be willing to maintain a journal, which I will provide, of your experiences during this time and be willing to reflect upon questions I will pose to you. These questions will explore your background, experiences and beliefs, in the context of degree attainment.

For more information or to volunteer as a participant, please call me at (416) 421-0692. Any member of my committee - Marilyn Laiken, Peter Gamlin or Budd Hall, would also be happy to briefly discuss my work.

Appendix “E”
CONCERNS

There was an area of concern that centred around the initial desire to videotape the proceedings. The feedback was generally stated as noted by Hilary below.

The first session left me feeling uncomfortable. (Hilary)

In addition, the MA/MEd group raised new concerns after the first session on whether the supervisor for this project would be viewing the raw data. Some of the participants were in her class and expressed concern that they would be unable to speak freely and would be intimidated if Dr. Laiken wished to view the raw data.

After consultation with my committee, it was agreed that I cease using the video equipment, and I obtained assurances from my supervisor that she did not intend to view the raw data, in order to reassure the participants in this group that the members of the committee see only the researcher's written work and not the raw data.

These issues were addressed at the beginning of the second meeting of the Master's group. In addition, there was a brief discussion of the role of the "researcher", since I had never conducted a group meeting before and wished to clarify my role in the process. This initial stumbling is part of my own educative process.

The second meeting of the MA/MEd group fared much better:

At the second meeting I really enjoyed the group. I felt more comfortable without the camera. (Hilary)

It got even better by the final meeting:

The last group meeting was a major improvement from the first one and I enjoyed it tremendously...I was amazed at some of the answers I came up with. (Teri)

I was glad to help another student by being a participant in his research. (Brianna)

After the final meeting, I felt that the group had formed nicely and that we all felt very comfortable with one another...I have enjoyed being a part of the group from a "selfish" perspective. It has allowed me to see research work in action. (Hilary)

APPENDIX “F”
NOAH’S REALIZATION

NOAH'S REALIZATION

During the first group session with the EdD/PhD participants, a transformation in the belief systems of one of the participants, Noah, occurred. The following is the transcript recounting the incident.

ALMIRA Yes, because I figured - the people I'd talked too - if you're already in the system and your marks are good and your research project was accepted as a QRP I would be accepted over someone else maybe who had a master's from someplace else. Maybe I shouldn't have felt that way but I did, but I still also had this feeling - so then when I found out they only accepted six people that year in a doctorate...[emphasis added]

NOAH Really?

ALMIRA Then, I sort felt well...

NOAH Is that right?

ALMIRA That's what I was told.

CROFT That was the same year that you - we both - that was '94 wasn't it?

ALMIRA Yeah.

CROFT Because I was told six as well.

ALMIRA So then I felt a little different and very - oh my goodness!

NOAH Boy that number seems small. Like what is it - 97...

ALMIRA That would be the total.

ANNE MA, MEd

ALMIRA The total.

ANNE EdD

NOAH My God!

ALMIRA So then when I found out I was only six, then my thoughts changed a bit and I thought "Oh my goodness".

NOAH I feel much different now!

CROFT No, there was only, for example, this year, there was only three I think in Teaching and Learning that got accepted.

NOAH Is that right?!?!?

ALMIRA And that would have been in that focus. Six within that focus.

CROFT Yeah, within that focus.

NOAH Okay, well that's my focus!

...

ALMIRA Well, when I applied for the Master's though and I got accepted, when I got the letter, it was utter - I was in a state of shock for a couple of days because I was sure I wouldn't be accepted because I had heard that it was very difficult to get in and I'd heard, you know, all kinds of things.

NOAH Tell me more about being accepted!

...

ALMIRA And I had a "B" average at Ryerson but it wasn't a really high "B". My last year was good, my last year I had an "A-" average but overall it was a "B" and sort of a mid-B and I'd heard that the competition was very high here.

CROFT This has obviously brought up some feelings for you Noah.

NOAH Really, hey, because I didn't...

CROFT Let's discuss.

- NOAH I thought it was like, I thought [the administrative assistant] said 97- there was a seminar where everybody comes in and...
- ANNE Maybe she was saying 97...
- ALMIRA that's the total people starting, in total.
- ANNE the MA program, the MEd program...
- ALMIRA in total, not just in the one...
- ANNE the doctoral programs.
- NOAH But I thought she said there was an astronomical number.
- CROFT Well, 80 for example, is the average number of both MA and MEd students.
- ALMIRA Because I've been on the admissions committee and no way have they ever accepted 97 people in one program in one year...
- CROFT Yeah, that's the whole thing.
- ALMIRA Because I was on the committee for four or five years.
- ANNE So that's the whole thing, is what how many hundreds apply, right?
- NOAH I feel of a hell of a lot more privileged than I did! ...
I'm glad you told me that because perhaps that will push me a little harder.

This is another example, like the checklist earlier, of how a little bit of knowledge, if known by the student, can have a profound effect on their self-efficacy beliefs and motivation to succeed.