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Date November 28, 2000
ABSTRACT

A fundamental aspect of Canada’s social structure is the right for Canadians to get an education. Many agencies provide basic and advanced education/training to individuals, and as a result, people are presumed to have an equal opportunity. This perception of parity for educational opportunity is inaccurate (Courtney, 1992). A vast quantity of research over the last century has shown definitive trends in deterrents to participation. Many social, organizational, and situational obstacles prevent people from taking advantage of educational opportunities and an alarming number of people reach adulthood without reaching their academic potential. Even for those who continue to participate in formal learning activities the journey can be long and arduous. Struggles with internalized perceptions of inability, low confidence, poor home and classroom environment, and dislike of the structure and nature of the formal educational system create hardships.

A narrative inquiry was used to get a thorough picture of participants’ perceptions of past and present events at educational institutions that led to the development of dispositional barriers towards education. This open-ended interview approach enabled the researcher to identify specific negative experiences encountered by 10 individuals in the K-12 formal educational system and assess the resultant detrimental effects. The transcripts of the respondents’ interviews were examined for descriptive passages that characterized their overall negative feelings towards school. These excerpts were classified under social or psychological themes to better understand trends that may lead to dispositional barriers.

From these trends, the most prominent factor that seemed to foster dispositional barriers was the negative environmental conditions encountered by the participants. These conditions pertained to respondents’ concerns over safety, security, and the learning environment. Other factors exhibited were issues of self-esteem, faith in the educational system, attitude towards school, peer pressure, relationships with teachers and support networks.

Although these deterrents posed significant problems for the respondents, the need to obtain academic credentials for professional advancement, validation of personal worth, or to affect transformation for the benefit of others enabled participants to cope with their dispositional barriers. Where five of the 10 respondents are presently in the process of obtaining advanced credentials, two participants believe advanced learning to be disagreeable and will not actively seek further education.

Through self-reflection, participants developed a means to cope with negative internalized feelings towards education. Respondents recognized several factors that were beneficial in beginning to change their attitudes and perceptions towards themselves and education. Participants found it was necessary to acknowledge their negative feelings and perceptions and to counter these with self-affirming thoughts that promoted positive thinking and enhanced their self-confidence to face their uncertainties and fears. Equally important, according to the respondents, was the need to focus upon one’s desired
educational goals and then to search for appropriate programs, and create the circumstances and support networks, necessary to permitted them to achieve their goal.
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CHAPTER ONE

PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION

Introduction

Vast changes in economic, political, and demographic demands over the last 50 years have led to a re-evaluation and re-organization of society. Recent global advancements in telecommunications and technology have significantly affected the economies of many nations. The adult workforce has had to adapt to changes in responsibility and demands in the workplace. In previous generations, education was seen as a means to social advancement and those who completed formal schooling were more likely to secure employment or positions of prominence in the community. Continuous education and training throughout life is now required if one wishes to maintain an active and functional role in society. Adult education has become more and more prominent of late to address the ever-growing demands for educational improvement in a diverse range of specialties. In many cases the decision to participate is voluntary, as adults choose leisure or job-related activities for personal reasons. For others, such as those seeking education to maintain employment or seek advancement, the decision is seen to be mandatory.

Decades of research have indicated that much of adult education is not utilized by the members of society for whom it was originally intended. Individuals with incomplete formal schooling were originally thought to be the ones who would participate in adult education. These individuals, who would benefit most from further studies, do not in large actually participate in continuing education. Individuals who have had success in past educational settings experience positive attitudes and self-esteem, and as a result, are more likely to participate in further education (Courtney, 1992; Rubenson, 1992). The earliest national survey on record found that the amount of formal schooling that an individual has affects later participation. Individuals with more schooling are more likely to seek further education than those with lower levels of academic achievement (Lorimer, 1931). Adult education is most prevalent amongst those currently employed and seeking advancement (Johnstone & Riveria, 1965; Kaplan, 1945; Statistics Canada, 1990). This is significant, since a nation's competitiveness in the global market is now perceived to be partially dependent upon the quality of its human resources. Specialized knowledge, advanced learning, and skilled labour are resources that have become "hot commodities". Human capital, as a result, is being perceived as a critical component of economic development (Rubenson, 1992). A number of individuals are unprepared to compete in the global job market because they do not possess the necessary education or training required, and as a result, often have a lower standard of living.

Literature often focuses upon the need for advanced skills and training by reinforcing the economic benefit of education for those who participate in advanced or further learning. This, however, should not undermine the value associated with leisure based educational programs. Courses taken for recreational purposes can lead to increased confidence and self-worth. When advanced education results in positive changes in an individual's personal circumstance, the potential for increased awareness towards the benefits of education improves and this encourages participation by others. Adult education, in all its forms, serves a vocational function for
economic growth and career advancement and offers personal growth and enlightenment to individuals and society as a whole.

Despite the variety of programs provided and their purported benefits, the patterns of adult participation in education have remained largely unchanged in the last 20 years (Courtney, 1992). Some adults continue their education, while others are hindered or choose not to participate. Significant sections of the adult population, particularly lower socio-economic groups, women with family commitments, mature adults, and undereducated adults, consistently fail to participate in further education—possibly because of cultural, dispositional and social barriers. If the number of people returning to education is to be increased, it is important to understand the processes at work in encouraging and enabling adults to participate. It is equally important to understand why some adults who are hindered by negative attitudes of themselves and the education system, manage to cope with their perceptions and attain their educational goals.

Characteristics and Trends

Need for Participation

With constantly changing educational demands in the global economy, educational policy can no longer be focused only on younger learners. Advances in technology, declining birth rates and a rapidly increasing elderly population places a growing necessity for adult education to fulfill the need for further educational commitments (Rubenson, 1992). Unfortunately, some segments of the population, either from personal choice or due to barriers, are not participating in learning activities. These individuals who lack basic education, skills or qualifications are unable to avail themselves of the full range of educational opportunities accessible to them in today's "scholastic marketplace". This creates a "catch 22" situation. Their lack of certification or prerequisite knowledge prevents them from participating in adult education opportunities which are designed to impart necessary skills and qualifications.

Although Canadians are quite well educated, there are large discrepancies between those who have and those who have not completed formal schooling. Statistics can be strong indicators of educational and standard of living attainments. The 1990 Adult Education and Training Survey indicates that 13% of British Columbians age 17-69 in 1990 had participated in some university course work--suggesting that at the very least--university entrance level education is reasonable. But close to a quarter of the population in British Columbia at that time had not completed high school (Statistics Canada, 1990). It was common in the past decades for individuals to leave school at a young age to help support families. It is not surprising that the data collected indicates that those in the 55-69 age group tend to have attained lower levels of education (Rubenson 1992). In this researcher's opinion, it is expected that individuals will attain at least a high school education and are likely proceed to community college or university. This notion, however, needs to be re-examined as a section of the population continues to drop out of the formal educational system.
Profile of Non-Participants

There is a strong correlation between previous advanced learning and participation in adult education. Individuals who have participated successfully in formal education are more likely to engage in adult education than those who had less successful results or experiences. In general, it is those with educational qualifications and a high standard of living that have dominated adult education. Research on non-participation has shown there are large discrepancies in educational levels, socioeconomic status, gender, and age differences between individuals who participate and those that do not. In general, research has shown that those who do not participate can be grouped into five general categories: older individuals; non-working individuals who tend to suffer from a lack of ready resources; less formally educated individuals who are frequently troubled by past failures or perceive a lack of purpose; lower-position employees who tend to receive less corporate sponsorship and have less personal resources available to them; and blue-collar workers who tend to place less priority on improved education (Courtney, 1992; Statistics Canada, 1990).

One should be cautious of assuming these generalizations are applicable to all members of society. Every individual is unique and experiences life in different ways. It is critical therefore, to consider this uniqueness when trying to understand why individual educational pursuits are unpleasant, discontinuous or simply not sought at all.

Dynamics of Participation / Non-Participation

It is necessary to understand the factors that affect participation and how these influence behaviour if one is to conceptualize why adults do or do not engage in educational opportunities. Although a variety of typologies have been postulated by various disciplines within the social sciences, no one theory of participation has been accepted. (Courtney, 1982; Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982). Models to explain participatory behaviour have been based upon economic / human capital benefits, psychosocial behaviour, health and leisure-based models, motivational and individual goal orientations, retention/attrition perspective and transformational theories. In their own capacity, each of these models present relative and valid points of view. Unfortunately, the scope of participatory behaviour encompasses aspects from all of these factors, so segregating this information gives an unclear and incomplete picture of its foundations.

As the major focus of this study is to increase understanding of factors that prevent or hinder participation, Cross’s (1981) conceptualization of barriers was used as a framework. Her typology is broad and encompasses both intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence an individual’s life. Internal factors affecting participation include self-confidence, attitudes, expectations and motivation. External factors pertain to life circumstances, obstacles or opportunities that contribute or inhibit an individual from participating in education.

Situational barriers arise from individuals’ circumstances and include concerns over a lack of time, money, transportation, and domestic commitments (Cross, 1981; Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982). Dispositional barriers stem from an individual’s personality and perceptions. These
barriers reflect negative views and attitudes individuals have towards themselves and education. Institutional barriers reflect characteristics of the program itself that exclude or hinder participation including such variables as difficulty in accessing information, time of the program, location, and irrelevancy of subject material (Cross, 1981; McGivney, 1990).

Situational and institutional barriers have received widespread attention in literature over the past two decades and many recommendations have been implemented to reduce their impact on individuals and society. More needs to done in this area but attention also needs to be focused upon the dispositional deterrents, which have been largely overlooked.

Dispositional barriers are particularly difficult to research, as people may be reluctant to discuss personal obstacles when interviewed (Courtney, 1992; McGivney 1990). These barriers are private by nature and are often not spoken about openly with others. Often, instruments used to collect data on non-participation focus mainly upon situational and institutional deterrents. This can have detrimental consequences, as it may misrepresent the importance and occurrence of internal perceptions that prevent individuals from seeking educational opportunities. These internalized barriers cannot be overlooked as the Adult Education and Training Survey cite dispositional barriers as “the most important deterrent to training, preventing more than half (52%) of all adults from enrolling in a learning activity” (1990, p. 28). The survey also notes that middle aged adults (age 25-44) were more influenced by these barriers than younger or older adults. Situational barriers placed second in this survey, and were cited by 32% of all respondents with financial considerations as the largest obstacle in this category. Only 16% of respondents in the 1990 Adult Education and Training Survey cited institutional barriers, with lack of suitable programs as the most significant.

Dispositional barriers will be particularly relevant to the research conducted in this study. According to Cross, dispositional barriers are “related to attitudes and self-perceptions about oneself as a learner” (1981, p.98). These include such concerns as a lack of confidence, previous negative experiences in school, and uncertainty or fear of resulting consequences from participating in learning. These barriers, based on past experiences or perceptions, are powerful deterrents to participation (Cardenas, 2000).

Various intrinsic and extrinsic obstacles have hindered participation in adult education by a significant portion of the population and may have subsequently had a detrimental effect upon the growth and development of society. The purpose of this study was to explore dispositional factors that influence participation in formal education. These barriers are less obvious than situational and institutional deterrents but in some ways are more fundamental in accounting for lack of participation. Although some adults are able to overcome these dispositional barriers and forge ahead in both formal and informal educational activities, others struggle unsuccessfully with their feelings and do not actively seek educational opportunities.

It is the researcher's belief that understanding the nature and characteristics of barriers that deter participation in formal learning activities is a crucial step to achieving positive growth and development in the community. An examination of literature in the area of non-participation helps to shed light on the various psychological, social, and economic factors that influence one's decision making process on participation in education. Chapter Two outlines prominent
models that have attempted to provide insight on participatory behaviour and highlights barriers that individuals face when considering educational activities.

Overview of the Thesis

In order to develop an awareness of internalized factors influencing non-participation, it is necessary to understand how dispositional barriers arise. The researcher interviewed individuals with negative perceptions of themselves or of the educational system. Examining information provided by these participants, regarding personal experiences they had while in school allowed the researcher to identify similarities in circumstance that existed between them. During open discussions with the respondents, the researcher was not only able to identify these negative circumstances, but could extract, in specific detail, how the participants believed the situation affected them. With the information this study will allow readers to perceive how dispositional barriers can develop through the eyes of the participants.

Having discovered how and why dispositional barriers had developed within the lives of the participants, the researcher set about determining how these negative influences can be counteracted or dealt with. With this in mind, the participants were asked to identify how they dealt with these barriers in order to continue with post-secondary studies. The information provided by the participants was reported in this study to provide assistance to subsequent researchers in the field of dispositional barriers.
CHAPTER TWO
PARTICIPATION BARRIERS

Conceptualizations of Participation

Studies of participation over the last 60 years have attempted to identify and comprehend the major factors that impact an individual's decision to participate in educational activities. Research has focused upon discovering the specific intrinsic and/or extrinsic factors that influence whether adults do or do not participate in educational opportunities. Many frameworks have been used to study the notion of participation including life cycle, psychosocial, life goals, retention/attrition models, access and motivational orientation typologies. Following is an overview of the history of the main concepts regarding participation and non-participation.

Retention/Attrition Conceptualization

A common approach used in studying participation involves examining individuals who have started an educational activity but do not complete it. Dropout rates in the United States have remained relatively stable over the last century, except for the period during and directly after WW11, when the rate was 45 percent (Tinto, 1982). Studies on attrition in non-degree granting institutions in Ontario have shown similar withdrawal rates (Sarkar, 1993). Vincent Tinto, a well-known researcher in the field of student retention and attrition, developed a prominent model of Institutional Departure (Figure 1). This theory postulates that students not only enter educational institutions with scholastic goals but also with a combination of personal, family, and academic experiences that are consequential in the success of the individual. The institutional environment is a broad network of interactions between various components such as the institutional mandate, student services, staff, faculty, and the student population. The central variables in this framework are personal background, previous academic endeavours, goals and intentions, interactions between student and faculty and faculty and staff, peer interaction, commitment to the institution, norms of the institutional environment, and external commitments.

The Institutional Departure model is beneficial to understanding participatory behaviour as it focuses on both internal and external factors that affect student retention. Through using this model, it has been discovered that academic and social integration are significant influences affecting student retention. The greater the compatibility between the student and the institution, the larger the probability that the individual will continue their educational pursuits. This framework can be powerful in determining what factors encourage continued participation, but it may not be the best conceptualization to determine the reasons for non-participation. The characteristics relating to those who do not begin educational programs may be fundamentally different from those who fail to complete what they start.
Accessibility to Formal Educational Programs

A developing concept within participation research is the notion of accessibility to formal educational activities and programs. Previously, difficulties were encountered in researching this field as a clear definition and understanding of the meaning of "access" did not exist. Recently, scholars in higher education have eliminated this problem by focusing on the economic, cultural, sociological, and psychological factors that affect access and their subsequent effect on participation in formal educational courses. Specifically these factors include the notions of individual characteristics, such as gender, ability, personal aspirations, expectations, and personal background (Andres, 1996; Andres, 1999). In recent investigations studying access, institutional characteristics such as admission requirements, policies, geographic availability and financial aid have also been considered. (Andres, 1999). Each of these influences, whether individually or in combination, affect student participation rates. The strongest influences on successful completion of post-secondary studies have been found to be family background and past learning achievements (Andres & Krahn, 1999). Past success in learning and attainment of a formal education is a powerful predictor of future completion, as those with higher levels of formal education participate in and complete post-secondary educational activities more than those with lower levels of formal schooling. Social class demographics continue to be a good indicator of continued participation, as individuals from higher socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to participate in educational activities than their less advantaged counterparts. Gender effects are subtly changing as men and women are equally likely to participate in
advanced educational opportunities though they make different choices which influence their completion rates (Andres & Krahn, 1999).

These studies reflect both internal and external characteristics and are beneficial in understanding participation rates. However, the approaches based on accessibility do not provide a complete picture of participation as individuals who do not begin educational programs may have characteristics vastly different from those who attend formal educational programs.

**Individuals' Goals**

Another approach, quantitative in nature, studies participants’ personal reasons for returning to education. The Adult Education and Training Survey (1990) reveals that the most cited reason for participation in education was work related and not for personal development. Not surprisingly, statistics in this report indicate two trends: the likelihood that an individual would take a work-related course decreases with age; and those with a lower education level are less likely to participate than individuals with higher academic credentials. About 45 percent of those reporting job-related reasons for participation were hoping to improve their job opportunities or develop their career; while 55 percent were improving job-related skills.

Other studies, focusing on individual’s goals, have suggested more diverse reasons for participation. Veronica McGivney (1990) identified seven goals which individuals hope to achieve by returning to school: knowledge; professional and personal development; meeting employer requirements; meeting new people; helping the community; fulfilling a religious need; and diversion or stimulation. Caution must be used to avoid broadly categorizing individual reasons for seeking educational opportunities.

**Motivational Frameworks**

Researchers have attempted to understand adult participation by developing motivation-oriented typologies that reveal an individual’s personality and characteristics. Cyril Houle’s classic study “The Inquiring Mind” in 1961 was actually predated 30 years earlier by Frank Lorimer (1931) who hypothesized that adult education was not used primarily by those with a limited education to fill in knowledge or skill gaps. Lorimer (1931) and other researchers over the following three decades discovered that previous education is the strongest factor in determining participation in further educational activities (Johnstone & Riveria, 1965, Kaplan, 1945, McGrath, 1938). Kaplan (1945) showed that those with higher socio-economic status participated more in continuing education and London, Wenkert, Hagstrom (1963) discovered that individuals with active lifestyles participated more often in further education than those with passive lifestyles. These findings are congruent with present day research.

Houle’s (1961) work in this field is significant because it has framed the research on participation for the last 40 years. Houle conducted interviews with 22 adult learners and developed a typology consisting of three learning orientations. The first of these is labeled goal-oriented, and describes participants who use education as a means to achieve a purpose, or respond to a personal need. The second orientation, activity-oriented, includes adults who participate for the sake of the activity itself and the social interaction which occurs in a learning
environment. Learning-oriented, the final category, pertains to adults who are enrolled in education to seek knowledge for its own sake. Researchers have used this typology as a foundation from which to study motivation and trends on participation began to emerge.

Using Houle's typology, Sheffield (1964) discovered five motivational orientations to participation. These were: (1) seeking knowledge for its own sake; (2) participating for interpersonal or social meaning; (3) meeting personal objectives; (4) accomplishing societal or community goals; and (5) developing intra-personal meaning during the circumstances surrounding the learning. These orientations, and those of Houle, came under criticism due to the composition of their samples. The participants in both studies were composed of a homogeneous group and as a result, the motivational orientations identified could not be generalized to other participant samples, especially those from other countries.

The work of Boshier (1971) is notable as he endeavored to further develop Houle's typology and construct an instrument to measure motives for attendance that could be generalized cross culturally. Boshier developed the Education Participation Scale (EPS-F (First)-Form) and discovered seven motivational orientations from New Zealand learners that promoted participation in further educational activities. These were interpersonal improvement; inner versus other-directed advancement; social sharing; conformity; self-centredness versus altruism; professional future orientedness; and cognitive interest. In 1976, his research was translated into Spanish, Portuguese, German, and Chinese and in 1982 was printed for commercial use. Boshier found the EPS (F-Form) limiting as it was based on a small culturally-biased data set and he wanted to eliminate the middle class ethos, from which Houle's typology was founded. In 1991, Boshier researched over 800 subjects from North America and Asia and compared interview data and "estimates" of motivation from independent researchers to actual EPS scores. He discovered that the three methods correlated and that seven factors emerged. These were communication improvement; social contact; educational preparedness; professional advancement; family togetherness; social stimulation; and cognitive interest. Through his research, Boshier developed a new 42-item scale (EPS-A(Alternate)-Form) which continues to be widely used today.

Morstain and Smart (1974) tested Boshier's original Educational Participation Scale [EPS (F-Form)] from New Zealand by administering it to over 600 students enrolled in adult education classes at a university in the United States. They wanted to determine if there were significant differences for participation when adult learners were categorized into sex-age groupings (up to age 20, 21-40, and 41+). Six major categories of reasons for adult education participation emerged: social relationships; external expectations; social welfare; professional advancement; escape/stimulation; and cognitive interest. Morstain and Smart found that more importance was placed on professional advancement, cognitive interest, and to a lesser extent, social welfare. Relatively lower in importance were external expectations, social relationships, and escape/stimulation. In general, this pattern of perceived importance was similar for each of the six age-sex groups. There were differences within the overall pattern, however, with social relationships declining in importance with age. The desire to meet new people and engage in group activities seemed more important to men and women in the youngest age group. Sex differences appeared, with external expectations being more important to men (usually related to career responsibilities) than women in every age group. The importance of social welfare remained relatively consistent to men across all age groups but for women it declined with age.
Women had higher scores compared to men on the cognitive interest dimension with the difference between the genders increasing in each ascending age group. Few differences were exhibited among sex-age groupings in the other three categories. These motivational orientations correlate closely with Boshier’s (1991) findings.

In the 1980s, Boshier and Collins (1983, 1985) tested Houle’s typology to assess its longitudinal validity and relevance in society. Data from over 13,000 participants from Africa, Asia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States was collected. They discovered Houle’s typology was still a valid framework but that it needed modification. Houle’s goal orientation corresponded with professional advancement motivations and his learning orientation corresponded with motivations in the cognitive interest dimension. Boshier and Collins (1985) discovered, however, that the activity orientation was too narrow a classification and divided it into community service, external expectations, social contact, and social stimulation.

Motivational typologies are useful in understanding some of the psychological characteristics of learners in relation to their reasons for returning to school. They provide, however, only a partial explanation of the phenomenon of continuing with education. Shortcomings include the assumption that adult learners are easily placed in one category and that this remains static. Reasons for participation within an individual can be diverse and may change over the span of the educational program. Additionally, motivational typologies fail to include the role of an adult’s personal situation. Life circumstances can be more influential in determining participation than goals or motivation.

**Barriers or Deterrents to Participation**

The last two approaches to participation focused upon an adult’s return to school in terms of intrinsic factors, or individual psychology. Extrinsic factors, however, also influence an individual’s decision to engage in adult learning.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s focus shifted to internal and external barriers that prevent or restrict an individual’s participation in learning activities. Numerous reasons were identified that influence adults decisions for not participating in the educational opportunities they desired for career or personal development. The Adult Education and Training Survey made reference to the fact that in 1990, “13% of Canada’s adult population wanted to participate in adult education activities for job-related or other reasons but did not. Non-participants in adult education accounted for 59% of this group” (Statistics Canada, 1990, p. 27). Adults often cite more than one reason for non-participation, and the research literature indicates that lack of time and cost are the two most crucial factors (Statistics Canada, 1990; Malhotra, Sizoo, & Chorvat, 1999). Information of this nature sparked researchers to discover the root causes of non-participation or intermittent participation.

With the intention of extending the work of Johnstone & Rivera (1965), Cross (1981) examined the literature on participation and non-participation and classified barriers into three categories: situational, institutional, and dispositional. According to her typology, situational barriers include finances, transportation, and domestic commitments that inhibit one’s ability to participate.
Institutional barriers are deterrents built into a program that hinder participation such as location, time, and subject matter. The final category, dispositional barriers, reflects an individual’s negative perceptions and attitudes toward learning and themselves. Independently, each type of barrier can decrease the likelihood an individual will participate in education. Cross does not believe the parameters of the categories are solid but envisions them as fluid in nature and interact with each other.

Cross (1981) continued her literature search and focused on the work of four prominent researchers in the field of participation/non-participation. She examined Miller’s (1967) Force Field Analysis, Rubenson’s (1977) Expectancy-Valence paradigm, Boshier’s (1973) Congruence Model, and Tough’s (1979) Anticipated Benefits Theory. From this review, Cross (1981) developed a Chain-of-Response Model (Figure 2) to explain participation in adult learning activities. In this model, an individual’s participation in an educational activity is not an isolated event, but the result of a complex chain of responses between a person and their environment. Participation is explained as a process that begins internally through self-evaluation, and then is steadily influenced by external factors. The decision to participate or not is initiated with a personal examination to determine the current need for personal growth or advancement. Attitudes about education, which arise from the learner’s past experiences and those of their friends and family, play an important role in the decision to participate and these. If an individual’s attitudes are negative, one is less likely to volunteer for further educational training. The next step in the process involves assessing the importance of personal goals or expectations and determining whether the learning activity will achieve the desired results. Life transitions, the third influence, play a role in determining participation because dramatic changes in one’s circumstances, such as the loss of a spouse or job, may require the need to obtain new knowledge or skills. Opportunities and barriers, the fourth consideration in this model, reflect external influences that may enable or inhibit direct participation regardless of one’s motivation. The final influence upon an individual is the availability of information on opportunities. If one does not know of learning programs they will obviously be unable to participate.

As is shown in Figure 2, the influences which may affect the decision to participate in education are not isolated from one another. Intrinsic and extrinsic factors clearly interact and combine to either encourage or inhibit further learning.
Cross's conceptualizations on motivations and barriers to participation inspired others to investigate why individuals do not take advantage of educational opportunities. Scanlan and Darkenwald (1984) devised a Deterrents to Participation Scale (DPS) which they administered to 750 allied health professionals. They discovered six major deterrents that inhibited participation. These were disengagement (boredom, apathy); lack of program quality; family constraints; cost; lack of benefit achieved through the program; and work constraints. With the exception of work constraints, Scanlan and Darkenwald (1984) noted that all categories were strong indicators of barriers to participation.

Later researchers used Scanlan and Darkenwald's scale with a variety of sample populations and discovered similar results. Hayes (1988) used a modified version of the Deterrents to Participation Scale (DPS – LL) to establish a typology of deterrents to adult basic education. She discovered five major categories of barriers which included low self-confidence; social disapproval; situational barriers; negative attitudes to class; and low personal priority. As is clear by the history outlined above, a noticeable trend in the field of non-participation has developed over the last 20 years. Although individual researchers have discovered minor differences in the strength of the barriers, the same barriers are consistently noted. McGivney (1990) reviewed the research on this subject and identified the ten most cited deterrents in the literature. By frequency, they include lack of time; school experience; lack of money; distance from facilities; lack of daycare; lack of daytime opportunities; perception of irrelevance of education; lack of transportation; and reluctance to go out at night. The strength of Cross's (1981) three categories of barriers is revealed here as the above listed deterrents all fall within the framework of situational, institutional, and dispositional barriers. This explains why her typology remains well represented in the literature today.
Conclusion

Rates of participation in adult education and training did not grow during the 1990s (Statistics Canada, 2001). *A Report on Adult Education and Training in Canada: Learning A Living* is a detailed analysis of the 1998 Adult Education and Training Survey (AETS) by Human Resources and Development Canada. The AETS main objective was to measure participation in education and training. Although the AETS did not measure dispositional barriers, it is possible to get a sense of their crucial role in participatory behaviour. In 1997, 72% of Canadians did not pursue formal education or training and a large proportion of these non-participants (87%) did not contemplate doing so (Statistics Canada, 2001).

Regardless of one’s position, background, past academic performance or personal affinities, participational barriers are influential. The ability to overcome these barriers and continue with educational activity can be attributed to external influences such as financial or emotional support from others or by internal influences such as strength of conviction or personal outlook/perspective. A lack of either positive intrinsic or extrinsic influences reduces participation in educational activity.

The Adult Education and Training Survey indicates that one in five adult Canadians continue their education and invest time and money into improving themselves for personal motives or career opportunities (Statistics Canada, 1990). This is an encouraging statistic but begs the question why the other 80 percent of the adult population are not participating. For some individuals, it can be postulated that there may be no need or desire to participate in an educational activity. For others, however, there may be barriers deterring them from obtaining the education they want. It is possible, through changes in the either the educational institutions or learning programs, or with an individual’s personal circumstances, the situational and institutional barriers can be overcome. The internalized dispositional barriers are often more difficult to conquer and can be present within both participants and non-participants. Fortunately, some people have enough personal resolve and support to overcome these barriers. For those who lack this intrinsic spirit, or emotional support, these barriers can seem insurmountable.

In an effort to better understand dispositional barriers on participatory behaviour, a study was conducted on 10 volunteers whose past educational experiences fostered negative attitudes towards continued participation. The respondents were asked about negative circumstances they experienced during their K – 12 years in school, the effect this had on their lives and future educational pursuits, and recommendations for changes to a more equitable and enjoyable learning experience. The following chapter outlines the methodology and framework behind this study.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

All research requires appropriate strategies to yield plausible results. This chapter outlines the data collection processes in order to identify and understand internal factors that account for interruptions or cessations in formal learning activities after the K-12 educational system. Particular focus was placed on individuals’ unpleasant school experiences to increase the understanding of negative feelings and perceptions that develop. This led to interviewing 10 ethnically mixed male and females on their experiences at school, and the institutional, situational, and psychological barriers they encountered. The purpose of the study was to:

- identify unfavorable learning situations that induce dispositional barriers;
- understand the effects of negative situations on an individual;
- examine how barriers facilitate change within an individual;
- ascertain conditions which enable individuals to continue with formal education despite past negative experiences.

In obtaining this information, two main research questions were explored.
1) What dispositional barriers are perceived by adults to hinder their participation in adult educational activities?
2) What needs to occur for individuals to pursue further educational activities?

Framework of the Study

Respondents had either discontinued formal participation or were currently striving to overcome dispositional barriers in order to pursue higher levels of education. The study involved interviewing adults who had had negative experiences in the K-12 school system. Participants were probed about the nature of their past learning environments, the effect these environments had on them, conditions that enabled them to overcome dispositional obstacles, and recommendations for improving formal education. Data collected from interviews were analyzed to identify common themes in respondents’ experiences and perceptions. Patterns that emerged were used to identify conditions that produced dispositional barriers in participants.

Research Procedures

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry, a form of qualitative research that values each respondent’s voice and the sharing of their personal perspectives, was used in this study. This type of research allows individuals to reflect on their experiences, create meaning, and envision future possibilities.
Narratives occur naturally in life and help people attach meaning to life's events (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). As a story is told, and questions are asked, the meaning of a story becomes clearer for the teller as well as the listener. "People live stories, and in the telling of them reaffirm them, modify them and create new ones" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 415). "Lives can be understood, revealed and transformed in stories and by the very act of storytelling" (Sandelowski, 1991, p. 161). It is important to acknowledge, however, that in analyzing these narratives the researcher must accept the context to be "true" and all conclusions drawn thereon can only be as valid as their source. This does not invalidate the information drawn, as the narrators' perceptions of events within the story are true to them and duly influence them accordingly. This only implies that those interpreting or using the findings should show caution.

Stories that individuals tell about the formal educational system "bring theoretical ideas about the nature of human life as lived to bear on educational experience as lived" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 3). Sharing stories, therefore, provides a way for others to question their own stories and to raise their own questions. The narrative is a way of "characterizing the phenomena of human experiences..." (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.2) and unique voices allow for new kinds of understandings. The use of narrative inquiry for studies on educational experience is not new. It has a long history in education because humans are "storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). The study of narrative is the study of how individuals experience the world. Education is the "construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories; teachers and learners are storytellers and characters in their own and other's stories" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). Narrative inquiry was chosen for this research project, as it is a methodology that allows individuals to share their experiences in an open and safe manner and allows them to reflect upon their life and build a bridge towards the future. Participants had the opportunity to explore circumstances and recommend changes to the formal educational system that may motivate them or others to participate willingly in further educational activities.

**Data Collection Procedures**

A semi-structured interview was used to collect detailed information regarding respondents' experiences. The interview guide combined both open-ended and closed-ended questions (Appendix 1). The open-ended questions enabled participants to describe their experiences in their own words, revealing comprehensive information that is often lost due to restrictions imposed by scaled or closed-ended questions. Open-ended questions were used to gain insight into individuals' perceptions of themselves and also of the conditions required to improve the quality of learning environments. The order and phrasing of the questions varied slightly with each participant. This was necessary as the conversational nature of the interview required the researcher to be flexible to permit subjects to reveal personal details in their own way. Closed-ended questions were used to obtain demographic characteristics for comparison purposes. Previous research on participation/non-participation has shown large differences in educational levels, socioeconomic status, gender, and age between those who willingly participate in formal learning opportunities and those who do not. Personal questions can be uncomfortable for respondents, so these questions were asked at the end of the interview to ensure adequate time was allowed for a rapport to develop between researcher and participant.
Interview Protocol

Private, one-on-one, in-depth interviews constituted the data collection strategies. Interview sites were located both on the University of British Columbia campus and off, depending on the preference and circumstances of the participants. Specifically, three of the interviews took place in private rooms on campus, three took place at the residence of the researcher, and four took place at the home of the interviewee.

Each interview took approximately 45-50 minutes and began with a brief description of the background and purpose of the study. Participants were then asked to read and sign an informed consent form (Appendix 2). The researcher then described the format of the interview and told respondents they would be asked about their experiences in the K-12 educational system. Every interview started with an informal conversation to put the participant at ease. Before the “official” questioning began, the interviewer assured participants they were permitted to refuse to answer any of the questions.

Open-ended questions were used at the beginning of each interview to help relax participants and guide the flow of the conversation. A relatively natural rapport developed during each interview. This is important in qualitative research, as interviews should approximate a regular conversation with minor variations (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The rapport led to a trusting atmosphere that allowed participants to divulge personal feelings and information in response to queries. Questions were put differently for each respondent depending on the circumstances of the participant and how much the participant revealed on their own. Clarification was sought on specific points and probing questions were asked to encourage elaboration. Questions outside the interview guide were posed to follow the flow of the conversation. The researcher used information obtained in initial interviews to inform and adapt subsequent interviews.

All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. Field notes were written as soon as possible after the interview to ensure that observations and “gut reactions” were recorded.

Sampling Technique

A purposeful sample of 10 individuals who encountered negative situations in the K-12 formal education system were interviewed. The sample was started with the researcher discussing the nature of her thesis with fellow students at the University of British Columbia. Several of the investigator’s colleagues contacted individuals, whom they believed, held negative perceptions of school. To increase the sample size, at the conclusion of each interview, initial informants were given an introductory letter (Appendix 3) describing the study and were asked to give it to individuals they thought might be interested in participating. Contact information was provided in the letter so those who were considering volunteering could contact the researcher and ask questions. To elicit further volunteers, the investigator sent an e-mail on the Educational Studies student listserv describing the study requesting assistance from fellow students in forwarding the e-mail to anyone who might be suitable.
Participants were chosen based on the requirement they had experienced negative situations in the K-12 educational system and that these individuals believed they had developed poor attitudes and perceptions towards formal learning as a result. Sampling continued until saturation was reached. The researcher determined saturation had occurred after 10 interviews based on the fact that upon coding no new themes were revealed through the discussion with informants.

The techniques chosen by the investigator were effective approaches for reaching a population base that is difficult to access. Dispositional barriers are personal in nature and it is hard to find volunteers willing to share private stories. The methods used allowed initial respondents to identify potential participants who the researcher would otherwise not have access to. Having informants contact the researcher allowed potential respondents to remain anonymous until they decided to participate.

Data Analysis

The audiotapes of the interviews were transcribed verbatim with the exception of identifying information, which was removed. Thematic data analysis was used in accordance with procedures outlined by Morse and Field (1995). Using this methodology, the entire interview transcript was read to obtain an overall sense of the respondent's narrative. Once the overall theme was grasped, a second reading was done immediately afterwards with the intent of identifying recurring ideas. A series of descriptive themes was then isolated for recording and categorizing on a separate memo sheet. A final examination of the transcripts was completed immediately thereafter where the relevant passages indicative of the emerging themes were coded. At this point, it was necessary to reflect upon the initial classification of themes and the relationship between the resultant codes. Minor adjustments to the coding scheme were made at this time. After the first five interviews were conducted and analyzed, the researcher's thesis committee reviewed the results and made suggestions regarding the interview and data analysis processes.

Five of the transcripts and a thematic template were given to a second rater for coding, to maintain objectivity in the analysis. Inter-rater reliability of 80-90% is required before analysis is deemed suitable to proceed. Initially, 82% reliability was obtained, but there was confusion concerning the parameters of two of the descriptive categories. The categories were redefined and 94% inter-rater reliability was obtained during the subsequent coding process.

Rigor

The issue of rigor within the qualitative research paradigm is contentious. Progress has been made regarding the legitimacy of the qualitative approach to inquiry, but there is little agreement on the "standards" of rigor. Lincoln and Guba (1985) are well known authors who have put forth criteria for evaluating the trustworthiness of qualitative research. These include (1) Truth value or Credibility; (2) Applicability; (3) Consistency; and (4) Neutrality or Confirmability.
Credibility is similar to internal validity in the quantitative paradigm, as only one tangible reality is measured. In qualitative research however, multiple realities are recognized. Researchers in qualitative studies ensure credibility through accurately reporting the perspectives of the participants. This was done in the present study by carefully interpreting the meaning of the narrative provided by the respondents and multiple reviews of the data to ensure that the essence of the participants’ views were reflected in the codings. Inter-rater reliability was also used to verify the accuracy of the descriptive categories that were developed. Though inter-rater reliability does much to alleviate the influences of double hermeneutic interpretation – interpreting others interpretations - one must still acknowledge that the investigator’s interpretation may have a confounding effect upon the data.

Applicability refers to the appropriateness, or generalizability in quantitative terms, of the findings to other contexts, settings, and groups of individuals. Different qualitative approaches are aimed at developing different kinds of knowledge, and as such, a generic set of principles/procedures cannot apply across all qualitative research. This study was based on an idiographic interpretation, which is concerned with the interpretation and meaning of a limited set of cases (Morse & Field, 1995). The intent was not to generalize, so this criterion does not serve the purpose of this study. However, there may be implications for similar populations and settings where the data obtained within this study may assist in providing useful sampling to expand future analysis of dispositional barriers.

Consistency refers to whether findings are consistent if the inquiry is replicated with the same sample or in a similar context. Within the qualitative paradigm there is the notion that there are multiple realities and that the human experience is unique. As a result, replication of identical results is not anticipated, but rather, variation is expected. Even if one were to interview the same participants, the results may be different. This is because the act of telling a story and reflecting on it can create a transformation within an individual (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Sandelowski, 1991). Consequently, the notion of consistency put forth in Lincoln and Guba’s model is less significant to this investigation.

Confirmability relates to the neutrality of the data and its interpretation. Qualitative research is never completely free of bias but investigators try to ensure trustworthiness by identifying, recording, and reflecting on their biases. To increase neutrality, the researcher used a memo procedure to record preconceived ideas on the affects dispositional barriers would have on individuals. It was valuable to refer to these memos as subsequent analysis proved several of the assumptions to be incorrect. If these notions had not been recognized, and considered, they could have biased the results. Without examining preconceptions, there is the possibility of unconsciously interpreting data based on assumptions.

The memo was one of several that were maintained throughout the data analysis process. Memos were used to keep track of developing themes, insights, and categories, and included information on the researcher’s decisions and the rationale behind them. These memos provide an “audit trail” which allows others to understand how the findings were drawn. A clean version of the information from these memos is in Appendix 4.
Also to ensure rigor, a thorough literature review was conducted to confirm that the findings were congruent with existing knowledge. Literature on barriers, developmental psychology/psychosocial theory, and interpersonal relationships was woven into the findings to help explain the results.

Limitations

All research suffers from various limitations which require consideration when assessing its interpretations. The first of these relates to unwanted influences that may exist within the data. Investigators strive to eliminate biases, but qualitative research is never completely free from them. Researchers using the qualitative paradigm endeavor to make their biases transparent to readers rather than to eliminate them. In accordance with this, the investigator’s decisions and processes regarding sample recruitment, data collection and coding were documented. The use of a second rater for data analysis ensured the findings were not derived from the researcher’s conscious or unconscious inclinations or assumptions.

Another limitation relates to the sampling technique employed. A purposive, snowball sample was obtained through having participants procure volunteers. Participants recruited through this method were likely to know each other and have similar characteristics and experiences. Consequently, the sample may be biased and not representative of the general population.

The final limitation is reactive bias. Participants sometimes change their answers in accordance with extrinsic factors that occur in interviews. Respondents may have been influenced by the background information provided by the interviewer, the nature of the questions, or the body language and tone of voice of the interviewer. As a result, the findings should be considered as partially biased.

Ethical Considerations

Only members of the general population, age 19 and above were included in this study. Initial respondents were provided with an introductory letter (Appendix 3) which they were asked to give to potential volunteers who met the criteria. The letter advised candidates to contact the researcher if they were interested in participating. If anyone did contact the investigator, no obligation was placed upon the individual to commit to the study. If an individual chose to continue, a time was set for a meeting.

At the beginning of the interview, participants were asked to read and sign a consent form which outlined their rights and the purpose and procedures of the study. The informed consent letter also provided contact information for the Director of the University of British Columbia Research Services in case subjects had any concerns about their rights or treatment. After participants signed the consent form, the researcher verbally informed respondents their participation was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Individuals were assured of their right to refuse to answer any question.
The interviews were conducted in private to ensure confidentiality. Several of the interviews were interrupted by people passing through the room. The researcher at these times asked the participants if they would prefer to stop and continue the session at another time or carry on. All of the participants opted to continue.

The survey constituted only a ‘mild risk’ for respondents because personal and potentially sensitive issues were raised during the interview. Subjects might have experienced psychological discomfort as past memories of experiences in school were discussed. The researcher informed participants that breaks were permitted during the interview if desired, and a reference sheet with contact information for counselling opportunities was available if subjects requested it.

On the positive side, the literature indicates that individuals may find sharing their experiences with others to be beneficial and therapeutic. Individuals often find it cathartic to tell their story and have their feelings acknowledged and valued. Another potential benefit of participation is that individuals have opportunity to build a bridge to the future. Respondents were asked to discuss and reflect upon changes they would like to see in the formal educational system and what circumstances would motivate them to pursue further educational activities. The data gathered can inform possible changes in the K-12 system and therefore be beneficial to the participants and others.

A final note on ethical considerations regards confidentiality. Although the intention of the researcher is to disseminate the results of the study, the anonymity of the participants was ensured during the transcribing and coding process and all names and identifying information were removed. The audiotapes were transcribed onto a computer and were password protected. The data and audiotapes were kept in a locked cabinet by the researcher and paper copies of data will be shredded after a two year retention period.
CHAPTER FOUR
RESPONDENT VOICES

Intrinsic and extrinsic obstacles hinder participation in adult education for a significant portion of the population (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982). Both the personal growth and professional development of respondents were adversely affected by negative situations encountered in school. Some respondents have struggled with these barriers and pursued formal and informal educational activities. Others continued to encounter unpleasant learning situations that resulted in intermittent patterns of participation.

Participant Demographics

The study consisted of 10 people - six female and four male. The ages for the sample ranged from 29 to 57 with the average being 40. Educational levels of the respondents ranged from the completion of a community college diploma to a master’s level education, with five of the participants currently seeking a graduate degree at either the master or doctoral level. Household income of the respondents was between $0 and $130,000 per annum.

Participants were chosen based on ability to articulate their experiences and their willingness to share their personal stories. Selection of respondents was based upon an individual’s experiences in the K-12 educational system. As the investigator was interested in examining dispositional barriers, it was imperative candidates had developed negative attitudes and perceptions while in the formal school system. All perspective participants were questioned, upon initial contact by phone, about their past experiences in education. Initially, the investigator felt it may be difficult to screen participants due to the personal nature of the subject being studied. Respondents, however, freely revealed dispositional attitudes as they discussed their past and current educational experiences. None of the potential respondents, who contacted the investigator, were excluded from the study. This may be explained by the technique used in advertising for participants. The investigator began by explaining her thesis to colleagues at the University of British Columbia. Many of these contacts took an initial letter of contact form (Appendix 3) and gave it to individuals they knew. The investigator also sent an e-mail out on the Educational Studies student listserv describing the study and requested assistance from fellow students in forwarding the e-mail to anyone who might be suitable.

Sampling continued until theoretical saturation was reached. The researcher determined saturation had occurred after 10 interviews. This decision was based on the fact no new data was revealed through discussion with the last several informants. Through the coding process, the repetition of themes became more prominent and a lack of new themes became apparent as the information revealed by respondents repeatedly fell into the categories previously mentioned.

The small sample size made demographic comparisons difficult. Although the sample is technically ethnically diverse by ancestry, it would be more accurate to note eight participants identify themselves as Caucasian and nine have lived most of their lives in a Western culture, either in Australia or North America. The shared “mainstream culture” made any comparison
based on ethnicity void in the opinion of this investigator. There were few differences based on
gender and age. Participants involved in full-time studies reported the lowest financial means, as
they either had to live off savings or work part-time to support themselves.

As stated earlier, individuals who experienced negative situations in their schooling were sought
for the purpose of examining pre-adult factors related to non-participation. In previous research,
distinctions based upon level of academic achievement have been made between individuals who
experience barriers to participation and those who do not. Often individuals who participated in
any form of education beyond high school were categorized as participants and were not
considered to experience dispositional barriers. Only individuals labeled as non-participants, due
to lack of educational pursuits, were factored into data analysis as people who experienced
barriers. Based on past research it would be anticipated individuals with dispositional barriers
would have low rates of participation in further education. This study clearly identifies, however,
the same dispositional barriers may exist in individuals entering advanced studies and that closer
scrutiny into the effects of dispositional barriers may be required.

To test this assertion, the researcher sought individuals who had negative experiences in school
and had attended a post-secondary institution. All respondents in this investigation were engaged
in significant learning activities during adulthood. This does not distract from the powerful
influence dispositional barriers have had on their behaviour, as their level of academic and
professional advancement, according to the participants, was restricted by the negative
perceptions that remained with them. Participants’ time in advanced study was stressful due to
the continual struggle with previously acquired attitudes and perceptions.

The degree of impact and diversity of effects that dispositional has had on respondents requires a
change in how educational participation is examined. Respondents would have been disqualified
in past investigations on dispositional barriers, due to their apparent success in participating in
education. Previous lines of thinking established the notion that if an individual suffered from
dispositional barriers they would not be able to continue in a post-secondary educational
environment. Upon first glance, the participants in this study appear to be unlikely subjects for
this research. However, the respondents do have dispositional barriers and continue to struggle
with them to reach their goals. Informants revealed their private feelings and fears regarding
themselves and education and two respondents openly admitted to being “terrified” and
“extremely anxious” of attending post-secondary institutions.

The following sections in this chapter outline the participants’ experiences and clearly
demonstrate that dispositional barriers do not fall solely in the domain of non-participants.

**Barriers to Participation**

A semi-structured interview was used to collect data regarding respondents’ negative
experiences in formal educational systems. Participants were probed about the nature of their
past learning situations and the effect these had upon them. The open-ended questions enabled a
conversational tone to develop. This natural flow to the interview allowed for a comprehensive
picture of dispositional barriers to unfold.
Respondents' stories provided deep insights into the nature of dispositional barriers. To better understand how this information influenced the development of detrimental barriers, it was essential in the researcher's view, to group similar responses into thematic categories. The following eight steps were taken to code participant responses:

- **Step 1** – the transcribed interviews were read twice to obtain an overall sense of the meaning of the respondents' words;
- **Step 2** – as the transcripts were reread a third time, main ideas were underlined and initial thoughts regarding their meaning were written in the margin of the text;
- **Step 3** – the underlined passages were reread for clarification within the context of the narrative and were coded for thematic content;
- **Step 4** – information under each code was re-examined and the parameters of the categories were defined. This led to an initial grouping of 12 descriptive categories. The codes and relevant passages of text were placed in an excel spreadsheet for a visual representation of the data;
- **Step 5** – grouping of commonalities between the initial category codes occurred and several codes were collapsed together to create nine categories. Definitional parameters were then redefined;
- **Step 6** – a second rater was given the definitions of the thematic categories and presented with the raw data (identifying material removed). The rater followed the steps used in phases 1 through 3;
- **Step 7** – discrepancies between the investigator’s coding and that of the second rater were examined. Two of the descriptive categories were eliminated and parameters for the remaining groupings were modified;
- **Step 8** – all passages were re-coded using the redefined seven descriptive categories.

This approach to data analysis was chosen to better isolate the barriers that related to dispositional factors by grouping similar thematic responses together. The seven categories that emerged are:

- **Self-esteem** - pertained to individual’s perception of their ability to perform tasks;
- **Faith in System** - referred to one’s perceptions of problems in the school system surrounding teaching methods, curriculum design and belief in the academic structure as a whole;
- **Attitude** - covered issues involving desire for learning or participation; perspective regarding the relevance of education or material taught; and respect towards instructors or academic structure;
- **Peers** - involved matters such as pressure to conform and concern over judgment by peers to a degree that distract an individual and negatively influence their enjoyment of school;
- **Support** - pertained to the lack of established support mechanisms for positive reinforcement at home or at school;
- **Environment/Atmosphere** - included concerns over safety, security or a positive atmosphere conducive to learning;
• **Teachers** - referred to teachers’ attitude and actions towards students such as an abusive mannerism, lack of respect, and a relationship between the teacher and student that is entirely directed by the action and demands of the educator.

The respondents’ quotes were placed in table format where critical analysis of the words, inflections and frequency of mention of an issue relating to one of the barrier subcategories was used to determine both meaning and level of affect of each isolated incident. Table 1 below provides a visual representation of the codes assigned to respondent extractions.

Table 1

**Subcategory Coding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Supporting Extractions from Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>Wanted to excel at sports to reassure herself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>Needed external validation - needed recognition to prove to others she was smart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>Didn’t believe in herself - that she was an OK person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>Zero confidence; lack of confidence in ability to perform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>It totally affected my self-esteem - you wonder whether you can function in the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith in System</td>
<td>Perceived a lot of her teachers didn’t want to be there [teaching in the school she attended]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith in System</td>
<td>Doesn’t like all the restrictions and rules; people should be able to learn in their own way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith in System</td>
<td>Find it hard to reconcile why he [teacher] was allowed to exist in that classroom and why we [students] didn’t say anything [to parents or other teachers] – in those days students didn’t tell anyone about bad situations that occurred at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers/Faith in System</td>
<td>Felt a tremendous sense of betrayal: by this [abusive] teacher and the whole system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith in System</td>
<td>Surprised she was not challenged on her decision to quit school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith in System</td>
<td>Forced curriculum and lack of confidence in instruction by teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith in System</td>
<td>The standard of teaching and the classes were boring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith in System</td>
<td>Attending boring classes; forced regurgitation of facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith in System</td>
<td>Hated the regimentation; volume of work; regurgitate it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith in System</td>
<td>Junior high - very rigid discipline, very hopeless circumstances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers/Attitude</td>
<td>Decline in attitude towards school due to feeling he was in terror of teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>Rigid curriculum prevented option of taking a course to break up the day from purely Academic courseware</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer</td>
<td>Pressure of expectations of others [peers]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer</td>
<td>Peer pressure and social segregation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer</td>
<td>Peer pressure due to segregation: stopped hanging with “tough” crowd but started to hang around with the “intelligent” crowd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer</td>
<td>Fear of ridicule or apprehension of judgement by others [peers]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer</td>
<td>Fear of judgment by others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer</td>
<td>Enjoyed learning but feared peer judgment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer</td>
<td>Peer judgment &amp; humiliation: absolute fear of what they were going to think of me - didn’t want to be perceived as dumb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer</td>
<td>Felt very frightened a lot of the time about being asked questions in class and being judged by peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer</td>
<td>When kids are different - other kids can be vicious and single you out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer</td>
<td>Fear of social isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer/Environment</td>
<td>All the social stuff around school that was really bad for me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Didn't tell anyone about the abuse in the classroom [lack of support mechanisms at home and school]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Lost year at school and this was perceived as a failure by her family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Didn’t receive acknowledgement from parents for doing well in school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Complete lack of support from parents – no encouragement &amp; interest shown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>My parents only concern for me was when I got into trouble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Had no one to talk to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>There were no resources [at school]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment/Atmosphere</td>
<td>Big gap between children and adults in schools [lack of respect towards students]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment/Atmosphere</td>
<td>Intimidation and lack of democracy impacted my aspirations – I gave up on my aspirations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Influence and Nature of Dispositional Barriers

Dispositional traits that influence post-secondary participation, especially past experience in school, need to be addressed. Respondents at the current time fall into one of the three following situations: have a discontinuous pattern of participation; continue with their educational goals even though they struggle with negative attitudes and perceptions and often do not take pleasure from their learning experiences; or do not presently seek formal learning activities because they anticipate it will not be enjoyable or they cannot be successful. Research needs to address matters of educational policy as well as the characteristics of students and teachers to gain a full understanding of where barriers to participation may develop. The researcher feels that undue concentration on any single aspect may heavily compound or bias the true results.

In an effort to clarify barriers faced by individuals, respondents were asked to describe negative situations from early school years. Some respondents spoke of their circumstances with greater passion and in finer detail than others. This did not distract from the overall findings, because when the narratives were analyzed as a composite, a select number of themes emerged as meaningful. The seven themes of barriers are outlined below.
Environment/Atmosphere was the most influential barrier upon respondents as is evidenced by the fact all participants mentioned this theme in their interview. Environment/Atmosphere referred to issues around atmosphere, such as the surroundings being conducive to learning and safe. Although respondents were unique, many commonalities appeared in their stories. The lack of a safe and positive atmosphere at home and school were implied by all subjects and consequential in their attitude towards school. Threats ranged from verbal browbeating to physical abuse by parents, peers, and teachers. Unfavorable home environments distracted individuals from concentrating on school related issues, and one respondent said, “The family situation that was very unhealthy...lots of violence... and no relationship skills ... it was just not a house a person can concentrate in”. Even when physical violence is not an issue, an unstable home environment can have detrimental effects upon a students’ ability to focus on school work as is illustrated by another respondent who said, “the rocky kind of home environment made, or kind of sucked up all my energy and made for a tense home environment. And it really didn’t leave me much time to really think about my school”. For these respondents, coping with adverse circumstances in their personal life made survival their first priority, leaving little energy for school.

Other respondents were concerned for their physical safety at school. Peer violence was a significant factor as “your physical safety was in danger... I watched other kids ... be beaten up daily ... it was in the hallways, after school, social activities, field trips” and “First time I ever went into the bathroom a girl was getting her face just pounded into the sink. I walked in, saw it and went right back out and never went back into that bathroom the whole time”. Equally disturbing was the effect of emotional and physical abuse by a teacher upon respondent’s feelings of security within the school environment: One respondent noted,

What had been such a positive experience with all these other teachers, and the whole school environment, all of a sudden was being turned around. And it was no longer a safe place to be. It was no longer, uhhm, a haven. It was no longer a place to learn. It was a place to survive and to get out.

Fortunately, the interviewees in this study are remarkably adaptive individuals and later positive influences helped them to begin to overcome their earlier negative experiences. Solid relationships have helped them heal some of the psychological barriers that had developed, and allowed respondents to pursue advanced education.

Faith in system represents respondents’ dispositional perceptions of the academic structure, curriculum design and methods of teaching used in the classroom and was the second most influential theme of barriers upon participants. Lack of confidence in the educational system was a significant deterrent for several respondents and reflected their overall attitude of educational institutions. One respondent could not comprehend how an abusive teacher could be allowed to continue teaching in the classroom year after year and he clearly articulates his loss of faith in the school system: “I felt a tremendous sense of betrayal ... we [students] had complete and utter trust in the system - and it was not supposed to be this way”.

Many respondents felt problems in the school system included issues of how students are treated, and how classes and course content are structured and presented. One interviewee said, “there
was a big gap between children and adults and it comes out in school ... schools are not [a democracy] - they don't give you any opportunity to live it”. Many respondents’ expectations about how school was supposed to prepare them for “real life” were dashed. The following excerpt illustrates the let down experienced by students

*School is supposed to be preparing you for later life, well when you actually work harder at the earlier stages [in school] versus what you are expected to do at later stages [referring to employment], it seems a little strange to me.*

A limited choice of subjects and how curriculum was taught was a concern for many respondents. Repeated themes of boredom, inappropriate material, and substandard teaching methods echoed throughout the narratives: Interviewees expressed a desire to have a greater range of topics and focus on personal areas of interest and academic strength. One respondent noted, “*the high school offered very little options, so that to my mind was less positive ... there was no kind of break ... there wasn't any other option to break up your day or to try something different.”* Lack of faith in the educational system created negative perceptions related to the following category.

**Attitude** covered issues involving the desire to learn or participate, perspectives on the relevance of education and content, and respect towards instructors and academic structure. Five respondents mentioned a rigid curriculum, lack of choice in subjects, and irrelevant content were each factors in developing their negative perceptions towards school. One respondent, discussing his dislike of attending school, said “*classes that were boring, classes where it was most easily described as forced regurgitation of facts - and that would be trivial facts for that matter*”.

Another category of barriers, **teachers**, pertains to educators’ attitudes and actions towards students. Teachers have a tremendous influence on the quality of the learning environment, and the students’ perceptions of school (Noddings, 1995). An unpleasant experience with one or more teachers has strong adverse consequences on young people. Academic achievement will not readily occur unless children believe that they are cared for by the teachers responsible for their schooling (Noddings, 1995). In spite of most teachers’ good intentions, the impression provided by seven of the 10 respondents was that relationships with some of their K-12 teachers were not fundamentally caring and growth enhancing. This reveals that it is critical for educators to be attentive to the emotional lives of students. As Noddings points out, “caring is the very bedrock of all successful education” (1992, p. 27).

It is clear from the findings that teachers make a lasting impression on their students. Unfortunately, this influence may not always be positive. One respondent described a particularly memorable teacher:

*He became in my eyes, I think just an absolute, just a monster – an absolute monster ... an emotional predator ... I think he beat on kids in the worst way ... we were being terrorized by this guy – physically and emotionally.*
The influence this teacher had upon the respondent was profound and long lasting as illustrated by the statement, “I was emotionally numbed...but more than anything I was angry...there had been a general decline in my attitude towards school and I am fully convinced that it was because I was in terror of this man”. Even more striking is the intensity of the respondent’s memory of this teacher:

I can see him now... when you see the face of evil and to me it was absolutely evil I can see the mustache, I can see the little burst blood vessels on his nose, the thinning hair, the dandruff in the eyebrows, I can see all that. I can smell him. I can see the shoes. I can see the shoelaces as they were tied, and I can’t say that I can do that with any other teacher. I can’t smell any other teacher. I can’t see those details, but I can see them on this man’s face.

This respondent showed remarkable courage and strength in reflecting on his horrendous experience and channeling it into a positive outcome. The interviewee credits the abusive teacher for propelling him towards a career in education for the simple reason that “I could not live with myself if I knew that other people like him were still in the system. I figured kids needed somebody who wanted to be there for them”.

For other respondents, verbal and emotional intimidation by teachers created negative attitudes and barriers towards school, for example, “there were teachers who were bullies. I think they had a kind of personality where they enjoyed bullying students. They literally made fun of and put these students down in front of everybody else”. Teachers clearly have a lasting effect on their students, and educators who criticize or ridicule children produce toxic atmospheres within their classrooms. This threatens a student’s sense of self and creates anxiety and disdain. One respondent recalled,

There was one teacher in grade four - she just had it out for me and no matter what I did in that classroom, it was never good enough for her. And so I really hated going to her class. I could truly say I hated that teacher.

The saying “one bad apple spoils the whole bunch” may be apropos, as seven out of 10 in the sample reported that negative situations with teachers created detrimental barriers towards future participation in formal educational institutions. It should be noted however, that all respondents stated they had also encountered commendable teachers throughout their time in school. The influence teachers have over the lives of children is profound. Exceptional teachers can help children overcome past traumatic experiences and inspire them to grow academically, socially, and emotionally.

Self-esteem, an individual’s faith in themselves and their perception of their ability to perform tasks, was consequential for five of the 10 participants. In order for a person to feel good about him or herself, they must be able to look at themselves and like what they see. They must believe they are capable of handling situations and performing tasks. Several subjects indicated low self-confidence when it came to particular learning activities within the classroom. This has had consequential effects upon the participants as is evidenced by the fact these individuals revealed they continue to struggle with low self-esteem as they pursue advanced educational
opportunities. One respondent was ridiculed by a teacher for poor writing skills and consequently perceived herself as incapable of performing in this domain. This interviewee indicated she continues to "struggle with fear" related to grammar and writing. The following statement describes the respondent's experience,

"English is my poorest subject ... my whole comprehension, spelling, uhhmm, grammar, I had no idea - can't sound out words. I mean now I am 35 years old and I can actually start to sound out a word. I have zero confidence. Now like, it's funny cause when I actually do it and type it out and you know the little red line [on the computer screen] doesn't come, it's like 'Oh my gosh, I just sounded that out!'"

This respondent is currently working towards an advanced degree, yet her statement demonstrates her perception of herself is as influential as the reality. When an individual suffers from low self-esteem, he or she often turn towards extrinsic sources for validation of their self-worth (Berk, 2000). Recognition of one’s talents and potential by others can be extremely important to anyone who has difficulty accepting him or herself. The following statement eloquently illustrates this notion.

"I would remember people's phone numbers, and I can remember people's names and all kinds of [information] ... I could regurgitate and I could announce that I knew it. It was a way of gaining a kind of respect that I wasn't getting other places ... I didn't exist unless I had these external things. And if I didn't have external recognition I was invisible."

Respondents in this study showed remarkable fortitude and spirit in their struggle to move towards academic and personal growth. As one subject stated, "I think I have struggled with fear and once I had got a handle on that and I could identify what was holding me back then I could look forward with hope".

**Peers** is the subcategory that referred to situations involving peer pressure and concern about being judged by one’s peers. Peers have a great deal of influence, because there is often pressure to conform to group behaviour, ideals, and attitudes and individuals who do not "fit within the norm" suffer. Tremendous angst occurs when a student feels judged or ridiculed by their classmates. One respondent noted, "that whole peer thing, like you would have to get in front of your peers and read. Oh my God! Or they would read your stuff. How I hated that!". No one wants fellow students to perceive oneself as inferior or incapable of performing a task – particularly at a young age when one is highly sensitive to other people’s opinions.

For others, peer pressure was related to a fear of rejection and subsequent feelings of worthlessness. Children can be cruel and create feelings of isolation and alienation in their peers, as is illustrated by the following statements, "I felt that I had absolutely no one to talk to" and "my reasons for escaping school were entirely social. People can tell when you are struggling with stuff ... kids can be really vicious and kind of single you out in the crowd". For one respondent, it was because she did not "fit in" economically with some of her school mates that created uncomfortable feelings. Financially, her family was considered to be of a lower socio-
economic status and she lived in a "lower class" neighborhood. This had an effect on the respondent as she was sometimes excluded from activities. She noted,

*I can see why sometimes I didn't get invited to things because you could tell I wasn't...I would shop at K-Mart clothes and they would show up with Gap clothes, ... you could tell I was wearing K-Mart jeans ... so that was one of the things that I had to deal with.*

Respondents stated that had they been able to develop meaningful relationships with their peers, their experience might have been more personally enriching and fulfilling. As the respondents' statements suggest, a balance between academic and social acceptance is critical in creating a positive experience of school.

According to participants, strong support mechanisms are crucial to developing a positive attitude towards education. The least significant thematic category of barriers to influence educational participation is support. This category pertained to a lack of positive reinforcement or nurturing from others either at home or at school. The detrimental effect of a lack of support from parents is reflected below.

"My parents they never wanted to ... their only concern for me was when I got into trouble" and "the complete lack of support from my parents - encouragement and interest - made me really not want to participate in school."

One respondent indicated physical separation from her immediate family created a situation where there were inadequate support mechanisms available when required. Due to the small school size in this respondent's home community, she was required to move to another region and live with relatives. The interviewee felt isolated from her parents and consequently the relocation had serious emotional and physical effects upon her. This is illustrated by her statement,

*I moved in with my aunt and uncle in (city name) and so it was a huge change. The result of that was that within a couple of months my body had given up and said, "I am not going to do this anymore." My immune system went kaput and I was very ill and so I had to be taken out of school and went through a series of illnesses, childhood illnesses before I went back to school the following year. So I went through school a year older than all the kids at my level. And it was interpreted in the family as somewhat of a failure.*

This barrier affected the respondent for many years. She felt like a "failure" to her family. Being older than her classmates was difficult as is reflected in her statement, "even though I was doing quite well in school I still had that sense of failure because I was older than the other children ... so that became a kind of, I don't know, ahh, tattoo on my soul".

The comments above suggest inadequate support mechanisms are strong deterrents affecting the future likelihood of participatory behaviour. Insufficient support from peers was also significant in developing respondents' negative attitudes toward school, "Not having a group of people or
kids that kind of understood what I was going through". For respondents', solitude was intolerable. Equally disquieting, however, was the lack of a clear support mechanism from administrators and teachers. Students who were facing difficult situations in the classroom needed to know that there was an adult who cared about them, would act on their behalf and was easily accessible. One respondent indicated that the main reason he didn't tell anyone about the physical and emotional abuse that occurred in the classroom was that he did not know where to turn for assistance. This is evidenced by the statement, "I think that we [students] were so shell shocked by this bastard that we couldn’t articulate what it was that needed to be done and whether or not anything could be done". This respondent's despair at the hopelessness of the situation could easily have been alleviated had a responsible adult within the school been accessible. The need for students to experience support from parents, peers, teachers, and school administrators is critical, as the perception of the quality of the environment is formed through interactions with others.

Although this was a qualitative study, the investigator chose to count the frequency of responses as an indication of the magnitude of influence particular barriers had upon respondents (Table 2). It is the researcher's opinion if an individual mentions a deterrent several times throughout an interview, it has had a more significant effect upon the participant than a barrier he or she mentions only once. The researcher also based the decision on using counting as a method of interpreting the importance of a barrier based on the tone of voice, inflection and body language exhibited by respondents during an interview. Counting the frequency of responses also helps the investigator avoid several biases that occur in making conclusions (Palys, 1997). Specifically, frequency of mention helps to eliminate:

- The bias of first impressions or dramatic incidents; and
- Selectivity – especially when trying to verify the categories devised or conclusions drawn

Counting the frequency of mention of the barriers helped to assess the representativeness of the phenomena while trying to decide how significant a barrier was. Using this method allowed the data to support the researcher's speculations and findings. Equally important, however, counting had a positive effect upon defining and redefining categories. In order to count the frequency of a barrier, clear and concise parameters had to be developed so one could know which descriptive category a particular barrier fell within.
Table 2
Thematic Coding of Respondents’ Quotes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P6</th>
<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>P9</th>
<th>P10</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith in System</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>17</td>
</tr>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>Teachers</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>132</td>
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</table>

The table above gives a more concise view of the actual impact that the various social and psychological influences had on participants. Figure 3 gives a visual representation of these deterrents where the larger the piece of pie the more predominant the effect of the dispositional barrier.

Figure 3. Percentage of Barriers to Further Education by Theme
Social and Psychological Aspect of Dispositional Barriers

Once the coding for the seven categories was finalized, the themes were then grouped, based on whether the underlying characteristics of the responses within each category were internal or external in nature:

- **Psychological** – Internal Influences
- **Social** – External Influences

The above classifications were developed by re-examining the transcripts of the interviews with particular attention being placed upon the intrinsic or extrinsic context of the barrier responses. It was discovered responses that were coded under each of the seven categories of *self-esteem*, *faith in system*, *attitude*, *peer*, *support*, *teachers*, and *environment/atmosphere* could be either *social* or *psychological* in nature. Table 3 illustrates the distribution of the thematic categorical responses into their respective *social* or *psychological* classification. Responses coded as *social* in nature were external influences that can act as a catalyst in the development of positive or negative internal responses, but cannot determine them alone. The responses that were considered to be *psychological* in nature were done so based upon the notion that although external elements can influence an individual's attitudes and perceptions of themselves and one's outside surroundings, it cannot control the effects of its influence – only the individual themselves determine the level of influence it has upon them. Negative external influences do not become strongly internalized if an individual has the strength of will to counteract them.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding of Respondents' Quotes by Social or Psychological Characteristic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Esteem</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Deterrents cited by respondents (Table 3) indicated *social* influences played a more significant role on the development of dispositional barriers. From the data presented in Figure 4 one can presume that social factors accounted for 59% of non-participation obstacles. This percentage was obtained by counting the number of times respondents mentioned thoughts defined within a particular thematic category.
Social influences were the most significant of the dispositional barriers accounting for 59% of all responses by participants. Figure 5 provides a visual representation of the percentage of each category that was coded as characteristically social in nature. In order of their percentage they are: environment/atmosphere, teachers, support, peer, faith in system, self-esteem, and attitude.

Figure 4. Percentage of Barriers to Further Education by Social or Psychological Nature

Figure 5. Percentage of Social Barriers to Education by Category
The categories within the psychological framework, illustrated in Figure 6, accounted for 41% of the total responses regarding barriers. The category of faith in system had the highest percentage (23%) of responses that were classified as psychological in nature. This was followed closely by attitude with a representation of 17%. Self-esteem and environment/atmosphere had an equal number of responses followed by peer, teachers and finally support.

Figure 6. Percentage of Psychological Barriers to Education by Category

Dispositional barriers are powerful influences that respondents have to overcome in order to participate in formal education. It is necessary to explore these factors in detail to discover the degree that these factors influenced the individual and what circumstances, and individual characteristics, that allowed them to pursue higher education.

New Conceptualization of Dispositional Barriers

Using the data analysis of the transcripts from the original narratives the investigator developed a conceptual map of relationships between the thematic categories. Results revealed divisions between the psychological and social dispositional barriers should not be considered firm but rather fluid and overlapping.

All respondents reported more than one type of dispositional barrier influenced their perceptions towards school. This suggests barriers relating to social and psychological themes do not occur
in isolation, but in fact, are intrically linked. This notion is supported by a trend which emerged from the data. All participants revealed issues that were coded under the category labeled environment/atmosphere. More propelling evidence of the link between groupings is the fact that five of the seven respondents who mentioned responses coded under the category of teachers also had indicated barriers under attitude as influencing their negative perceptions towards education. These tendencies reveal a close relationship between the influence of barriers.

This investigator envisions two themes within dispositional barriers, psychological and social, as overlapping circles of different size (Figure 7). Psychological and social barriers significantly influenced future participation with social deterrents having the strongest influence and is subsequently represented by the larger circle. The “fluid” lines of demarcation show where overlapping relationships exists.

![Figure 7. Conceptualization of Dispositional Barriers](image)

**Summary**

Negative experiences in formal educational institutions during childhood have a significant influence on an individual’s attitude towards formal education. These particular respondents revealed exceptional fortitude and perserverance in beginning to conquer their fears and overcome negative perceptions created by deterrents to participation in education.

Dispositional barriers mentioned by participants were divided into two themes: psychological and social. Social issues had the greatest influence, accounting for 59% of total barrier responses mentioned. The influence of internal factors on participation in education must also be recognized as 41% of responses were noted to be psychological in nature.
Although unique, respondents shared many commonalities. Many participants disclosed a similar desire and strength of resolve to overcome past situations and turn unpleasant experiences into something positive. Chapter Five outlines the respondents' present feelings towards the school system and lists recommendations for change both within the educational system and the individual. Participants discovered strategies to cope with dispositional barriers while attending post-secondary institutions. Suggestions for future research on the influence of dispositional barriers on participatory behavior are also outlined in Chapter Five.
CHAPTER FIVE
GETTING HERE FROM THERE

Introduction

This study illustrates how students' dispositional barriers towards school were developed, regardless of demographic factors. Most deterrents concerned social and psychological themes. Lack of self-esteem, inadequate support, and poor quality interactions with the environment influenced development of negative perceptions. As many adults are volunteer learners, it is critical to gain a better understanding of these factors. This is important to adult educators who develop programs to address learners and to school officials who can create change.

Since the respondents articulated many painful personal experiences, it is prudent, to emphasize their perceptions and feelings regarding factors that cause non-participation. This chapter outlines many specific instances where lack of attention to barrier-developing circumstances resulted in deep-rooted, long-lasting negative attitudes in participants towards themselves and, more importantly, towards the system responsible for providing this education.

Overcoming Dispositional Barriers: Fact or Fiction

Many personal circumstances that prevent, or interfere with, educational participation were uncovered. These dispositional factors developed randomly regardless of geographic, ethnic or financial boundaries, and affected each individual differently. How is an individual to overcome these barriers if they appear randomly and manifest themselves differently in each case? The best solution is institutional; to prevent negative attitudes, beliefs and perceptions from developing in the first place. Though the task is sizeable, ignoring it will have devastating results on education and development of society.

When one considers the circumstances that cause dispositional barriers, it is amazing that schooling systems permit the situations to continue. Students are encouraged to place complete trust in schools and teachers. When this faith is betrayed, students do not know where to turn for assistance. Barriers develop and remain deeply rooted. As one respondent noted, "I figure that you spend from mid-twenties to thirties and forties, unlearning all that the schooling layered on you. You have to learn to peel it off."

Is the Cup Half Full or Half Empty

When addressing barriers, emphasis should be placed upon their negative impact on future learners. It is important to place focus on the struggle learners endure when either returning to school or during their studies. Each respondent disclosed negative school experiences with such vivid descriptions, it is reasonable to assume their past experiences still affects them today. The necessity for higher education credentials to obtain responsible positions within society influenced the respondents' decisions to continue learning despite their personal conflict. However, this should not be construed as adapting to or overcoming one's past hardships, but
rather winning a battle in the war against personal adversity. As with any war, however, there will be many battles and the likelihood of a total victory over such barriers is remote.

How often individuals are capable of coping with adversity such as educational deterrents, and the manner in which they do, will directly affect their employment, education, and family circumstances. Adults are likely to face career challenges that require significant transformations in their knowledge and skills (Rubenson, 1992) and they will not be able to meet these obstacles if negative attitudes toward education cannot be dealt with.

Upon first glance, one might assume respondents did not truly experience barriers to participation since the individuals have either obtained, or are presently pursuing, high levels of formal, post-secondary education. One might equally infer that, although the circumstances of their past has left respondents with unfortunate memories, their effects were not so severe as to adversely affect their inclination to proceed with academic advancement. These inferences would be a misrepresentation of the truth, as failure to participate in higher education is only one manner in which the effects of dispositional barriers manifest themselves. To refute the existence of dispositional barriers based solely on the fact higher education was achieved would greatly harm endeavors to fully comprehend the degree of influence these barriers have upon people’s lives. To require lack of participation in educational activity to occur will prevent the research community from discovering the less obvious, yet still very real, manifestations of these barriers. Patterns of beginning and ending educational programs without completion, fear concerning what may occur within a learning environment and tremendous anxiety are just a few of the conditions suffered by those who struggle with dispositional barriers to attain educational goals.

If dispositional barriers are accepted as deterrents that affect an individual’s inclination to perform certain actions, then it is reasonable to assume necessity or personal resolve may motivate one to attempt to conquer the hindrances. These factors may be strong influences that enable one to try to overcome past adversity but these motivators do not remove the struggle one deals with on a daily basis. Four participants indicated they chose to be involved directly in the education field, either as policy makers or educators, because of negative situations they encountered. As one respondent stated,

“My experience in junior high school days affected my choice of job. I chose to be an official for the Ministry of Education because I thought, I still think that our education system has to change - has to be improved. So I became a kind of policy maker in the field of public education.”

This respondent felt the need to make changes within the educational system so students in the future would have better opportunities to succeed and to capture the “joy of learning”. This sentiment was echoed by a number of participants. Many felt they could offer something enriching to students that would help young minds to grow academically and personally. Respondents acknowledged the past adversity they experienced was the driving force behind their decision to become educators. As one respondent noted, 

“I think it’s really weird to say this but, I do credit him [abusive teacher] with being the one who pushed me into teaching - for the simple reason that I could not live with myself if I knew that other people like him were still in the system. I figured kids
needed somebody who wanted to be there for them, and I could do a hell of a better job than he could.

Many participants seeking higher certification in the education field stated in subtle ways the need to acknowledge academic achievement is only one goal of education. These individuals expressed a desire to ensure students under their guidance felt accepted and developed positive self-esteem. As the above respondent said, "... I decided that I had to become a teacher - just so that some kids would get the benefit of somebody who could actually teach rather than somebody who didn't care about them". To this respondent, teaching is not merely an act of passing along prescribed information, but involves caring about and helping students discover who they are as individuals. Every individual has capabilities, which if realized, contribute to the well being of the individual and society. Respondents believe it is the role of education to provide each individual with technical, social, and creative skills necessary to help students reach their full potential.

Another major factor that influenced respondents' decision to return to higher education, despite past negative experiences, was their need to reach their own potential. Six participants, who are currently pursuing advanced education, indicated they had not achieved what they desired for themselves and believed they were capable of much more than they were currently doing. This notion was captured by the statement, "... I woke up one morning and said, am I going to do this ... a new I going to this for another 30 years?". As another respondent noted,

... I began to get to the age where I could look at some of the older people around me and see how hard they were working into their forties, you know physically into their forties and fifties, and I decided that I don't want to be here.

Respondents faced their fears regarding re-entering the education system for either personal reasons or for job advancement requirements. In today's society, individuals feel both internal and external pressure to succeed. Part of this success relies upon the acquirement of advanced educational credentials. Six respondents indicated they believed higher levels of formal education were required in order to seek advancement within their professional careers. As one participant stated, "it [returning to graduate studies] was necessary for professional advancement - but my negative feelings [towards formal education] were so strong that I refused to go back to university until I was pushed into it".

Other respondents felt that higher levels of education were necessary for their careers. This is clearly captured in the statement,

I was probably in my early thirties when I decided on that [returning to community college] and basically the reason was that I was going nowhere quick in the workaday world as they like to call it and I needed some kind of paper stating that I am a qualified something - and this was a diploma that allowed me that status as a qualified individual.

This sentiment is further illustrated by the following statement, "I am a vice-principal and part of the requirement was that I obtain a Master's degree". This participant clearly needed to obtain
further education for career advancement. However, it would be incorrect to assume this individual merely obtained higher educational credentials for professional reasons alone. He wanted to pursue education not only "for the money", but for personal satisfaction. This subject disclosed a passion for learning and desire to discover new information, "Learning is exciting – it's something to learn something new every day".

Respondents were not motivated to pursue formal educational credentials for professional reasons from a purely selfish standpoint. Although participants would likely gain financially from their advanced education, many sought higher education so that could positively influence the system. For other respondents, the pursuit of higher education was partially motivated by his or her love for learning and desire to be intellectually challenged. This is portrayed by the following statements made by three of the respondents, "I just need to be stimulated", "I like to study if it is challenging and interesting", and "I have a passion for learning". These statements clearly illustrate that personal motivation may help individuals fight against the dispositional barriers they hold towards formal educational institutions.

Despite positive feelings towards school and universities, all respondents continue to possess negative attitudes and most encountered similar detrimental situations in institutions of higher education. Repetition of earlier negative experiences deepened their dislike of formal education. As one respondent noted,

> The experiences that I have had over the last two times [in university] have been negative enough that I don't foresee subjecting myself to that kind of an environment again. You know, they always say once bitten, twice shy. Well, this is twice bitten and, trust me, the third time is very shy.

Participants who claimed to have repeatedly experienced negative situations in educational institutions either dropped out or were forced to struggle with dispositional barriers as they continued with their learning for personal gain. Participants indicated two major concerns about universities that echoed their experiences in the formal K-12 educational system. The first was the lack of respect some professors show towards students as individuals, and more specifically, the lack of acknowledgment of a person's life experience or knowledge. This is illustrated by the statement, "I would say [respect] for the student in general - the student's own abilities, the worth of the student, and the ability to take that information and manipulate that information themselves rather than simply regurgitating". This respondent indicated the lack of respect shown to adult learners as capable, sentient individuals to be disheartening. This participant experienced negative learning environments at university where the professors forced all students to follow prescribed learning regiments without first taking into account a person's knowledge or skill level. As he stated,

> I had already had a lot of exposure to these fields within the work environment and once again within a short period of time I found that it was more of the exact same where it was simple disrespect and simple academic bullying. That's a term I tend to use. I [teacher/professor] am the authoritative figure at the front of the class. I know, you don't know, you will adhere to the way I teach regardless of your circumstances.
Several respondents experienced similar situations. Eight participants felt there was a discrepancy in the manner in which they should be treated as adult learners and the way in which they actually were. Respondents noted a lack of relationship being built between themselves and the educators whose job it was to help them in their learning goals. This is portrayed in the statement,

That's the authoritative aspect that they [teachers/professors] would take, the concept that they would dictate and that we would follow without question and there would be a lack of respect for the students was absolutely asinine. The teachers that impressed me the most were the teachers who related with me. The teachers who saw students as people and didn't see their job as a thrust of information. When I got to the university stage, and this was after taking a one-year hiatus from high school, I came across the exact same mentality, if not augmented slightly. That these people were academics. That these people were in roles that they, I don't know if they saw themselves as some kind of higher class citizens or what the situation was, but they had this feeling that what they had to offer was correct and that you would absorb that information and you would regurgitate that information. And that is just the way that it was going to be and there was very little respect for the individual student.

One respondent experienced such negative situations in university, he decided to discontinue the pursuit of further education entirely. As the participant stated,

I found that there was no way that I was going to take my money and spend my money on something that was not providing me with the direction, the guidance or the knowledge that I thought that I deserved from the input that I was giving.

This individual stated that he has to struggle to obtain challenging and stimulating employment because of his lack of educational credentials. He believes he is under-employed for his knowledge and skill level and is "frustrated" at witnessing others receive promotions "based upon their educational credentials and not necessarily on their abilities".

Seven respondents stated concerns about the type of administrative system used in universities, where the inclination is to follow rigid or complex procedures impedes education and learning. These participants indicated that universities are complex bureaucracies where students are often left on their own to work their way through. The idea that education will open one's mind to new possibilities and expand critical thinking is contrary to the experience of most respondents. Participatory democracy, where all individuals have the opportunity to express their opinion, is not practiced in universities according to seven participants. They believe an authoritarian environment, where the educator holds the power, remains the norm. The respondents felt frustrated by the fact that students have little say over learning activities, even though they are more likely to know what will best suit their individual needs and life circumstances. The level of frustration experienced is demonstrated in one respondent's comment,

I was so tired of the whole process. It was emotionally draining, physically draining and I just wanted the hell out of there. And I had no conception that
school could be anything but what I endured. So I wanted to get out and get a job right away.

Although this individual eventually obtained a university degree in his late 20’s he may have progressed further, academically and professionally, had he not been impeded by the educational nightmare he endured. The negative situations encountered in school and university has placed further limitations on this individual. Harmful experiences in the past have made this respondent hesitant to return to undertake graduate studies. He considers the learning environment at formal institutions “intolerable”. The respondent further elaborated,

I didn’t decide that I would end my education until I probably got through three-quarters through my degree. I really became disenchanted with the whole bureaucracy of universities. And as soon as I realized that this system which professes to support, encourage innovative thought is actually rooted in an extremely Medieval system. The whole idea of tenure, absolute power over faculty member’s entire dominion, no accountability, all that kind of stuff really turned me off. The kind of passive/aggressive politics that go on. You know in the corporate world that kind of stuff is sometimes very overt but at university there is this veneer of civility and kind of erudite language in codes but beneath that is this kind of simmering hatred. And so just a lot of contradictions, I think a lot of my popular conceptions about what university is and should be were really dashed.

Seven other participants supported this sentiment, though their exact words varied. Respondents indicated there was a lack of autonomy at universities and students are required to “jump through hoops”. Several participants felt the education they received at university was of a lower standard than expected. As one respondent noted,

I think universities are very big bureaucracies and I think there is this big claim that education is to open and to broaden your mind and so you will go in and experience a lot of different ideas. You will learn to think critically on your own. And in my experience it has been that it’s still very much that traditional, authoritarian environment where you walk in and instead of a teacher it’s now a professor who holds all the power. They sit at the front of the classroom and tell you what your assignments are going to be, how you will do your assignment, and then you will be graded based on that. So it’s regurgitation again and I don’t think that I have been taught to think critically on my own.

The lack of challenging opinions and formulating one’s own thoughts has made it difficult for some participants to feel good about the learning processes in educational institutions.

For some individuals, higher education was sought solely for the purpose of professional advancement. One respondent noted, “I needed some kind of paper behind me saying I am a qualified something ... this diploma allowed me that status”. Others indicated that they thought learning would be exciting, but were concerned they would continue to encounter negative situations within formal educational activities that would threaten to derail their efforts.
Overcoming dispositional barriers to educational participation, according to respondents, requires positive interactions with the learning environment and intrinsic behavioural and psychological adjustments. Educators are often under time pressures to impart a large volume of material in a short time span (Noddings, 1995). The educator is therefore forced to pay more attention to orderliness and efficiency and learning is focused upon preconceived expectations and standards. Participants felt their natural creativity and curiosity was inhibited in these environments and stated this kind of atmosphere negatively affected their decisions regarding future educational participation.

On the other hand, some respondents indicated that when educators allow students to discover who they are and permit individuals to express their true nature, learning will blossom and the individual will more likely strive to reach their potential. However, even if an individual encounters positive learning environments that help counteract negative experiences, there would still be a need for psychological change. How quickly and how much change could be accomplished would be difficult to determine. There is reason for hope as one respondent noted, “I think I struggled with fear [regarding school/university] and once I got a handle on that and I could identify what was holding me back then I could look forward with hope”.

Respondents had been moderately successful in dealing with their dispositional barriers. They have critically reflected on their lives and made positive changes, despite the fact their attitudes towards education were tainted by past experiences. This self-analysis provided the foundation where upon respondents could better deal with situations that fostered deep-rooted negative feelings towards education. Through reflecting on past experiences and current perceptions, the participants have begun to develop a more balanced and positive outlook on their learning capacity and potential.

**Recommendations**

Respondents showed courage in trying to overcome personal adversity in educational institutions. Although respondents pursued formal learning activities, their dispositional attitudes remained intact. For two respondents, the learning environments at post-secondary institutions, continued to be so negative their dispositional attitudes and perceptions developed to the point where the individuals gave up on attaining the credentials they desired.

A healthy concept of self is developed through quality interaction with others (Berk 2000). Seven respondents noted they, at some point in their educational pursuits, lacked quality relationships with others in schools, families, or community. Educational facilities consist of adults who are in the position to determine and influence the environment that will be placed upon the student. This provides the opportunity for those who work within the educational system to have a positive influence on learners as educators have the power to touch people in caring, nurturing, and inspiring ways (Noddings, 1995). Classrooms are emotionally charged environments where a diverse range of psychological factors must be taken into consideration (Gedalof, 1998; Lowman, 1990; McKeachie, 1986). Teachers’ words and actions can have a life long effect on students. As the social influences of environmental conditions, teachers attitude, actions and relationship skills, peer pressure and inadequate support were significant factors in
the development of negative attitudes and perceptions towards education, three recommendations, proposed by respondents, for change in the educational system are suggested.

Firstly, teachers need to develop quality relationships with students, and encourage students to interact with their peers. Educators, according to participants, could abandon the “traditional” narrow-minded model of students as blank slates that need to be sculptured, and value the unique gifts and personality of each. This recommendation is substantiated by Pratt (1998) who identifies “transmission”, where the educator controls the learning environment, as only one of five perspectives towards education. Other means of educating students are outlined by Pratt that enable instructors to take into account the needs of the students in determining the most suitable approach. A new academic culture needs to be developed where emphasis on the core curriculum is decreased and attention placed upon creating an atmosphere accepting of a student’s nature. This would reduce student anxiety and allow them to develop. An effort by teachers to show concern and be encouraging could have a lasting impression. “Good teaching builds bridges to individuals. It is much more than the honing of mechanics” (Goodlad, 1984, p. 248).

Since educators determine the quality of relationships within a classroom (Lowman, 1990), society needs to be diligent in their selection of future teachers. Educators need to be exceptional individuals who show respect, understand diversity, and genuinely care about students. Respondents suggest that training programs for future teachers need to place as much emphasis on these fundamentals as is placed on teaching methods.

The way in which educators function within schools must be addressed. The prevailing culture within the educational system encourages too much work by teachers to be done in isolation. There is little collaboration between fellow teachers within a school, or between a school and its community, which is detrimental. Educators are in their classrooms most of the day, with little time for an exchange of ideas with colleagues. If a culture of collaboration were promoted, teachers could exchange ideas and approaches, which would benefit themselves and their students. Interaction between educators would also allow teachers to notice problems that existed within their colleagues’ classroom. This could lead to positive suggestions that could lead to solutions that would eliminate the development of dispositional barriers by students.

Secondly, respondents note there needs to be a stronger connection between educational institutions and communities. The job of educating young people is solely the responsibility of school officials. One respondent noted an old truism; “it takes an entire community to teach children”. There is a need for an open environment so parents and concerned community members can participate in decisions, which could lead to better interactions between educators and students. If a student feels valued, and goes home excited, this feeling can carry over to parents. If parents think their voices will be heard, they are more likely to become an integral part of the system.

The final recommendation to eliminate the stigma associated with vocational and business-oriented courses. It is critical for individuals to be able to experience a wide array of subjects to develop different skills, increase creativity and broaden their minds (Berk, 2000). Unfortunately respondents’ experience has been that academic courses such as math and science have a higher status in the hierarchy than non-academic classes. The latter topics are considered easier and are
often discouraged if a student plans to continue with advanced education. More guidance should be provided to students on how to maximize their strengths and build on their interests. Guidance counsellors should be working with teachers and parents for the betterment of student’s.

These recommendations provide a starting point in alleviating the formation or continuing development of dispositional barriers. Educators, administrators, and policy makers play a significant role in the lives of learners and have a moral obligation to consider the result their actions and policies will have upon learners. Equally important are the internal psychological factors which individuals must acknowledge and accept responsibility to examine the root cause of why they suffer from dispositional barriers towards education.

Respondents reflected on their perceptions of themselves and their attitudes towards formal education and made positive changes towards freeing themselves from the burden of dispositional barriers. This is not to say all participants have completely overcome their fears, negative expectations, and emotional hardships. Eight respondents have found ways to cope with their situation in order to pursue their goals while two participants have, at the present time, given up on their educational goals. Under the right circumstances, and through personal transformation, individuals are able to participate in education even if they continue to struggle with negative thoughts and expectations. The following five recommendations were interpreted from the respondents’ comments to assist individuals to succeed in their educational goals:

- Recognize and acknowledge your feelings, attitudes and perceptions – increase your self-awareness of the feelings, beliefs, and patterns which trigger dispositional barriers and examine your assumptions, fears and interpretations of events;
- Focus on what you want to achieve – determine what your desires and goals are and rate how important they are to you;
- Determine what you need to do to accomplish these goals – examine what coping strategies, support, and circumstances will allow you to reach your goals;
- Develop support mechanisms – find individuals who will nourish you and bolster your confidence during difficult times; and
- Counteract negative thoughts – it is easy to let critical thoughts overrun your thinking. Examine the validity of these beliefs and learn to transform self-defeating thoughts into inspiring messages.

Through self-reflection, participants developed a means to cope with negative internalized feelings towards education and find the support mechanisms necessary to obtain their desired level of education. Although self-reflection can be a short-term solution for some, it is specific to the individual and does not address factors that fostered the development of the barriers in the first place. To avoid the development of dispositional barriers it is important not only to consider the conditions that stimulate the negative responses, but also to address the level of influence that social and psychological factors may have individually. Since affecting changes to development of barriers on each person can be an overwhelming task, the psychological approach to change can only be long-term. To achieve more immediate results to the problem, it is better to focus on the social influences where changes in policy, accountability and responsibility at the institutional level will prevent the development of these negative, internalized feelings towards education.
Implications for Future Research

Adults should be able to pursue higher education but this cannot be achieved if individuals hold negative attitudes towards themselves or education and do not understand how these dispositional barriers affect them personally. The findings of this study suggest that deterrents to participation can arise from previous negative experiences in formal educational institutions. Later positive experiences in educational pursuits raised respondents' self-confidence and increased their willingness to participate in learning activities. Self-awareness of one's fears, uncertainties and negative perceptions played a more significant role in allowing participants to continue to persevere and continue with their educational activities.

Several implications exist for further research. First, there is a need for replication of the present study using a larger and more diverse sample of adults. The research conducted was an initial attempt to identify the effects of past negative experiences upon participatory behaviour. The small sample size potentially detracts from discovering a wider range of dispositional barriers within different cultures, and indeed the population as a whole. There is also a need to perform a study with adults, who had negative experiences in the K-12 educational system, and did not continue to participate in education after leaving high school. It would be beneficial to compare the findings between the two investigations to discover if the trends in what was perceived by respondents to create the development of dispositional barriers, and the effect it had upon them, were similar.

Secondly, all respondents mentioned both internal and external themes of dispositional barriers which influenced their perceptions towards themselves or school. This suggests barriers relating do not occur in isolation but in fact are intricately linked. Further research may verify this assertion and provide a better understanding of the complex social and psychological dynamics of these dispositional barriers. A more detailed profile of individuals' past experiences, their concept of self, their learning needs, motivation and environmental interactions would provide greater insight into the variables that affect participation.

Finally, this investigation emphasized pre-adult factors that strongly influenced participatory behaviour. In contrast, previous research focused upon present circumstances in adults' lives when examining factors that inhibit educational activities. Decision making processes regarding participation are influenced by both the historical fabric of the individual’s life and current conditions within their lives. Future research should include both notions to understand the enduring nature of dispositional barriers. Such information would enhance the utility of these recommendations, which could be used as a basis for the design of strategies to meet the needs of students.

Conclusion

For many students, school was both enjoyable and beneficial. It was a time filled with learning new skills, socializing as well as growing and developing in positive ways. The stories told by participants in this study, revealed a very different world; a world of formal educational that was tumultuous at best. Respondents’ memories of school life were mostly negative in nature,
overshadowing any positive experiences they may have had. Furthermore, the participants felt that these same negative experiences were paramount in restricting their participation in further education for the simple pleasure of learning as others do.

Respondents learned to become moderately successful in dealing with their dispositional barriers. They have critically reflected on their lives and made positive changes, despite the fact that their perceptions and attitudes towards education and themselves are tainted by past experiences. Participants examined the way they viewed past circumstances and reassessed their beliefs and actions to a small degree. They also developed strong support networks to assist them in achieving their educational goals.

The personal changes made by each respondent have implications for others who suffer from dispositional barriers. The courage shown by participants reveals that it is possible for individuals to cope with their negative attitudes, feelings, and beliefs and move towards developing a more balanced and positive outlook about themselves and education. The process is long as social and psychological influences are deeply rooted, but these respondents have illustrated there is potential for change.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX 1: Unstructured Interview Sample Questions

Where did you go to school?
What did you enjoyed about school? Why?
What did not enjoy about school? Why?
When you think back on your school experience what is your overall feeling?
About when in your schooling influenced this feeling the most?
Were there any turning points in your school life that influenced this feeling?
When you think of yourself as a learner back then, what immediately comes to mind?
How would you describe yourself as a learner then?
When you think of yourself as a learner now, what immediately comes to mind? How would you describe yourself as a learner now?
Were there any personal factors that affected your decision regarding the level of education you obtained?
After you left school were there any courses/programs that you have wanted to take for employment or personal reasons but did not?
    Yes - Please describe why you took the course/program.
    No - Please describe what was the most important reason that prevented you from taking this course/program.
Are past experiences preventing you from participating in further education at the present time?
Yes - Which past events most prominently affect this decision? What feelings do they provoke?
Are there things that have intervened to help you get over this?
What circumstances or changes would motivate you to participate in further educational activities?
How would these changes affect your decision?
If you were in a position to affect changes to the educational system, what changes would you implement to improve situations for yourself or others?
Demographic questions:

How old are you?
What gender are you?
To which ethnic or cultural group do you belong?
What is the highest level of education that you have obtained? When did you decide on that level? Why?
What is your household annual income?
What is your occupation? Are you presently a student?
APPENDIX 4: Category Development Memo

The following eight steps were taken to extract the data above and to code participant responses:

- **Step 1** – the transcribed interviews were read twice to obtain an overall sense of the meaning of the respondents' words;
- **Step 2** – as the transcripts were reread a third time, main ideas were underlined and initial thoughts regarding their meaning were written in the margin of the text;
- **Step 3** – the underlined passages were reread for clarification within the context of the narrative and were coded for thematic content;
- **Step 4** – information under each code was re-examined and the parameters of the categories were defined. This led to an initial grouping of 12 descriptive categories. The codes and relevant passages of text were placed in an excel spreadsheet for a visual representation of the data;
- **Step 5** – grouping of commonalties between the initial category codes occurred and several codes were collapsed together to create nine categories. Definitional parameters were then redefined;
- **Step 6** – a second rater was given the definitions of the thematic categories and presented with the raw data (identifying material removed). The rater followed the steps used in phases 1 through 3;
- **Step 7** – discrepancies between the investigator's coding and that of the second rater were examined. Two of the descriptive categories were eliminated and parameters for the remaining groupings were modified;
- **Step 8** – all passages were re-coded using the redefined seven descriptive categories.
Descriptive Sub-Category Definitions

(1) **Self-esteem** pertained to individual's perception of their ability to perform tasks.

(2) **Faith in system** in the system referred to one's perceptions of problems in the school system surrounding teaching methods, curriculum design, and belief in the academic structure as a whole.

(3) **Attitude** covered issues involving "desire" for learning or participation, "perspective" regarding the relevance of education or material taught, and "respect" towards instructors or academic structure.

(4) **Peer** issues involved matters such as pressure to conform and concern over judgement by peers to a degree that distract an individual and negatively influence their enjoyment of school.

(5) **Support** pertained to the lack of established support mechanisms for positive reinforcement at home or at school.

(6) **Environment/Atmosphere** included concerns over safety, security, or a positive atmosphere conducive to learning.

(7) **Teachers** referred to teachers attitude and actions towards students such as an abusive mannerism, lack of respect, and a relationship between the teacher and student that is entirely directed by the action and demands of the educator.

**Sample Coding of Transcript**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code #</th>
<th>Sample Passage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>referring to a teacher: physical abuse, intimidation, emotional abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>referring to a teacher: monster, absolute monster, emotional predator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>referring to a teacher: were being terrorized by this teacher – emotionally and physically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>find it hard to reconcile why the teacher was allowed to continue in the classroom – felt a tremendous sense of betrayal by the system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>school was no longer a safe place – not a place to learn but a place to survive and get out</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Note: the interpretation of quotes taken out of the context of the narrative can be misconstrued – the above is meant as an example only
APPENDIX 5: Sample Field Note Sheet

Interview Date: _________ Starting Time: _________ Ending Time: _________

Description of the Environment: _______________________________________
                                                                                   _______________________________________
                                                                                   _______________________________________

Nonverbal Behaviour: (tone of voice; posture; facial expressions; hand gestures)
                                                                                   _______________________________________
                                                                                   _______________________________________
                                                                                   _______________________________________

Content of Interview: (key words; topics; focus) ________________________________
                                                                                   _______________________________________
                                                                                   _______________________________________
                                                                                   _______________________________________

Researcher’s Impressions: (discomfort of participant with certain topics; emotional responses)
                                                                                   _______________________________________
                                                                                   _______________________________________
                                                                                   _______________________________________

Analysis: (tentative hunches; trends; emerging patterns): ________________________
                                                                                   _______________________________________
                                                                                   _______________________________________
                                                                                   _______________________________________

Technological Problems: (taping problems): ________________________________
                                                                                   _______________________________________
                                                                                   _______________________________________
                                                                                   _______________________________________