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Sources of self-efficacy beliefs of resilient high school dropouts

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SOURCES OF SELF-EFFICACY BELIEFS OF RESILIENT HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership, Administration, and Policy

by

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this study was to examine the stories of men and women who dropped out of high school and later returned to school to earn a *higher education* degree. Previous research outcomes proposed that an individual's *self-efficacy* influenced academic motivation and judgment of capabilities to perform actions and overcome obstacles. Although high school *dropouts* have been studied in depth, the voices of individuals that have pursued furthering their education after dropping out have not been heard in self-efficacy studies. The study intended to answer three research questions: (a) what was the motivating factor to return to school after dropping out of high school, (b) what factors enhanced or inhibited the development of the self-efficacy of those who had dropped out of high school to eventually earn their degree in post-secondary education, and (c) how did self-efficacy sources influence the academic paths of resilient high school dropouts?

This qualitative study followed an interpretative phenomenological analysis research design. Four significant findings emerged from the analysis of the participants' responses. First, exposure to adversity and the dropout predictors identified in the literature were present in the stories of the participants. Second, higher income, better jobs, and respect and credibility motivated the participants to return to school. Third, positive adults, educational aspirations, and observing others achieving success enhanced the participants' development of self-efficacy. Fourth, self-efficacy was found to influence the academic paths of resilience. The findings from this study can be used to inform school practices and program development. Based on the results of the interviews, students would benefit from the continued research of the effects of exposure to adversity, development of counseling and mentoring programs, increased vocational and job opportunities, and program development focused on enhancing student self-efficacy.

Chapter One: Introduction and Background

Background

The basis of any country's economic solvency depends on its ability to produce an educated population (Aghion, Boustan, Hoxby, & Vandenbussche, 2009; Hanushek & Wobmann, 2010). Education is one of the essential elements related to social and economic attainment (Melville, 2006; Stuit & Springer, 2010). In the United States, high school completion and dropout rates indicate the productivity and effectiveness of the schooling system along with the country's social and economic well being (National Research Council (U.S.)., Hauser, Koenig, National Academy of Education, 2011). In addition, education is of utmost importance to individuals. For example, high school completion is a fundamental requirement for youth to bolster their employability and improve their adult life opportunities (Northeastern University Center for Labor Market Studies, 2009; Sum, Khatiwada, McLaughlin, & Palma, 2009). There is a prevalent agreement that dropping out of high school increases societal costs and leads to increased personal hardships.

Notwithstanding the significance of earning a high school diploma, approximately one-fourth of U.S. high school students fail to graduate each year. It was estimated that in 2010 1.3 million students failed to graduate nationwide ("Diplomas Count 2010," 2010). The annual estimates translate to more than 7,000 students dropping out each school day. For the nation as a whole, it is estimated that only two-thirds of all students that enter the 9th grade will graduate and obtain a high school diploma in four years (Melville, 2006). The data reflect that among those students who are not graduating, there is an inequity among different groups. Amid poor, African American, and Latino students, the likelihood that they will graduate is lower than their non-Hispanic white peers (Melville, 2006). The factors that research has found linked with

leaving high school before graduating are increasing across the nation's schools (Rumberger, 2011).

Findings from studies such as Rumberger (2011) and Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Morrison (2006) support the idea that providing motivation and guidance to students with at-risk factors may impact student outcomes leading to dropout prevention. The National Research Council and National Academy of Education (2011), recognize that receiving a secondary diploma is significantly related to social and economic achievement. A secondary diploma benefits both the country and the individuals who earn it. Additionally, "a high school diploma is usually a minimum requirement for engaging in further training and serves as the gatekeeper for higher education and higher paying jobs" (NRC and NAed, 2011, p. 13).

The racial achievement gap has received more attention than other student achievement measures in part because of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law signed in 2002, which required that students test annually and that scores be separated by racial subgroups and released to the public (Orfield, 2004). NCLB also emphasized graduation rates, requiring reports and rates to be disclosed to demonstrate increased student outcomes (National Research Council, 2011; Orfield, 2004). The law defines the *graduation rate* as "the percentage of students who graduate from secondary schools with a regular diploma in the standard number of years" (Richmond, 2009, p. 3). Although the language contained in NCLB intended to convey the significance of reducing the dropout rate, tests scores became more important progress indicators than students earning a high school diploma. "Because the graduation rate provisions were so loosely defined, there were many concerns that the test-based mandates would lead schools to push low-performing students out of school in an effort to increase test scores" (National Research Council, 2011, p. 21).

The dropout crisis creates profound economic and social consequences. The 2009 Northeastern University study found that high school dropouts negatively influence a community's economic, social, and civic health. Individuals without a high school diploma are estimated to cost taxpayers above $292,000 in lower tax profits, and incarceration costs (Sum et al., 2009). Melville (2006) found that dropouts cost the nation a total of $200 billion each year, not taking into account the fact that more than two-thirds of the prison inmates are school dropouts.

California mirrors the same alarming dropout statistics as the rest of the nation. Rumberger (2007) reported that California has an estimated 34% dropout rate. According to the California Department of Education (CDE; 2016), California's cohort graduation has continued to climb in the last consecutive years. Going form 74.7% in 2010 to 82.3% in 2015. The CDE reports that 83,024 did not graduate with their class in the year 2015. Of those students, 52,249 were categorized as cohort dropouts, while 30,775 were tracked as still being part of the cohort pursuing a high school diploma or its equivalent after four years (California Department of Education, 2016).

California's economy would profit by decreasing the high school dropout rate. Stuit and Springer's (2010) research analyzed the dropout economic and social costs in California from a taxpayer perspective. The analysis revealed that each prevented dropout would represent a gain of $28,227 and eliminating student dropouts would result in a $2.8 billion annual savings, representing 14% of the present state budget deficit. It is also estimated that not graduating from high school is resulting in the loss of over $54 billion per year in taxable income, support for meal stamps, housing sponsorships, Medicaid, and state and federal income tax credits.

In addition to the national and state costs, when students do not graduate from high school, it generates increased hardships for them personally. Compared to individuals who obtain diplomas, students who leave school before graduating have higher rates of unemployment, earn less money in their lifetime, have higher rates of mortality, have greater involvement in criminal conduct, have higher rates of incarceration, depend on public aid, and they are less prone to partake in voting (Belfield & Levin, 2007; Rumberger, 2011). Harlow's (2003) study on dropouts and correctional populations found that approximately 60% of individuals in jail, 68% of state prisoners, and about half of the federal inmates did not graduate from high school. Without a high school diploma, individuals' likelihood to be unemployed increases to 72% (U.S. Department of Labor, 2004). Furthermore, individuals who drop out of high school are also more likely to become teenage parents (Waldfogel, Garfinkel, & Brendan, 2005). The research found that young females (16-24) without a diploma are six times more predisposed to give birth to one or more children than their peers with some college or with a college degree, (Sum et al., 2009) and high school dropouts are at greater risk for both early death and a variety of poor health consequences (Davidoff & Genevieve, 2005). Research indicates that inferior levels of education accomplishments correlate with adverse health effects and increased behaviors that lead to poor health (Stuit & Springer, 2010).

At-risk conditions start early before the individual decides to disengage from school. Researchers have demonstrated that more than 40% of learners in secondary school have risk factors that may lead to dropping out (Kominski, Jamieson, & Martinez, 2001). Kominski et al. (2001) found that nearly 46% of America's school-aged children, more than 24 million, have at least one personal risk factor, and 18% have, or will have, multiple risk factors during their lifetime. Family and school factors have been determined to contribute to the phenomena of

dropping out. Additionally, personal, social and circumstantial variables influence the process of disengagement before high school completion (Lessard, Fortin, Butler-Kisber, & Marcotte, 2014).

High self-efficacy has been found to guide the perseverance of those with potential risk factors. For example, Martin and Marsh (2006) found that establishing ways to control, planning, coping with emotions, and persevering were identified as four factors that predict resilient outcomes and prevented students from dropping out. Significantly, one common finding that distinguished resilient students from those who did not graduate was that resilient students viewed themselves as part of the solution. Lessard et al. (2014) studied at-risk high school students and examined why some individuals endured and found that four categories of abilities set the resilient students apart from those who left school before graduation. Being able to use resources and asking for support when needed, establishing constructive relationships while setting limits with educators and peers, strong planning skills and following through on decisions was attributed to their resilience. The students that did not drop out, although they had at-risk factors, were aware that they hold their own assets and they were also convinced that they could succeed. Resilient individuals also recognized that they could get help if they were not able to manage on their own. In other words, students were able to achieve success and persist when they had a strong sense of their responsibility to be part of the solution.

Self-efficacy theory has provided extensive information on motivational practices, academic achievement, and career path selection. Although research is available on the role of self-efficacy and the impact in reducing the intention of students to drop out (Alivernini & Lucidi, 2011), self-efficacy in enhancing academic outcomes (Caprara et al., 2008; Pajares, 1996; Pastorelli et al., 2001; Usher & Pajares, 2006; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994), and the

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impact in shaping aspiration and career trajectories (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, &

Pastorelli, 2001; Betz & Hackett, 1981, 2006; Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992)

research is not available in the role of self-efficacy in *resilient dropouts*. Bandura (1993) posits

that self-efficacy beliefs increase individuals' determination to master school tasks and therefore

affect college outcomes. Bandura's (1977, 1986) sources of self-efficacy have not been

investigated in relation to individuals' beliefs in their agency and the capacity to change behavior

to recover from high school drop out and achieving higher education goals.

Statement of Problem

Studies have demonstrated that self-efficacy impacts the level of persistence and

determination an individual exerts when faced with obstacles. It is also evident that earning a

high school diploma is an essential requirement for continued education and higher paying jobs.

The primary problem leading this research was the alarming number of students dropping out

without completing the high school diploma requirements. The problem associated with the

excessive number of students leaving high school before graduating is the lack of research of

individuals that return to school and complete a higher education degree after the phenomenon of

dropping out. High school dropout is an issue that has been studied in depth. What remains

unclear is why individuals return to school to complete higher education degrees.

Purpose and Nature of the Study

This qualitative study explored the stories of men and women who dropped out of high

school and later returned to school to earn a higher education degree. Previous research

outcomes proposed that an individual's self-efficacy influenced academic motivation and

judgment of capabilities to perform actions and overcome obstacles. The voices of individuals

that have pursued furthering their education after dropping out have not been noticeable in self-

efficacy studies. The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of dropping out and later returning to school to earn a higher education degree.

Research Questions

The following questions were developed for this study:

1. What was the motivating factor to return to school after dropping out of high school?

2. What factors enhanced or inhibited the development of the self-efficacy of those who had dropped out of high school to eventually earn their degree in post-secondary education?

3. How did self-efficacy sources influence the academic paths of resilient high school dropouts?

Theoretical Focus

The studies surrounding the theory of self-efficacy provide the framework for this research study. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's confidence about his or her capabilities in a particular assignment or task. Bandura (1977) found that self-efficacy is an essential cognitive mechanism, which supports many aspects of human behavior. Bandura (1977) theorized that individual's capability beliefs and the results derived from their effort powerfully influences behavior. According to Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, self-efficacy encourages the effort an individual exerts, the degree to cope with anxiety, the level of persistence and determination when faced with obstacles.

Self-efficacy has earned attention in the field of education, where it has predicted students' academic achievement (Pajares & Urdan, 2006; Usher & Pajares, 2008). Moreover, self-efficacy has shown to predict individuals' career paths (Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade,

2005). Individuals with higher self-efficacy have been found to sustain extensive effort, frequently evaluate growth, and engage in monitoring results that in turn foster success in school (Schunk & Pajares, 2005). Bandura (1986) theorized that individuals can govern the way they think, how they feel, and how they behave.

Bandura (1977) postulated that an individual's self-efficacy affects involvement in activities, effort exerted, and perseverance. Self-efficacy beliefs are created and developed from four fundamental sources of information: enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and affective states.

Enactive mastery experiences. Mastery understandings are believed to be primary dependable sources of efficacy information since they offer concrete evidence of achievement (Bandura, 1997; Schunk & Usher, 2012). Successes increase self-efficacy, whereas letdowns damage them, especially if the failures appear before the individual's self-efficacy beliefs are robustly built (Bandura, 1997).

Vicarious experiences. Individuals learn from comparing to particular acquaintances in similar situations, such as classmates, work associates, competitors, or other individuals pursuing similar endeavors (Bandura, 1997). For example, exposing individuals to confidence-building representations to increase levels of perseverance when faced with recurring failure (Brown & Inouye, 1978). Vicarious experience is most active when individuals acknowledge a commonality concerning their capacities and the skills of the model. "The greater the assumed similarity, the more persuasive are the models' successes and failures" (Bandura, 1997, p. 87).

Verbal persuasion. Truthful self-affirmation and confirmation from others may advance individuals' efficacy perceptions (Bandura, 1977, 1997). "If people receive realistic encouragement, they will be more likely to exert greater effort and to become successful than if

they are troubled by self-doubts" (Wood & Bandura, 1989, p. 365). On the other hand, persuasive efficacy information can also be conveyed in ways that undermine individual's sense of self-efficacy (Schunk, 1991).

Physiological and affective states. According to Bandura (1997), individuals judge their capabilities partly on information conveyed by physiological and their emotional state. "People often read their physiological activation in stressful or taxing situations as signs of vulnerability to dysfunction" (Bandura, 1997, p. 106).

Self-efficacy plays a fundamental function in motivating behavior. Motivation is determined in large part by cognitive representations of future states—by expected outcomes and by cognized future goals (Bandura, 1977). An individual's self-control exerted over events determines the outcomes produced on the goals they set for themselves.

Importance of the Study

Although some studies have documented the self-reported reasons why students leave school before attaining a diploma (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Lehr, Johnson, Bremer, Cosio, & Thompson, 2004; Rumberger, 2011), there are no studies available examining the self-reported reasons why individuals return to school, complete the requirements, or the equivalent, enroll in a higher education program, and complete a post-secondary degree.

This study will help inform actions to improve intervention practices to recover students that may be vulnerable to dropping out or that have left school before graduating. Additionally, it will add to programmatic developments to seek to increase students' self-efficacy to help overcome obstacles and develop a motivation to have a transition plan for students to move on to college after high school. The description of individuals' experience with dropping out of high school and later recovering might be critical in further developing programs, interventions,

curriculum and professional development aspiring to improve students' self-efficacy and academic resilience. This study might also increase the inquiry on school reform resolves directed at decreasing the dropout rates and increasing the efforts to recapture the students that drop out of high school to guide them to improved futures. Learning more about what motivates students to continue their education after having dropped out will lead to advancing prevention efforts. This research will also be relevant for students that have dropped out to realize that college success is still a possibility even if circumstances have led them to drop out before completing their secondary education. Further examination of the relationship of self-efficacy sources and how it impacts resilient dropouts will add insight into the intervention or combination of interventions that may influence students that have dropped out to return to school.

Definitions

- *Dropout*. For the present study, dropping out was considered as an event. In other words, a high school dropout was an individual who decided to quit school before graduating (Rumberger, 2011).

- *Graduation rate*. The indicator used to determine the percentage of learners that earn a regular high school diploma (NRC and NAed, 2011).

- *Higher education.* For the present study, higher education was used to define the level of education beyond high school and earned at institutions that award Associate's, Bachelor's, Master's and/or Doctorate degrees.

- *Resilient dropout*. A resilient dropout was defined as an individual who dropped out of school between grades 9 and 12, later earned a diploma or its equivalency, and continued to college to obtain a higher degree.

- *Self-efficacy.* The fundamental concepts of Bandura's (1977) theory can be described as, "what people think, believe, and feel affects how they behave" (Bandura, 1986, p. 25). Bandura (1997) states that individual's beliefs about individual efficacy results in making things happen. Bandura found that self-efficacy is an essential cognitive mechanism, which supports many aspects of human behavior. Since Bandura's (1977) influential article, the abundant examination has extended the function of self-efficacy as an approach to alter individuals' actions. For example, self-efficacy has been connected with predicting various outcomes such as academic results, quitting smoking, tolerating pain, performing in athletics, and selecting a career (Bandura, 1986).

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to the collection of seven interviews of individuals that lived and worked in Southern California. All participants had dropped out of high school and subsequently attained a post-secondary education degree. Findings were limited to the individuals involved in the study. Additionally, the data captured brief snapshots of information shared by individuals about their dropout experience and recovery from the phenomena to continue their education to achieve a higher education degree ultimately. The findings were limited to subject report and did not intend to generalize the experiences of all resilient dropouts.

Assumptions

This study assumed that participants were credible, open and honest in their responses to the interview questions. Secondly, this study considered that the findings would help understand the impact of individual's self-efficacy sources that influence the resilience of dropout students to overcome the dropout event.

Positionality

Moustakas (1994) describes phenomenology as being less focused on the interpretation of the researcher and more on the experiences of the individuals participating. Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology is not focused on the description of the experiences but rather on the researcher's interpretation. Additionally, Moustakas focuses on epoche (or bracketing), in which an investigator should set aside, as much as possible, his or her own experience to be able to approach the phenomenon with a fresh perspective. Thus, transcendental means, "in which everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34).

Moustakas (1994) admits that seeing a phenomenon from a fresh perspective is seldom entirely achieved. Creswell (2013) recommends that researchers begin a project by addressing their own experience with the phenomenon and bracketing out their views before proceeding with collecting the views of the experience of others. The procedure to accomplish bracketing, outlined by Moustakas, consists of identifying the phenomenon to study, bracketing out one's personal experience, and collecting data from several individuals who have experienced the event.

Currently, the researcher is a doctoral student in the Education Leadership, Administration and Policy Program at Pepperdine University. Since 2003, she has worked with high school dropout recovery programs in various roles, including: teacher, lead teacher, vice principal, principal, and director of instruction. In working in academic recovery programs, the researcher has seen many success stories of students that had been labeled as *school dropouts* to eventually earn not only their high school diploma, but also pursue higher education degrees.

Additionally, the researcher has lived the phenomenon of having dropped out of high school and later returning to complete higher education degrees. She left high school when she

was sixteen years old. Her reason for leaving high school was due to her loss of hope of achieving anything past a high school diploma. She did not have the desire to graduate since she did not have any true-to-life goals past obtaining the diploma. Another reason for dropping out was to help her family financially. Although education was highly respected in her family, both her parents completed very little education. Her mother completed the fifth grade and her father only finished the first grade in Mexico.

The researcher became acquainted with the term dropout when she journeyed from Mexico to California with the dream of graduating high school. Two years after dropping out, the researcher realized she would not accomplish much without an education. She moved to the United States to pursue the American Dream of graduating high school and going to college. Recovering from being a high school dropout was not an easy task. The researcher was able to become fluent in the English language, navigate the school system, and eventually earn an Associate's, a Bachelor's, Master's and work towards earning a Doctorate degree.

Organization of the Study

This qualitative phenomenological study intended to explore the stories of individuals who dropped out of high school and later returned and earn a higher education degree. Although previous research outcomes propose that an individual's self-efficacy perspectives influence academic motivation and judgment of capabilities to perform actions and overcome obstacles, the voices of individuals that have pursued furthering their education after dropping out have not been noticeable in self-efficacy studies. This study explored the ordinary meaning and lived experiences with the phenomenon of dropping out and later recovering and achieving academic success and earning a higher education degree. Furthermore, the study intended to identify self-efficacy themes within the stories of resilient dropouts.

This research study is presented in five chapters. Chapter One includes the background of the study, the problem statement, the study purpose, the study significance, the definition of terms, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations.

Chapter Two presents a review of the literature and investigates the dropout history, self-efficacy theory, and the four sources of self-efficacy.

Chapter Three includes the methodology employed in the study, including the investigative questions, a description of the participant selection process, and the techniques for gathering and synthesizing the data.

Chapter Four includes the design study and the presentation of the findings. The findings are presented as they relate to the three research questions.

Chapter Five provides a review of the key findings. Based on the key finding, conclusions, discussions, and recommendations for policy, practice and further study are included. The chapter concludes with final thoughts.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

This qualitative study explored the stories of men and women who dropped out of high school and later returned to school to earn a higher education degree. Although previous research outcomes proposed that an individual's self-efficacy perspectives influence academic motivation and judgment of capabilities to perform actions and overcome obstacles, the voices of individuals that have resolved to further their education after dropping out have not been noticeable in self-efficacy studies. The current study utilized a phenomenological design to explore the phenomenon of returning to school after dropping out of high school. A phenomenological design was appropriate to the study because it used detailed descriptions from the participants to explore their lived experiences and perceptions in regards to being a resilient dropout.

The literature review explored the ways self-efficacy beliefs affect and guide individuals to overcome the event of dropping out of high school. The intention of the literature review was to investigate whether there are sources of self-efficacy that impacted individuals to overcome the obstacles after departing from high school before earning a secondary diploma. The review of the literature for this chapter starts with the examination of the reasons why individuals drop out of high school. Secondly, this chapter will include a literature review of the study's conceptual framework: self-efficacy. Thirdly, in this literature review is the research concerning the four sources of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and affective states. Also included in the literature review is research pertaining to the impact of self-efficacy and performance outcomes, career selection, and for academic achievement.

Dropout History

The term dropout can be traced back to the 1960's (Dorn, 1993; Kamenetz, 2015). The stigma of being classified as a dropout came about due to the expectations for youth in America to obtain a high school diploma in the last several decades. But before dropping out of school was identified as problematic, it was required for high school graduation to be recognized as a standard. Dorn (1993) described that being a high school dropout is a distress for most individuals as it is viewed as a "departure from an age-specific norm…the norm is high school graduation as a teenager" (p. 354). The norm of graduating from high school remains. Dropout is a commonly used word in everyday speech because the expectation is that the vast majority of teenagers acquire diplomas.

Most would concur that the percentage of individuals leaving high school before completion is excessive. However, the rate of dropouts in America has been unclear due to the ambiguity of how the term dropout is defined. "The ways that states and local school districts classify students as dropouts, graduates, or completers can significantly affect the rates that are calculated" (NRC and NAed, 2011, p. 7). According to The National Research Council (NRC) and the National Academy of Education (NAed), the common categories of dropout/completion indicators are the following:

1. Individual cohort rate: "a rate derived from longitudinal data on a population of individuals who share a common characteristic at one point of time, such as entering high school" (NRC and NAed, 2011, p. 9).

2. Aggregate cohort rate: "a rate designated to approximate an individual cohort rate when longitudinal data are not available by using total counts of students (e.g., the

number of ninth graders in a given year, the number of graduates in a given year)"
(NRC and NAed, 2011, p. 9).

3. Status rate: "a rate that represents the fraction of the population that falls into a
   particular category at a given point in time (e.g., the percentage of the total U.S.
   population that does not have a high school diploma)" (NRC and NAed, 2011,
   p. 9).

4. Event rate: "a rate that is the fraction of a population that experiences a particular
   event over a given interval. For instance, the event dropout rate indicates the
   percentage of students who exit school during a specific academic year without
   having earned a diploma" (NRC and NAed, 2011, p. 9).

Regardless of how dropout is defined, it is clear that the number of students leaving high
school has become a national issue resulting in nationwide policy concern. In 1990, the national
educational goal established that the United States should increase the graduation rate to 90% by
the year 2000 (U.S. Department of Education, 1990). In 2007, education researchers Balfanz,
Herzog, and MacIver (2007) coined the term *dropout factory* to describe high schools in which
less than 60% of the ninth graders remained enrolled four years later. In 2007, Balfanz et al.
labeled more than 2,000 U.S. schools as dropout factories. The highest concentration of the
labeled dropouts factories was located in high-poverty rural areas or large cities. The schools
identified as dropout factories had high proportions of minority students facing challenges
beyond academic ones. Kati Haycock (1998) found a clear relationship between low standards,
low-level curriculum, undereducated teachers and poor student outcomes. Haycock (1998)
suggests that taking simple steps to ensure that poor and minority students have teachers of the
same quality as other children; about half of the gap in achievement would disappear. She

further details that if the best teachers were assigned to those students that need it the most, there is enough evidence to suggest that the achievement gap would entirely close. Haycock (1998) found that the effects of poverty and institutional racism would melt away allowing children to soar to the same heights as other Americans from more advantaged homes if they were in the hands of the best teachers.

One decade ago, Bridgeland et al. (2006) deemed the high school dropout outcomes an epidemic. Federal legislation has made various attempts to address the high school departure, as evidence, we have the inclusion of provisions in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. NCLB established the school dropout prevention program in Title I, Part H, which provides resources to state education agencies and local education agencies (LEAs) to plan and coordinate "dropout prevention and re-entry programs for students in grades 6-12" (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

In the early 1990s, states and the federal government initiated the development of distinctive graduation rate computations (DePaoli, Balfanz, & Bridgeland, 2016). The National Governors Association (NGA) reached unanimity that secondary rates of graduation should be computed using comparable methods throughout all states. The formula was modified and refined to become the Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate. The new directive defines a four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate as "the number of students who graduate in 4 years with a regular high school diploma divided by the number of students who enter high school 4 years earlier, adjusting for transfers, in and out émigrés, and deceased students" (NRC and NAed, 2011, p. 22). Presently, it is required that states use the Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate to account for their graduation rates (DePaoli et al., 2016; NRC and NAed, 2011). This measuring

system tracks all individual students over time, and it captures the percentage of first-year students entering high school class who graduate four years later.

Superseding NCLB, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was endorsed by President Obama on December 10, 2015. The bipartisan measure reauthorized the nation's education law, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), and continues the commitment to afford equal opportunity for all students. Appreciably, the bill highlights the importance of education in creating generational change (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Reasons for Dropping Out

Understanding the dropout crisis necessitates a better understanding of why individuals leave school before earning a diploma. Nonetheless, identifying the causes as to why students depart before earning a high school diploma is challenging (Orfield, 2004). Dropping out is a venture persuaded by a variety of factors linked to the individual and his or her background, the school, and the community (National Research Council, 2004). It has been discovered that departing from school before graduation is not caused by one isolated event, as there are many factors that may contribute to the increase of student disconnectedness from the educational and social framework of school (Fleming, 2012; Levin, 2012; Orfield, 2004; Ream & Rumberger, 2008; Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012). Bridgeland et al. (2006) found that leaving high school before graduating is a complicated decision that relates to the learner, his or her family, and the community. Ream and Rumberger (2008) concluded, "dropping out is perhaps best viewed as a long-term process of disengagement and withdrawal from school that often begins in the early elementary school" (p. 10).

Some studies have sought to explore the reasons students report for leaving school. One of the most influential studies was *The Silent Epidemic* (Bridgeland et al., 2006). In 2005, the

researchers collected data from four focus groups of participants ages sixteen to twenty-four. Interviews were also conducted with 467 diverse students, ages sixteen through twenty-five, who had dropped out of 25 public high schools in the United States. The authors note that the data are not a representative sample of dropouts, "but they offer reflections from a broad cross-section of the very people who are most affected by the silent epidemic of high school dropouts in America" (Bridgeland et al., 2006, p. 22). The report recommended greater standards for student performance; increasing time dedicated to instruction and at home assignments; and developing benchmarks for teachers and improved payments for educators. The report established that what was accurately threatened was the "promise that all, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual mind and spirit to the utmost" (Bridgeland et al., 2006, p. 8).

According to the literature, no particular motive exists to describe why individuals are departing from high school without a diploma. Students that leave school before graduating report various justifications for leaving school, including the educational setting, family, and employment associated reasons (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Rotermund, 2007; Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Some students leave school because they find school boring and not engaging, while others realize that they are far behind and consequently give up (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Rotermund (2007) examined the dropout issue from the student perspective in the United States. Data from three national surveys were employed to examine the factors that contributed to the individuals' decision to leave school. The following studies were used: (a) the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002, (b) The Silent Epidemic, and (c) the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (Rotermund, 2007). The most cited reasons for dropping out of high school were: absenteeism; thinking earning a GED would be easier; getting poor grades;

disliking school; and falling behind with academic work (Rotermund, 2007; Rumberger, 2011; Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

Dropout Predictors

Several factors may predict whether or not students will disengage from school or earn their high school diploma. Approximately 46% of America's school-aged children have at least one personal risk factor, and 18% have, or will have, multiple risk factors during their life (Kominski et al., 2001). Suh, Suh, and Houston (2007) identified the student's background and situation as indicators of student disengagement from high school. Rumberger and Lim (2008) discuss four types of influences that lead individuals to withdrawing from high school: (a) educational performance, (b) behaviors, (c) attitudes, and (d) background. These four factors have been noticeable across the findings intending to explain why students leave high school without a diploma.

Educational performance. Empirical studies demonstrate that test scores and grades are indicators that forecast individuals' success or failure in earning a high school diploma (Ramsdal, Bervik, & Wynn, 2015; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). Study results show that performance in primary and middle school can often project whether students will drop out or complete the high school requirements. For example, Rumberger and Lim's (2008) analysis of the impact of academic success as a predictor of high school dropout found that academic attainment had a substantial statistical effect on the probability to lead students to withdraw before earning a diploma. They found a relationship between student test results and the risk of dropping out. The higher the grades, the lower the risk of quitting school. Conversely, subordinate test scores augmented the risk for students to drop out. Students that

fail middle and high school courses have increased the potential to give up before graduating high school.

Behaviors. Student behaviors in school and outside of school have been associated to impact high school graduation. Student engagement is one of the most impactful behaviors to predict student dropout. Engagement includes active involvement in academic work and the social aspects of the school. Finn and Rock (1997) established measures of student engagement—such as school absence frequency or tardiness, completeness of homework, and school preparedness. The out-of-the-class measure included quantifying whether students were involved in sports or academically oriented supplementary activities (Finn & Rock, 1997). Suh and Suh (2006) researched the association concerning educational engagement and meeting the graduation requirements. They define student levels of engagement as follows:

> Student engagement levels can be assessed through the way they complete class work, whether they maintain educational expectations or aspirations for themselves, whether they complete homework on time, whether they control their TV watching, whether they attend class regularly, and whether they can participate in class discussions and other school activities. (Suh & Suh, 2006, p. 15)

The most common specific indicator of dropping out relating to behavior found in research was absenteeism (Schargel, Thacker, & Bell, 2007; Rumberger, 2011). Student enrollment in high school does not necessarily mean that students are attending. Chronic absenteeism was found to be "the strongest predictor for dropping out" (Rumberger, 2011, p. 50).

Attitudes. Beliefs, values, and mindsets relate to student performance and graduation. Psychological factors include motivation, values, goals and student self-perception about themselves and the abilities they possess (Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

For some children, the early-adolescent years mark the beginning of a downward spiral leading to academic failure and school dropout. Some early adolescents see their school grades decline markedly when they enter junior high school, along with their interest in school, intrinsic motivation, and confidence in their intellectual abilities. Negative responses in school increase as well, as youngsters become more prone to test anxiety, learned helplessness, and self-consciousness that impedes concentration on learning tasks. (Eccles, 1999, p. 37)

Dropout rates are found to be greater among individuals with low educational and occupational aspirations. To succeed in school, students must value school (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Students must believe that meeting their short and long-term goals is instrumental (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). The educational expectation is an immediate indicator found in the literature that may determine whether students drop out or remain in school. Students' educational expectations and goals can be answered in one question: "How far in school do you think you will get?" (Rumberger & Lim, 2008, p. 35).

To succeed in school individuals must also believe that they are competent. The manners in which individuals perceive their aptitudes are key components of motivation and are also precursors of student engagement (National Research Council, 2004). Self-concept, self-esteem, and locus of control have been examined in relationship to dropout and graduation. Locus of control, which according to Rumberger and Lim (2008) were able to measure the level of control individuals' feel over their fate to be the most studied self-perception in relationship to achievement, motivation and student engagement. Students feeling little control over their destiny presented to be more likely to drop out (Rumberger, 2011; Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

Background. Demographic characteristics and past experiences were found to be associated to high school graduation. Racial, ethnic, and linguistic minorities, coming from low-income families, and living in single-parent homes have increased risk factors that may lead to high school departure before graduation (Rumberger, 2011; Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Immigration status is another characteristic found to impact high school graduation (Orfield, 2004; Rumberger, 2011). For example, a study uncovered a decrease in graduation among those born outside of the country in comparison to second and third generation students (Zsembik & Llanes, 1996). Additionally, students with disabilities also drop out at an increased rate (Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

Although much attention has been given to the four types of factors that may lead students to become a high risk of educational failure, there has been less attention to traumatic events or trauma-related factors that may increase the potential for an individual to leave school before graduating. Psychological trauma occurs when individuals' mind and body are forced to cope with an overwhelming and horrifying experience (Van der Kolk & Fisler, 1994). According to Van der Kolk and Fisler (1994), "Traumatization occurs when both internal and external resources are inadequate to cope with external threat" (p. 393).

Prior investigation of early childhood distress (Broberg, Dyregrov, & Lilled, 2005) correlated trauma with the risk of school dropout. Some cases of school dropout may be explained by the experience of traumatic events (Dyregrov, 2004) or chronic exposure to stressful environments that may lead or intensify psychiatric disorders (Shnurr, Friedman, & Bernardy, 2002). Examples of trauma include direct experience or witnessing of physical abuse, sexual abuse and assault, domestic violence, community and school violence including aggressive and threatening victimization, severe neglect, traumatic injury and experiencing the

painful loss of a loved one (Cohen, Mannarino, & Deblinger, 2006). According to Porche,

Fortuna, Lin, and Alegria (2011), although research on behavioral and neurobiological

consequences of severe or persistent trauma among youth is relatively new and burgeoning field,

it has much to contribute to the understanding of academic achievement in children and

adolescents who may present signs of being at risk of school failure.

The awareness of trauma has been on the rise following horrific events such as

September 11, the tsunami of 2004, hurricane Katrina in 2005 and the 2010 earthquake in Haiti

(Tishelman, Haney, Greenwalk, & Blaunstein, 2010). Empirical research exists corroborating

the accounts of the widespread experience of significant adversity in childhood (Costello,

Erkanli, Fairbank, & Angold, 2002). The study indicates that many children encounter threats to

their physical and emotional well-being that in turn affect the way they perform in school.

Traumatic exposure has been found to strongly impact school-based functioning. Porche

et al. (2011) posit that early traumatic stress affects psychological, social, and physiological

development, which disrupts learning and academic achievement. The effects of adversity, such

as childhood trauma can impact various aspects of functioning and development because "it

disrupts brain architecture, affects other organ systems, and leads to stress-management systems

that establish reactively lower thresholds for responsiveness that persist throughout life, thereby

increasing the risk of stress-related disease and cognitive impairment well into adult years"

(Shonkoff, Boyce, & McEwen, 2009, p. 2256). Early experiences of trauma may affect

children's ability to control physiological arousal and the subsequent loss of self-regulation is

related to self-destructive behaviors, conduct problems, and substance abuse (Van der Kolk &

Fisler, 1994). Trauma-related behaviors associated with self-regulation may often be interpreted

as disruptive behaviors in the classroom setting (Porche et al., 2011). Due to the proliferation of

zero-tolerance policies, these types of behaviors and substance use behaviors can lead to suspensions and expulsions that may contribute to the exacerbation of developmental problems (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). Across various studies, children who have experienced trauma have significantly higher rates of school dropout. Studies indicate that the dropout rate for maltreated children, as compared to the general school population, can be as excessive as three times higher (Boden, Horwood, & Ferguson, 2007; Cahill, Kaminer, & Johnson, 1999; Leiter & Johnson, 1994).

Neighborhood stress. Over the past decades, research has also begun focusing on the effects of neighborhoods influencing children and adolescents. Exposure to various kinds of violence, whether directly witnessed in the home or the community, has been associated with adverse outcomes in adolescents. For example, a growing body of research focuses on the collateral consequences of neighborhood violence, especially its potential negative impact on educational results (Harding, 2010; Kirk & Sampson, 2013; Sharkey, 2010). Living in a violent neighborhood has been associated with lower school achievement as well as increased behavioral problems that obstruct school performance (Bowen & Bowen, 1999; Guerra, Huesmann, & Spindler, 2003). Harding (2010) has demonstrated that living in a high violence neighborhood can exceedingly impact individuals to drop out of school. Minorities living in low-income and urban communities may experience the more significant impact of neighborhood distress due to the higher exposure to trauma and stress (Crowder & South, 2003). Consequently, the exposure to neighborhood violence for African-American children is related to decreased academic achievement due to the frequent absences, lower grades, and low expectations for the future (Bowen & Bowen, 1999).

Self-Efficacy Theory

The core concepts of Bandura's theory can be recapitulated as, "what people think, believe, and feel affects how they behave" (Bandura, 1986, p. 25). Individuals can control their thinking, their feelings and their actions (Bandura, 1986). In 1977, Bandura theorized that individual's self-beliefs about their competencies and effort robustly influence the way they behave. Self-efficacy fundamentally impacts learners' confidence to perform an undertaking (Bandura, 1997). Bandura's (1986) theory states that individual's self-efficacy will govern choice, investment in effort, and the persistence and perseverance individuals will exhibit when they face challenges. Furthermore, individuals' self-efficacy will regulate the level of anxiety or serenity they will experience as they engage in tasks (Bandura, 1986). When thinking about capabilities and performance, individuals actively evaluate the relationship between their perceived abilities and the implications of a given undertaking (Cervone, 2000). Believing that major life occurrences can be controlled decreases the amount of stress and increases individual's incentive to confront life's challenges (Skinner, 1995). Bandura (1986) states that self-efficacy is an essential cognitive mechanism, which supports many characteristics of human comportment.

Since Bandura's (1977) influential writing on self-efficacy, the extended investigation has sought to explore the role of self-efficacy as a mechanism to alter individual's performances. For instance, there is confirmation that self-efficacy envisages various outcomes such as educational accomplishments, social skills, quitting smoking, pain management, performance in athletics, career selections, and improved sales performance (Bandura, 1986). Self-efficacy has also received abundant attention in educational research to predict educational achievement (Pajares, 1996, 2003; Usher & Pajares, 2006). Additionally, self-efficacy has also revealed

predictability to select college majors and career choices (Betz & Hackett, 1986; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994).

Although Bandura's (1986) writings created a model to influence self-efficacy beliefs for therapeutic interventions to change the behavior of phobics, it later became a generalized theory of human behavior becoming the theoretical model of self-efficacy. Bandura's theory has expanded into many areas to determine subsequent performance success (Cervone, 2000). For example:

Research involving the promotion of health and recovery from physical setbacks (Bandura, 1991; Ewart, 1995; O'Leary, 1992), performance in work settings (Locke & Latham, 1990; Wood & Bandura, 1989), the control of eating (Glynn & Rudderman, 1986), resistance to addictive substances (DiClemente, Fairhurst, & Piotrowski, 1995; Hagga & Stewart, 1992; Shadel &Mermelstein, 1996), educational achievement (Bandura et al., 1996; Schunk, 1991), and success in athletic pursuits (Feltz, 1982) attest to the pervasive impact of self-efficacy appraisal on human achievement. (Cervone, 2000, p. 33)

Self-efficacy is considered to be malleable, and therefore interventions can be in place to affect it negatively or positively. Pajares (1996) found that knowledge, skills and prior attainments, are not predictors of future accomplishments. Instead, individuals' viewpoints about their faculties and the result of the exertions strongly influence how individuals will behave (Pajares, 1996). The interpretation of individual's performance attainments informs and alters self-belief and therefore affects subsequent performance. Individuals who feel efficacious are theorized to persevere and exert more efforts when they confront complications as opposed to those who have doubts in their abilities (Schunk, 1991). Strong expectations are imperative to

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the persistence of performance (Lent & Hackett, 1987). Self-efficacy may increase or decrease

dependent on success or disappointment, but once self-efficacy is established, disappointment

may not impress in future outcomes (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 1991).

Individuals can influence their success or failure by bringing about actions that impact

self-efficacy. Individuals contribute to their performances and actions, rather than merely predict

the outcomes (Bandura, 1997). The regulation of motivation and action requires individuals to

have an idea of what they wish to accomplish (Bandura, 1986; Lent & Hackett, 1987; Schunk,

1991). If an individual is not aiming for anything in particular and is not responsible for

monitoring his or her performance, he or she most likely will not know what skills to enlist, how

much determination to exert and the extent to sustain it (Bandura, 1986). Additionally, he or she

will not be aware of when to make corrective adjustments in the strategies employed to achieve

the goal (Bandura & Cervone, 1986; Cervone, Jiwani, & Wood, 1991). Perceived self-efficacy

does not take into consideration the number of skills an individual has, but with what one may

judge he or she can do with the possible circumstances (Bandura, 1997). Research has informed

that self-efficacy beliefs are associated with other self-beliefs, motivations, academic endeavors,

and achievements (Pajares, 1996).

Self-efficacy beliefs produce several effects and influence the level of accomplishments.

Bandura (1997) explained the impact of self-efficacy beliefs as:

> Such beliefs influence the courses of action people choose to pursue, how much effort
>
> they put forth in given endeavors, how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles
>
> and failure, their resilience to adversity, whether their thought patterns are self-hindering
>
> or self-aiding, how much stress and depression they will experience on coping with
>
> taxing environmental demands, and the level of accomplishments they realize. (p. 3)

Sources of Self-Efficacy

Bandura (1986) hypothesized that self-efficacy is gained from four principal sources: past performance achievements, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasions, and physiological and affective states. The four sources of self-efficacy are believed to interact to affect performance judgments and, in turn, change the way individuals act. The sources of self-efficacy can help strengthen individuals' self-beliefs and therefore bolster academic achievement (Pajares, 1996; Pajares, 2003; Schunk & Pajares, 2005).

Past performance accomplishments. Past performance experiences, also known as enactive attainment, provide authentic evidence that an individual can master the goal he or she set to succeed. Past performance attainments are the most reliable sources of self-efficacy because they give information on achievements for which individuals have definite evidence of success (Bandura, 1997; Schunk & Usher, 2012). Enactive mastery experiences function as indicators of competence because they provide feedback. Mastery experiences are students' interpretation of their authentic previous accomplishments and are dominant sources of self-efficacy (Usher & Pajares, 2006). Mastery experience has been found to be a robust and dependable source of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1989; Dawes, Horan, & Hackett, 2000).

According to Bandura (1997), each success builds assurance, while each failure weakens it. The more individuals' beliefs of personal efficacy raise, the better they can perform tasks (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). Improvement in functioning is more likely to endure if competence development is empowered with the personal power to produce results through the continued exercise of skills (Bandura, 1997). This means that if individuals experience success in their performance, their personal belief of self-efficacy will elevate. Moreover, when individuals experience performance failures, mainly before a keen awareness of efficacy has

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been established, self-efficacy tends to decrease (Usher & Pajares, 2008). Once individuals are persuaded that they undeniably are equipped to be successful, they can persevere when encountering difficulty and are also able to rebound when they confront setbacks (Bandura, 1997). Success in small performances persuades individuals to believe that they have what it takes to go well beyond their immediate performance attainments and attempt higher accomplishments and even try new activities in new settings (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, Adams, Hardy & Howells, 1980).

Experience in overcoming obstacles contributes to resilience. Several definitions exist to explain resilience. However, the descriptions agree that two criteria must exist: (a) the occurrence of high risk or trauma and (b) the demonstration of adaptation resulting in a positive outcome (Ginsburg & Jablow, 2011; Luthar & Martin, 2005). The way individuals perceive their self-efficacy impacts the types of anticipatory situations they create and how they will be able to withstand adverse circumstances (Bandura, 1989). Individuals with a solid awareness of self-efficacy can imagine conditions that guide decisive implementation, while those who view themselves as less efficacious are more likely to envision themselves failing (Bandura, 1989). Individuals who experience recurrent failures but continue to improve over time are more likely to elevate their sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986; Benight & Bandura, 2004; Schunk, 1983a). Developing a resilient awareness of self-efficacy requires some mastery of difficulties through persevering and sustaining effort when encountering complications (Bandura, 1989). All in all, those with a healthy awareness of self-efficacy can endure and recover from failures (Bandura, 1977; Bandura et al., 1980).

A study within the academic setting found that knowledge, skills and prior attainments are not adequate predictors of subsequent achievements (Pajares, 1996). Individuals' self-beliefs

of their abilities and efforts "powerfully influence the ways in which they will behave" (Pajares, 1996, p. 543). This suggests that the way individuals interpret and self-reflect on the results of their performances will affect the way they think and behave. Self- efficacy views will help define the determination individuals will have to achieve pursuits, the level of perseverance, and also their resilience when faced with obstacles (Bandura, 1991, 1997; Pajares, 1996). High efforts beget greater accomplishments and therefore can enhance self-beliefs of efficacy. Resiliency in self-efficacy requires experiences with mastering complications through increased effort (Bandura, 2001; Pajares, 2003). When individuals succeed easily, they expect swift outcomes and their understanding of self-efficacy may be challenged by disappointment. "Some setbacks and difficulties in human pursuits serve a useful purpose in teaching that success usually requires sustained effort" (Bandura, 1989, p. 1179). Rebounding from setbacks allows individuals to become convinced that they can influence their outcomes (Schunk & Pajares, 2005; Valentine, DuBois, & Cooper, 2004).

Vicarious experiences. Individuals create their self-efficacy through vicarious experiences by assessing their performance in comparison to others. According to Bandura (1997), efficacy valuations are relatively persuaded by model attainment, which entails altering one's efficacy beliefs through diffusion of proficiencies and judgment with the accomplishment of others. Vicarious experiences, or modeling, can affect individual's self-efficacy viewpoints through a social comparison process. Modeling is an essential process of acquiring skills, viewpoints, and innovative comportments (Bandura, 1986; Rosenthal & Zimmerman, 1978). Vicarious experiences allow individuals to judge their capabilities by comparing with the successes and efforts of others (Bandura, 1986). Thus, being exposed to individuals comparable to oneself achieve success, or perform positively, typically raises efficacy beliefs. On the other

hand, mixed experiences of success and failure can impress self-doubts. Modeling that suggests effective ways of coping can enhance self-efficacy for individuals that have endured countless experiences endorsing their efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Vicarious knowledge gained from viewing others observed to be comparable in aptitude serves to yield influential proportional information, but having similar attributes, such as age, gender, and ethnicity, resulting in prominent foundations of self-efficacy information (Usher & Pajares, 2008).

Individuals are confronted daily with similar experiences whether they seek it or not. Vicarious experiences often occur by making associations and comparisons with associates such as classmates or family members (Bandura, 1991; Betz & Hackett, 1981; Schunk, 1987; Suls & Miller, 1977). Individuals formulate outcomes expectancies, or beliefs about the results of their actions, by observing modeled behaviors and the effects of such behaviors (Schunk, 1987). Individuals continually assess their capabilities as they relate to the performance of others. The greater the individuals' assumed resemblance to the models, the more impactful they become to their achievements and failures (Bandura, 1997). "Unlike learning by doing, which requires shaping the actions of each individual through repeated trial-and-error experiences, in observational learning a single model can transmit new ways of thinking and behaving simultaneously to many people in widely dispersed places" (Bandura, 1996, p. 5514). This suggests, for instance, that if students that have experienced dropping out before earning their high school diploma observe students recovering and continuing to earn a higher education degree, they will too consider recovering from the event of dropping out. It is more probable for individuals to amend their self-efficacy viewpoints following a model's success or letdown if they feel comparable to the model (Bandura, 1997).

The advances in communication technology have made modeling, diffusing ideas and behaviors easily accessible. Although vicarious experiences occur by observing everyday associates, the role of television has also brought symbolic models to individuals' fingertips (Bandura, 2004). Bandura (1997) found that television and other visual media offers another common source of vicarious influences containing symbolic modeling. Bandura (1997) theorized that the accelerated growth of technologies that allow individuals to share stories and information, the ranges of models that they are exposed to day in and day out continues to increase. Symbolic modeling, according to Bandura (1997) allows individuals to observe the attitudes, styles of competencies, and attainments of others in different segments of society as well as other individuals in other cultures. Being exposed to real or symbolic representations that display useful skills and approaches promotes the observer's views in their competencies (Bandura, 1982; Schunk, 1987). Strengthening self-belief can be achieved by visualizing oneself applying the modeled strategies successfully. Schunk (1987) found that when individuals observe others similar to them succeed at a task, their self-efficacy will advance and they will be encouraged to try the undertaking. According to Bandura (1982) and Schunk (1987), seeing individuals being successful increases confidence in engaging in tasks.

Bandura's (1997) theory is the basis of television and radio shows that have transformed the lives of millions. Various studies have demonstrated that "entertainment-education" works in modeling behavior. Entertainment-education is the practice of purposefully planning and executing media messages to both provide entertainment and education to intensify audience's knowledge about a topic, create encouraging attitudes and manifest performance (Svenkerud, 2001). Entertainment-education refers to programming designed to exert some pro-social effect on viewers such as: providing information, reducing stigma, and promoting healthy behaviors

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(Moyer-Guse & Nabi, 2010). For years, the use of entertainment-education has been used around the world to solve social problems such as HIV/AIDS prevention, teenage pregnancy, and domestic violence. Entertainment education allows for individuals to learn from role models whose behavior they aspirate to imitate. For example, in 1975, Mexican television executive Miguel Sabido crafted the soap opera *Ven Conmigo* or *Come with Me*. Sabido used Bandura's (2004) work on modeling to provide entertainment and promote adult literacy. It was reported that the plot not only drew large viewing audiences, but also moved 25,000 people to get free literacy booklets the next day after the episode first mentioned the existence of the national distribution center. The rate of enrollment was 99,000 the year before the series, and it grew to 900,000 during the year the series was broadcasted (Bandura, 2004). The program provided vicarious motivators by depicting the benefits of literacy. In comparison to non-viewers, the audiences of the series increased their knowledge about the national literacy agenda and also conveyed a positive attitude about supporting one another to promote and improve reading (Bandura, 2004).

Technology advances have made information consumption more available. Vicarious experiences may also include reading, browsing, or viewing blogs, commentaries or videos uploaded by others also provide an individual's levels of self-efficacy (Hocevar, Flanagin, & Metzger, 2014). In 2014, Hocevar et al. presented the concept of social media self-efficacy (SMSE), which relates to an individual's perceived capacity to attain an anticipated outcome in the social media setting. In their study of internet user's data, Hocevar et al. (2014) recognized that the higher the SMSE of individuals, the more they will depend and rely on the social media information and opinions. The study evaluated the association between social media and self-efficacy and how individuals assess online information. Those with higher social media self-

efficacy are increasingly disposed to accept the input from others on the online platforms (Hocevar et al., 2014).

Verbal persuasions. Verbal persuasion also offers a boost to self-efficacy perceptions (Bandura, 1986). Verbal persuasions are important communications from equals, educators, or parents that encourage the reinforcement or deterioration a learner's levels of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). It is easier for individuals to withstand an awareness of self-efficacy, particularly when facing struggles when meaningful individuals convey assurance in his or her capabilities rather than expressing doubts (Bandura, 1997). "If people receive realistic encouragement, they will be more likely to exert greater effort and to become successful than if they are troubled by self-doubts" (Wood & Bandura, 1989, p. 365). On the other hand, effusive praise that is perceived as trivial may result in lowering the expectation and appraisals of the student's ability (Fong & Krause, 2014).

Self-efficacious thinking alone will not foster effective use of skills. Just telling an individual that they are more capable than they believe themselves to be will not necessarily increase their capacity. Self-efficacious thinking may foster the practical use of skills, but it must be part of a multifaceted strategy of self-development (Bandura, 1997). Research studies in various fields demonstrate the limitations of verbal persuasion that create false or unrealistic expectations (Bandura, 1997) or that focus on capability rather than effort (Dweck, 2000; Mueller & Dweck, 1998). Some types of commendations may be disadvantageous to individuals' self-perception and advancement (Mueller & Dweck, 1998). In general, for verbal persuasion feedback to be effective, appraisal levels need to be authentic and appropriate for the learner (Bandura, 1997).

Unwarranted praise may be unproductive to an individual's intrinsic motivation and performance advancement. Ability commendation may push individuals into a fixed mindset, while effort praise encourages individuals to take on challenging new tasks (Dweck, 2006). Dweck (2006) recognized two different types of ability meanings. On the one hand, is the fixed capability that needs to be demonstrated, while on the other hand, there is an ability that can be cultivated through the continual increase of knowledge. "The growth mindset is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts" (Dweck, 2006, p. 7). Giving individuals feedback that highlights their capabilities raises their efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997). In the study conducted by Schunk (1983b), the more the persuasory feedback elevated the children's beliefs in their efficacy, the more the individuals persisted in their efforts, which in turn raised the level of competence they eventually achieved. According to Bandura (1997), because many factors influence judgment, the development of skills only partially affects the beliefs in individuals' efficacy. Individuals' awareness of self-efficacy contributes to actions and is more important than skill development (Bandura, 1997).

Appraisals should come from a credible source to impact individual's self-efficacy. Persuasory efficacy appraisals must be evaluated concerning who the persuaders are, their credibility and their knowledge about the nature of their activities (Schunk, 1991). According to Bandura (1997), individuals are further prone to rely on the evaluation of their competencies if those giving the feedback are themselves accomplished in the endeavor. On the other hand, when individuals are confident in their self-appraisal, the judgment of others will not sway their belief about their capabilities (Bandura, 1997). Bandura (1977) suggested that verbal persuasion is easily accomplished but not as lasting as offering individuals opportunities that gradually expand their ability to take on increased challenges and risks.

Physiological and affective states. Individuals' judgments regarding their physiological and affective states are the fourth determinant of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). Individuals are influenced by their physical and emotional responsiveness to various situations (Bandura, 1997). An emotional stimulation state that comes from stress, anxiety, or depression can reduce self-efficacy expectancies (Conger & Kanugo, 1988). For example, anxiety towards a demanding task or a school project may indicate to an individual that he or she is not qualified to accomplish such task. "Strong emotional reactions to school-related tasks can provide cues to expected success or failure" (Usher & Pajares, 2006, p. 8). The feeling of competence is achieved when individuals are not experiencing strong aversive arousal (Conger & Kanugo, 1988). Procrastination, manufactured idleness, and monotony are methods of dealing with school-related stress because they temporarily push the feelings of stress (Ginsburg & Jablow, 2011). According to Ginsburg and Jablow (2011), experts have identified fundamental differences in the way individuals cope in response to challenges. They have found that some are problem-focused and can cope with the challenge by tackling it head-on and trying to fix it. While others are emotion-focused and focus on the sentiments that those problems create and therefore try to do what makes them feel better to decrease their discomfort and may opt to entirely deny or withdraw to avoid problems (Ginsburg & Jablow, 2011). Researchers found that when engaging in difficulties, individuals actively have two options; they may try to change the stressor to feel more comfortable, or they can modify their behavior to adapt to the stressor (Bandura et al., 1980; Ginsburg & Jablow, 2011; Pajares, 2003). Stress levels and how individuals respond to a task are factors that determine how well they succeed (Bandura, 1997; Benight & Bandura, 2004; Pajares, 2003).

Depending on how individuals interpret arousal, different levels of arousal influence efficacy (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). According to Hollandsworth, Glazeski, Kirkland, Jones, and Van Norman (1979), high achievers view arousal as an energizing facilitator. Bandura (1997) hypothesized that when judging their competence, individuals decode manifestations such as anxiety, stress, tiredness, and mood. Individuals assess actions as they experience unique physiological conditions, and they can decipher their arousal as indicators of their efficacy (Usher & Pajares, 2006). Zajacova et al. (2005) found that individuals with sophisticated levels of self-efficacy experience less stress and are more apt to accomplish goals when challenges arise in the academic setting.

Self-Efficacy and Dropping Out

Bandura (1997) states that, "substance abuse, unprotected sexuality, and delinquent and violent activities" (p. 177) place young people at risk. Becoming a young parent also represents further challenges since "young child bearers are more likely to drop out of school" (Bandura, 1997). Furthermore, high rates of absenteeism, repeated suspension from school, negative influence from peers, lack of positive relationships with teachers and administrator, and expulsion were additional reasons identified for placing individuals at risk of dropping out. Due to the increase independence in the adolescent years, students tend to engage in increased high-risk activities (Bandura, 1997). These include: "Alcohol and marijuana use, smoking, tooling around in automobiles, and early sexual activity…drinking [that] goes with partying…and heavy partying detracts from serious studying" (Bandura, 1997, p. 177). Bandura found that adolescents who are insecure in their efficacy are less able to curtail involvement in negative behaviors.

Internal protective factors have been found to protect individuals against delinquent behaviors (Christle & Yell, 2008). Protective factors include self-control, setting goals, high self-esteem, and social and cognitive competences in the form of self-efficacy. As stated by Bandura (1993), there are four ways self-efficacy is encouraged:

1. directly by providing success experiences,

2. vicariously by showing students others like themselves can succeed,

3. verbally reminding students of their achievements,

4. physiologically by explaining that difficult tasks get easier with practice (p. 155).

Bandura goes on to describe the reciprocal relationship that exists "in which academic success can help promote self-efficacy, and self-efficacy helps promote academic success" (Christle & Yell, 2008, p. 155).

External protective factors also affect self-efficacy. Protective factors can be found within the students' families, their community, their relationships with peers, and their school environment. When students experience caring relationships, they demonstrate resiliency and the capacity to achieve new expectations (Christle & Yell, 2008). Family experiences such as the divorce of the parents can undermine rather than protect against delinquency and the choice to drop out of school. Without a strong sense of belonging, students' self-efficacy can be diminished (Christle & Yell, 2008).

Self-Efficacy and Performance

Self-efficacy offers motivational direction that drives determination when encountering obstacles, intensifies the level of intention for planning, and also supports self-regulation and self-correcting activities (Bandura, 2001). In various meta-analyses, self-efficacy has surfaced as a reliable forecaster of motivation (Bandura & Locke, 2003). Self-efficacy motivation appears to

be critically interconnected to individuals' performance in academic settings (Valentine et al., 2004). Strong performance in academic settings is associated with improved self-confidence and found to be likely to encourage individuals to assume responsibility and complete tasks (Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2005). DeWitz, Woolsey, and Walsh (2009) found that individuals with high self-efficacy reported a higher determination that leads to increased academic outcomes. Success or failure experiences were found to be associated with the robust or a fragile feeling of self-efficacy and predict college students' actions to realize academic success (Gore, 2006). Komarraju and Nadler's (2013) study results indicate that individuals with inferior self-efficacy are insecure about their achievement in college, and are inclined to believe that their intelligence is permanent. Such findings are significant in highlighting the importance of self-efficacy and pursuing mastery.

Self-efficacy expectancies are essential in predicting academic outcomes. Komarraju and Nadler's (2013) study results established that expanding the levels of self-efficacy and self-confidence leads to the belief that intelligence is variable and determined by the amount of effort. High self-efficacy allows students to maintain self-discipline, sustain drive, particularly throughout demanding times when it is easier to give up. Such findings are central to providing proof that individuals' self-efficacy can be enhanced (Bandura, 1989).

Efficacy beliefs influence individuals to select challenging tasks and increase efforts and persistence (Pajares, 1996). Pajares (1996) found that individuals who lack confidence in their accomplishments will not engage in tasks and will also give up when the undertakings are perceived as arduous. Bandura (1997) argues that individuals possessing a developed sense of self-efficacy are significantly willing to participate in challenging ventures, persist with them and accomplish the tasks. According to Schunk (1991), an individual's self-efficacy level does not

need to be high for active learning. However, self-efficacy should be high enough to sustain completing a task in the present and the future (Walker, 2003). Johnson (2006) found that individuals with high self-efficacy use their intrinsic motivation to "press forward" and their advancement is dependent on the level of self-efficacy development.

Academic Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy level is a contributing factor to academic success (Khan, 2013). Chemers, Hu, and Garcia (2001) define academic self-efficacy as "students' confidence in mastering academic subjects" (p. 56). According to Bandura (1977), academic self-efficacy indicates an individual's ability judgment to accomplish educational goals positively. Academic self-efficacy relates to academic tasks and is of importance because it correlates with academic grades (Chemers et al., 2001; Elias & Loomis, 2000), academic major selection (Betz & Hackett, 2006), and academic performance (Elias & Loomis, 2000). Students with high academic self-efficacy demonstrate superior academic performance due to their confidence in mastering subjects (Chemers et al., 2001). If an individual has confidence that he or she will succeed in college, the likelihood to succeed is increased (Chemers et al., 2001). Chemers et al. (2001) found that grade point averages (GPAs) are also derived from high self-efficacy. Gaylon, Blondin, Yaw, Nalls, and Williams (2012), in their study, discovered that a deeper connection exists between self-efficacy and exam performance. Elias and MacDonald (2007) findings suggest that self-efficacy is highly important to potential academic achievement.

Concerning academic outcomes, individuals who overcome the risk factors connected with academic difficulty or dropping out of school are considered academically resilient (Finn & Rock, 1997). The concept of risk embodies the notion that being exposed to risk factors increases the probability that individuals will experience unfavorable consequences. As

mentioned in this chapter, a variety of factors have been found to foretell whether individuals will drop out or complete the high school requirements. Studies have recognized students' expectations are fundamental predictors to register in college (Bandura et al., 2001; Eccles, Vida, & Barber, 2004). The likelihood to graduate from high school increases when individuals have a clear expectation of obtaining a diploma (Fan & Wolters, 2012). Additionally, unless individuals believe that they can impact anticipated outcomes, they most likely not have the incentive to act and persevere when obstacles arise (Bandura et al., 2001).

Self-efficacy is known to be responsible for overcoming past experiences and shaping new behaviors and outcomes. Bandura's sources of self-efficacy have been assessed empirically to conclude how they contribute to individual's perception of self-efficacy. Studies demonstrate that self-efficacy impacts school performance, including academic achievement in post-secondary settings (Choi, 2005; Pajares, 1996; Zimmerman, 2000), achievement in college and student perseverance (Robbins et al., 2004). In general, individuals' self-efficacy beliefs about their capabilities will help determine and predict performance in schooling contexts and beyond (Usher & Pajares, 2006).

Individuals with a high sense of self-efficacy are likely to persevere when obstacles arise. Individuals with high self-efficacy are not increasingly affected by setbacks and failures. For individuals with high self-efficacy, barriers are viewed as manageable, and, therefore, they can increase their efforts when obstacles arise rather than get discouraged or experience feelings of despondency (Bandura, 1991). Studies have confirmed that learners with an enhanced awareness of academic self-efficacy exhibit resilience, determination, and interest in their education outcomes (Pajares, 1996; Pajares, 2003; Schunk, 1983b; Zimmerman, 2000).

Self-Efficacy and Career Choices

A relationship exists between self-efficacy and career selection (Betz, 2016; Betz & Hackett, 1981, 1997; Hartman & Betz, 2007). According to Betz and Hackett (1997), "the theoretical context of the self-efficacy construct provides not only a means for understanding the development of self-efficacy beliefs, but the means for their modification through interventions incorporating positive applications of the four sources of efficacy information" (p. 358). Since the introduction of the conceptual article, researchers have also reinforced the implications of self-efficacy to career development. Career self-efficacy, according to Lent and Hackett (1987), is the judgment of efficacy as it relates to the behaviors involved in selecting a career and in making changes in career paths. Betz and Hackett (1981) established that efficacy expectations relate to the understanding, investigating, and, ultimately, deciding on a career path and development. Engagement in research, setting goals and making decisions have been found to impact a career path dependent on levels of self-efficacy (Taylor & Betz, 1983). Hackett and Betz (1989) and Lent, Lopez, and Bieschke (1991, 1993) have highlighted the relationship of self-efficacy in mediating between prior attainments and career path selection along with other motivational values.

Profession choice has been found to be influenced by individual's self-efficacy (Betz & Hackett, 1981; Hackett & Betz, 1981). Individuals with established self-efficacy contemplate a broader range of career opportunities (Bandura, 1988). Bandura et al. (2001) concluded the following:

> The higher people's perceived efficacy to fulfill educational requirements and
> occupational roles, the wider the career options they seriously consider pursuing, the
> greater the interest they have in them, the better they prepare themselves educationally

for different occupational careers, and the greater their staying power in challenging

career pursuits. People simply eliminate from consideration occupations they believe to

be beyond their capabilities, however attractive the occupations may be. (p. 188)

On the other hand, inferior career self-efficacy leads to procrastination in making career

decisions and may delay making progress once a resolution has been achieved (Betz, 1992).

Self-efficacy determines the challenges individuals select to accept, effort exerted to apply in the

venture and the level of perseverance when obstacles arise (Bandura, 1982, 1986). Those who

do not trust their competences are easily discouraged by failure (Bandura & Cervone, 1986).

Summary

Overall, the literature relating to high school dropout is extensive, yet it is primarily

focused on the factors that lead students to leave school before graduation. The literature

indicates that student disconnectedness is attributed to the students' background, the family, and

the community. Although there are some studies on high school dropout at the national level,

there is a lack of studies focusing on the resilient individuals that were able to overcome the

phenomenon of dropping out. The literature review intended to research the impact of the sources

of self-efficacy in individual's ability to recover after leaving high school before graduation. It

suggests that the sources of self-efficacy affect and guide individuals in achieving academic

success, overcome obstacles, and guide specific outcomes. This chapter addressed self-efficacy,

the sources of self-efficacy and the impact of self-efficacy in dropout prevention and college and

career selection. This study will focus on the stories of resilient dropouts to explore the

motivating reasons to return to school, the factors enhancing their development of self-efficacy

and the influence of self-efficacy. Chapter Three provides a framework of the methodology for

this study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

This qualitative study explored the stories of men and women who dropped out of high school and later returned to school to earn a higher education degree. Previous research outcomes proposed that an individual's self-efficacy influenced academic motivation and judgment of capabilities to perform actions and overcome obstacles. The voices of individuals that have pursued furthering their education after dropping out have not been noticeable in self-efficacy studies. The purpose of this study was to explore the experience of dropping out and later returning to school to earn a higher education degree.

The following questions guided this study:

1. What was the motivating factor to return to school after dropping out of high school?

2. What factors enhanced or inhibited the development of the self-efficacy of those who had dropped out of high school to eventually earn their degree in post-secondary education?

3. How did self-efficacy sources influence the academic paths of resilient high school dropouts?

This chapter includes specifics about the methodology employed for this study. The research design is explained including the role of the researcher, the participant selection procedures. Additionally, the instrumentation, data collection techniques, management, and analysis are also described.

Research Design and Rationale

The researcher interviewed seven resilient dropouts. The interviews were conducted in person, over the phone or via Skype using a semi-structured interview protocol consisting of 9 interview questions. The questions were designed to explore the lived experiences of resilient dropouts.

This study used qualitative research methods. Qualitative research is conducted to explore and enhance the knowledge of a problem (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research is focused on patterns of meaning that emerge from words, actions, and records (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). Qualitative research also requires the examination of patterns and of meaning that appears from data gathered (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research should first explore the theoretical frameworks to inform the study and to address the implications ascribed to social or human problems. Qualitative researchers, according to Creswell (2013), have highlighted the importance of not only understanding the beliefs of the theories that inform research but also actively writing about them in reports and studies. Delving deep into a particular context resulting in a report or presentation that incorporates the voices of participants and a complex portrayal and interpretation of the issue contributes to the literature and possibly also enhances a call for change (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, qualitative research is used to empower individuals to share their stories (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative methods allow us to seek to understand any phenomenon about which there is limited information available (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Since the purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of resilient dropouts, qualitative research with phenomenology was chosen. "Phenomenology is a philosophical approach to the study of experience" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 11). The

phenomenology approach involves individuals returning to an experience to offer an opportunity for reflection and to display the essential components of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological research documents a description of the lived experiences as individuals recount the experience with the phenomena (Creswell, 2014). Moustakas (1994) defines phenomena as "the building blocks of human science and the basis for all knowledge" (p. 26).

More specifically, because the researcher was interested in examining how resilient dropouts made sense of their personal experience with dropping out and recovering, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was utilized. Interpretative phenomenological analysis research attempts to understand what it is like to be in the shoes of the subjects while also standing alongside the participant to take a look at them from a different angle. According to Smith et al. (2009), IPA is committed to examining how people are able to make sense of major life occurrences. For IPA, a successful interpretation is one principally based on the reading within the text produced by the participant. IPA requires reading the text relating to the lived experiences to make sense of the text rather than the author. IPA is concerned with how things appear and allowing for things to speak for themselves. IPA is interpretative because there is not such thing as a phenomenon that cannot be interpreted (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Interpretative phenomenological analysis relies on hermeneutic insights. IPA research involves double hermeneutics. In this research, the researcher tried to make sense of the participant, who would make sense of the phenomena of dropping out of high school and returning to school to achieve a higher education degree. IPA requires a combination of phenomenology and hermeneutic insight to get as close as possible to the personal experience of the participant, while also recognizing the interpretative endeavor for the participant and the researcher (Smith et al., 2009).

The nature of this study is qualitative design rather than quantitative design for the following reasons. This study intended to construct knowledge by analyzing the essence of the occurrence of dropping out and recovering through the lens of those who have experienced the phenomena of dropping out. This study did not attempt to predict the participants' self-efficacy to overcoming dropping out, but rather explore the phenomena in relationship to Bandura's sources of self-efficacy.

Population, Sampling Method, and Participants

The sample for this study involved seven individuals represented through a purposeful sampling of resilient dropouts. With IPA's orientation, samples are selected purposefully because they offer insight into a particular experience (Smith et al., 2009). The seven participants live and worked in California. The study included five females and two males who earned a higher education degree and in some cases multiple degrees. Four of the seven participants held master's degrees and one participant had earned a doctoral degree. Participant's occupations ranged from teaching, real estate agent, and school administration. Six to eight participants are appropriate for an IPA study as its size gives an opportunity to explore similarities and differences between individuals (Turpin et al., 1997). Creswell (2013) recommends collecting data from 5 to 25 individuals who have experienced the phenomenon. According to Smith et al., (2009), given the complexity of human phenomena, IPA studies benefit from a concentrated focus on a small sample because the issues is quality, not quantity.

Participants in the study were selected by a combination of network selection and primary contacts. The researcher gained access to the participants through colleagues, other school administrators, and through personal acquaintances. According to Creswell (2013), it is

essential that the participants selected in the sampling have experienced the phenomenon being studied. Once possible participants were referred, they were contacted individually via e-mail, phone, or in person to solicit their cooperation in the study. Each participant received information of the nature of this study and requested to willingly participate. The participants met the following criteria:

1. Left high school before graduating with their cohort

2. Returned to high school, an alternative high school or a GED program and continued to work towards a higher education degree

3. Obtained a higher education degree or degrees (Associate, Bachelor, Master, Doctorate).

This study explored participants' stories through a self-efficacy lens to seek to understand what influenced the desire of the individuals to return to school and persevere to earn a degree. Representativeness is a desirable characteristic of a sample (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). Representativeness, as described by Lunenburg and Irby (2008) enables the results from the sample to be generalized to the population. Smith et al. (2009) refer to rich data as the means to giving participants the opportunity to share their stories in a free and reflective and to allow them to express ideas and concerns at length. "In terms of devising a data collection method, IPA is best suited to tone which will invite participants to offer a rich, detailed, first-person account of their experiences" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 56).

Human Subject Consideration

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) practices and protocol for Pepperdine University Graduate and Professions Schools were followed in conducting this qualitative study. The researcher applied for and obtained exempt status based on the Summary of Expedite Category 7

criteria (see Appendix A). The risks to the participants were minimal. Minimal risk projected

was emotional discomfort, issues with self-efficacy or self-esteem, boredom, and possible

negative self-reflection. Possible breach of confidentiality was also a potential risk.

Participation was entirely voluntary and may have been terminated at any stage of the process.

Participants were informed that they could opt out at any time and for any reason. Participants

were provided with a letter (see Appendix B) that included the purpose of the study and also

assured them that the information collected would remain confidential. There was no direct

benefit to the participants. However, this study might allow the worth of their stories to be

highlighted and possibly contribute to the success of others with similar experiences. This study

contributed to the existing literature and perhaps also enhanced a call for change. To ensure

confidentiality, the researcher did not disclose participants' identifiable personal information.

Instrumentation

According to Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014), an interpretative phenomenological analysis

is primarily concerned with eliciting rich, detailed and first person accounts of experiences of the

phenomenon under investigation. A semi-structured interview was used as the primary

instrumentation. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher and the participant to engage

in real-time while also allowing space and flexibility to further investigate and obtain additional

details if needed (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). In the data collection process, Creswell (2013)

outlines nine steps for interviewing: (a) deciding on the research questions, (b) identifying

interviewees, (c) determining the type of interview, (d) using adequate recording procedures, (e)

designing the use of interview protocol, (f) refining the interview questions, (g) determining the

place for conducting the interview, (h) obtaining consent, and (i) using good interview

procedures. The procedure for conducting phenomenological research should include two broad

general questions: (a) what have you experienced regarding the phenomenon? and (b) what

contexts or situations have influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?

(Moustakas, 1994).

The interview questions were developed in advance (see Appendix C). The purpose of

interviewing is "to enter into the other person's perspective" (Merriam, 1998, p. 72). Suitable

questions in IPA study may concentrate on exploring the sensory perceptions, mental phenomena

and most importantly individual interpretation (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The interview

questions aligned to the research questions in this study (see Table 1). The questions were

standardized and open-ended to allow for the unique narratives to emerge when participants

reflect on their own experience with the phenomenon. Additionally, using the semi-structured

interview protocol allowed for standardization to acquire similar information from each of the

participants, while also allowing for flexibility during the interview process. The order of the

questions stayed the same during each of the interviews to remain focused on the experience of

recovering from dropping out. As Merriam (1998) recommends, the interview began with two

questions intending to gather demographic information, family background, academic

background, and career selection. This initial part of the interview also served as an opportunity

to establish a rapport with the participant.

The questions relating to the four sources of self-efficacy were systematically explored.

Question 3 asked the participants to recall the experience that influenced their choices and

decision to return to school. The intention was to explore past performance concerning to their

decision to return to school. Question 4 was designed to discover whether others influenced the

participants and if vicarious experiences were used to influence their decisions. Question 5

explored verbal persuasion sources to seek to discover if the participants were influenced by

others to encourage them to recover after leaving high school before obtaining their diploma. The fourth source of self-efficacy, physiological and affective states, was explored through Question 6 with the intention that participants addressed emotional reactions and feelings.

To explore additional details, the participants were asked to describe a memorable story that would assist in further understanding how the participants decided to pursue higher education after having dropped out of high school. Finally, to help enhance the stories, the last two questions invited them to provide suggestions as to how the school system could support other students in their situation and if they would have done anything differently in their academic and career path.

Table 1

Alignment of Research Questions With Interview Questions

Research Question	Interview Questions
	1. Background information---age, schools attended, family, previous occupations.
	2. Could you please describe your current occupation?
1. What is the motivating factor to return to school after dropping out of high school?	3. What experiences contributed to your decision to return to school after dropping out?
	7. Tell me a memorable story that would help me understand how you came to attain success after having dropped out of high school?
2. What factors enhance or inhibit the development of the self-efficacy of those who have dropped out of high school to eventually earn their degree in post-secondary education?	8. Why do you think that individuals that drop out of high school decide to return and pursue higher education?
	9. Considering your academic history, if you could have done anything differently, what would that have been?
	Possible follow up question: What could or should be done to increase the number of individuals recovering from dropping out?
	(continued)

Research Question	Interview Questions

3. How do self-efficacy beliefs influence the academic paths of resilient dropouts?	4. How were you influenced by others?
	
	5. What did people say as you were contemplating returning back to school?
	
	6. How would you describe your feeling and beliefs about returning to school?
	Possible follow up questions:
	   a) How did returning to school make you feel?
	   b) What were your beliefs about what you do, or the area for which you were preparing your self to have a career?
	   c) What were your emotional responses as you encountered challenges while finishing high school and while you were in college?

Data Collection Procedures

For this study, interviews and field notes were the primary resources of data collection. Moustakas (1994) highlights the importance of compiling the *what* and *how* in describing the role of the inquirer in collecting data from individuals who have lived the *phenomenon* to develop a description of the "essence of the experience" (p. 13). Descriptive and reflective field notes enhance the transcript (Creswell, 2014). Participants' interviews were collected using a handheld digital voice-recording device. The equipment and the field notes were kept and stored in a locked in-home storage. The digital audio files will be kept secured on a personal computer and will be destroyed three years after completing the research study. The following steps were taken to conduct the interviews:

1. Potential participants referred by colleagues, other school administrators, and through personal acquaintances were contacted by telephone to determine their willingness to participate in an in-person, phone or Skype interview. Additionally, the recommended participants were screened to ensure they met the criteria for the study. After the initial introductory telephone conversation, the letter containing details of the research study was e-mailed along with the

interview consent form and a request for a convenient date, time and place for the interview.

2. During the interviews, the participants were requested to give their perceptions about the phenomena of recovering and succeeding in earning a higher education degree after having dropped out of high school. The interviews were informal and conversational.

3. Follow up interviews were not necessary.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis research aims to produce an in-depth examination of a certain phenomenon (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Interviews were used as the instrumentation for collecting data for this qualitative research. Qualitative research methodologies reject formulating hypothesis prior to conducting the research, instead they promote and inductive approach to the collection of the data and the analysis (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). According to Smith et al. (2009), to gather good qualitative data, interview schedules should be short and should start with broad and general questions that permit the participants to set the parameters of the topic. Interviews should be conducted with the intention that the researcher does not impose his or her own understanding of the phenomenon on the participant's narrative (Smith et al., 2009). A semi-structured interview, according to Patten (2009), refers a process where the interviewer can ask additional questions to explore further material that may be relevant to the participants. Interviews provide means to "understanding the experiences of other people and the meaning they make of the experience" (Seidman, 2006, p. 9). The common elements in the experiences of resilient dropouts provided insight into the aspects of self-efficacy that help explain what led to their achievement after dropping out of high school. "At the heart of interviewing research is an interest in other individual's stories because

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they are of worth" (Seidman, 2006, p. 9). Seidman (2006) notes the importance of interviews in

allowing researchers to access the context of individual's comportment and to understand why

individuals behave a certain way. This study allowed the worth of their stories to be highlighted

and possibly contribute to the success of others with similar experiences.

Throughout the study, all interview responses, including recordings and notes, were kept

confidential. Pseudonyms were assigned to substitute participants' name and any other

identifiable information such as proper names, districts, schools attended and cities. Upon the

completion of each interview, the interviews were transcribed. The researcher proofread the

transcription of the interviews. Two colleagues also read the transcripts and provided feedback

relating to the patterns found in the data.

Data Analysis, Management, and Validity

Upon the completion of each interview, the researcher transcribed the interviews

verbatim. The researcher proofread the transcriptions of the interviews. Analyzing qualitative

material using the IPA framework required the researcher to conduct multiple readings of the

data collected (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Each case was analyzed in detail working closely

with the IPA suggested set of steps: Step 1: Reading and reading, Step 2: Initial noting, Step 3:

Developing emergent themes, Step 4: Searching for connections across emergent themes, Step 5:

Moving to the next case, and Step 6: Looking for patterns across cases (Smith et al., 2009).

Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) recommended reading the transcript and listening to the audio

recordings multiple times to allow the researcher to immerse in the data and recall the interview

atmosphere. They add that by closely reading and listening, the researcher may start focusing on

transforming notes into possible themes that emerge. The transcribed data were stored in a

computer database to continue with the process of coding. The raw data were then inputted into

HyperResearch to maintain, control and reconstruct the data collected through the interview process. During the initial procedure, the transcribed data were compared using the hard copy and HyperResearch to code each transcript. Data were organized into codes and themes that emerged in the participants' responses. Creswell (2013) states that the process of coding "involves aggregating the text or visual data into small categories of information, seeking evidence for the code from different databases being used in the study, and then assigning a label to the code" (Creswell, 2013, p. 184). Leedy and Ormrod (2005) refer to this mode of coding as *open coding*. Open coding involves organizing the data and further examining for properties that characterize each category, in other words, decreasing the data into a small set of themes to depict the phenomenon being investigated (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

A benefit of IPA is that the generation of a hypothesis based on the literature is not required, but rather the interview process may lead to the collection of expansive data (Smith, 2004). After the data were organized into codes and themes, further analysis revealed themes relating to participants motivation to return to school, which were not found in the literature review. IPA can be most exciting to reveal the unanticipated while engaging with the material (Smith, 2004). IPA is an inductive process that involves techniques that allow for unpredicted themes to emerge when the researcher engages in the analysis. Through IPA, researchers can move between themes generated through the narratives, while also developing similarities and difference within the stories collected (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Interpretative phenomenological analysis is also a dynamic process that allows the participants to make meaning of their world, while allowing the researcher to attempt to decode such significances and make sense of the participants meaning making (Smith, 2008). In other words, the research sought to understand the experience from the participant's perspective. Interpretative

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phenomenological research relies on idiography guiding it to focus on the particular rather than the general (Smith, Harre, & Langenhove, 1995).

Yin (2011) suggested that in qualitative research the procedures and as many steps of the procedures need to be documented to increase dependability. Various steps were taken to ensure that the study was valid. First, the interview questions were developed to allow the participants to share their story and to allow for clarifying questions. Isaac and Michael (1997) stated that trustworthiness increases with objectivity when using interviews and semi-structured interviews allow to "probe at significant points to avoid biasing tendencies" (p. 145). The interview questions were developed after a thorough review of the literature pertaining to high school dropouts and the sources of self-efficacy.

Additionally, the interview questions and procedure validity were provided through a pilot study. The pilot consisted of a small-scale testing of the procedures planned for the main study (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). The pilot study allowed for a preliminary analysis of the procedures to ensure the effectiveness of the questions and validity of the results. The procedures were revised based on what the testing reveals. The merit of the procedures was determined in the pilot study and allowed for correction of flaws (Gall et al., 2007). The questions were tested on two participants that meet the criteria for the study. According to Gall et al. (2007), in a qualitative study, two to three participants are sufficient for a pilot study. Only two individuals participated in the pilot study.

An assumption underlying qualitative research is that reality is multi-dimensional and ever-changing. Assessing isomorphism between data collected and the reality from which they were derived is thus appropriate of validity (Merriam, 1998). The researcher's main strategy to address threats to validity was documentation and detailed record of how data were collected,

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how and why data were coded and how many times the themes emerged in each of the interviews. Validity threats were addressed by trying to represent an honest rendition of how the participants saw themselves as resilient dropouts. The researcher sought to maximize validity by involving peer examinations and by exposing researcher's bias and opinions. Two colleagues well versed in qualitative methodologies were asked to read the transcriptions and also to provide feedback on the patterns of the data and the findings that emerged.

Also, thick and rich descriptions were employed to ensure ample details and descriptions were provided for the results to be realistic. Using thick and rich descriptions to communicate findings "may transport readers to the setting and give the discussion and element of shared experiences" (Creswell, 2014, p. 202). Using thick and rich descriptions, according to Creswell (2013), involves describing from general ideas to narrow while interconnecting the details by using strong action verbs and quotes.

Summary

Chapter Three presented the methodology that was used to address the purpose and the methods to complete this study. This chapter included the research design and the approach, research questions, context of the study, method for data collection, data analysis and validity. The results of the narrative themes stemming from the analysis are represented in Chapter Four to allow for discovery of methods to re-engage students who previously have dropped out; to re-enter the school system to promote higher education completion.

Chapter Four: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experience of dropping out of high school and later returning to earn a higher education degree. This chapter presents the key findings from the interviews, beginning with a brief description of the interviewees. The significant findings will be discussed in this chapter. This study intended to answer the following questions:

1. What was the motivating factor to return to school after dropping out of high school?

2. What factors enhance or inhibit the development of the self-efficacy of those who have dropped out of high school to eventually earn their degree in post-secondary education?

3. How did self-efficacy sources influence the academic paths of resilient dropouts?

Research Design

This study followed an interpretative phenomenological analysis research design. The study began with a pilot study in which two individuals participated. Upon the completion of the pilot study, the interviews were transcribed and analyzed to ensure the effectiveness of the questions and the validity of the results. The two pilot participants were asked if they would be willing to give feedback after the interviews were transcribed. Both participants declined the request to read the transcript and provide feedback. The researcher and a peer determined that the interview questions did not need further modifications. The pilot participants are not included in the findings.

The study involved seven individuals represented through a purposeful sampling of resilient dropouts. The study used semi-structured open-ended interviews. All interviews were

audio-recorded, and the researcher maintained a reflective journal, which included a record of interview dates, times, interview location, and the duration of each interview. Data were collected during the summer of 2017. Participants were interviewed in person, over the phone or via Skype.

The researcher transcribed the interview data within two weeks after each interview was completed. The participants were asked if they wished to provide feedback or provide comments after data had been transcribed and analyzed. Most of the participants declined a copy of the transcripts. Two of the participants requested printed copies of their interview transcripts. One participant provided feedback on the transcript of his interview. The data collected from each of the interviews were reviewed several times and initially analyzed manually. The data were uploaded to HyperResearch. While using the research software to code the interview data, notes were also kept in the printed transcripts of each interview.

Research Participants

Demographic information such as degrees completed, schools attended, family, and current and past occupations was obtained from each participant. This study included five females, and two males, who earned a higher education degree and in some cases multiple degrees (see Table 2). Four of the seven interviewees held master's degrees, while one held a doctoral degree. All seven participants lived and worked in California. Their occupations ranged from early childhood education, teaching, real estate, and school administration. The participants were asked the same open-ended questions to gather the information relating to their personal lived experiences.

Table 2

Research Participants

Participant	Degree Completed	Gender	Current Occupation
#1	Master's Degree	Female	College Professor
#2	Bachelor's Degree	Male	High School Teacher
#3	Master's Degree	Female	School Principal
#4	Bachelor's Degree	Female	Real Estate Agent
#5	Master's Degree	Male	School Administrator
#6	Bachelor's Degree	Female	Student
#7	Doctorate Degree	Female	Ret. Superintendent

Participant #1 is an adjunct faculty member at three colleges. She enrolled in high school and dropped out during the first semester. Instead, she obtained a GED and moved on to community college and later transferred to a university to earn her bachelor's and master's degrees. She described how her school experience started being positive and then turned into boredom and disengagement. In kindergarten, this participant had tested out of the fourth-grade reading level, but she described that the school decided to keep her in the age appropriate grade so she could advance with her age group. Her mother, a single person working two to three jobs, trusted that the educators were the experts and agreed with them to keep her at grade level. By fourth-grade, she was drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana. After middle school, this participant decided to disengage from school completely. By the age of 18 she was arrested, and as part of her probation plan, she had to earn a GED to avoid being incarcerated again. Participant #1 now holds a master's degree.

Participant #2 is a high school teacher. He described himself as being a creative person, and he stated that his high school experience did not address his interests. Additionally, he did not see any value in the courses required to earn his diploma. He did not have positive

experiences with educators, but education was highly regarded in his family. As an adult, he realized that without a high school diploma and furthering his education, his job opportunities would be limited. He returned to school to earn his GED and immediately enrolled in a community college. His parents were from Mexico, and he had lived and studied in Mexico, so he had the additional challenge of learning academic English and adapting to different school settings during his elementary and middle school years. He returned to school because he liked being an educated person and also for job advancement. He has been accepted to a master's program and is confident he will complete this advanced degree.

Participant #3 was in an orphanage for the first five months of her life and later was adopted. Her adoptive parents divorced when she was in the fourth-grade. She describes being on her own throughout her childhood and youth because her adoptive parents were absentee parents.   At the age of five, she was placed into a gifted and talented student program, but by the fourth-grade, the school was no longer a good experience for her. By the time she was in the seventh-grade, she was not attending school regularly. By the end of ninth-grade, she was considered truant and had earned only PE credits. Her parents did not intervene when she failed multiple semesters and when she stopped going to school altogether. At the age of 15, she was asked to leave high school to search for alternative programs. The district's alternative high school program denied her enrollment because she had missed too many school days. She was referred to an independent study program, which consisted of study materials to pass the high school proficiency exam. At the age of 16, she took the high school proficiency exam and passed it. She completed her bachelor's degree at the age of 28 and continued with a master's degree. She is a principal at an independent study high school. Participant #3 is considering earning her doctorate after her two children complete their higher education degrees.

Participant #4 is in her mid-twenties. She is one of eight children born into the system. Six of her siblings were either given up for adoption, living with extended family or were placed in the custody of their parental grandparents. She describes enduring considerable abuse and neglect. From the age of seven to eleven her mother abandoned her, and she became a ward of the court. When she was reunited with her mother at the age of eleven, Child Protective Services (CPS) was continually visiting to find drugs in the home and the children begging for food. CPS did not remove her from her mother's household, instead, the parent was repetitively counseled, and social workers closed the child abuse case multiple times. She met her father only a few times but never had a relationship with him. As a young child, her mother brought numerous men to the house and would leave for extended periods of time, possibly on drug binges. She moved between foster homes and group homes but was never removed permanently from her mother's house. She vaguely remembers attending school. She has been able to piece together her school experiences from looking at her CPS file. When she became a teenager, she began to rebel and run away. As a teenager, she transitioned from juvenile halls to foster homes to running away until she aged out of the system. At the age of 18, the court rescinded a warrant against her arrest, terminated her probation and released her from foster care. Shortly after being released from the system she became pregnant. She decided to enroll in high school at the age of 19. Currently, she has earned a high school diploma from an alternative education program, an associate's degree, and a bachelor's degree and is progressing to earn a master's degree. She works in real estate and soon will launch a clothing line.

Participant #5 is a top-level school administrator at an alternative education program. The year his father abandoned his family, at the age of 14, he went from being a straight-A student-athlete to becoming truant and missing 121 schools days in one academic year. He was

persuaded and recruited by the gangs in his neighborhood to sell drugs to other students at his high school. He was eventually asked to leave high school when the school administrators suspected that he might be selling drugs at the school. He described enduring intense verbal abuse from his father. Additionally, he was exposed to neighborhood violence, an array of drugs, alcohol, weapons, and depression. At the age of 14, he had a cocaine habit that cost him about $300 every week. He did not think he would be alive past his twenty-first birthday. He recalled having put a pistol to his head because there were times he could not see a way out of his situation. Persuaded by friends, he decided to return to school to complete his high school diploma, and after graduating, he joined the Army. After his service in the Army, he earned his bachelor's degree at the age of 30 and continued with a master's degree. In ten years he has moved up in his career as an educator. He went from being a teacher to principal and now is an educational leader.

Participant #6 is pursuing a master's degree in child development. She has ten siblings and is the first female in her family to earn a higher education degree. Her younger brother attended college but did not graduate, and an older brother went to the Navy and received a higher education degree. She attended two traditional high schools, two alternative education programs and graduated high school from an adult school program. She describes several factors that led her to drop out of high school multiple times. First, she moved from one city to another while in high school. Additionally, when she moved from Los Angeles to Long Beach, her mother was not interested in taking care of the paperwork to enroll her in a new school, subsequently she had to register herself. Third, she felt bored at school, mainly because she did not understand classroom material; consequently she missed many days of school. She has managed to earn a

bachelor's degree and is enrolled to start a master's degree while raising her four children. Additionally, she also is contemplating pursuing a doctorate after she completes her master's.

Participant #7 is a first-generation college graduate. Her mother dropped out of the ninth-grade, and her father received a GED when he was in the military. She dropped out of high school and adult school and eventually earned a GED as an adult. Participant #7 became a teenage mother and had to work and take care of her children when she decided to return to school. It took her ten years to earn a bachelor's degree. After earning her bachelor's degree, this participant moved on to a master's and continued with a doctorate. She went from being a teacher to an assistant principal, to a principal, to a district administrator to becoming an assistant superintendent. She recently retired as a superintendent in the same school district where she and her family attended school.

Development of Categories

The research questions guided the development of the preliminary identification of emergent patterns. To make meaning of the of the participants' stories, the IPA analytical process was utilized. Each case was analyzed in detail working closely with the IPA suggested set of steps: Step 1: Reading and reading, Step 2: Initial noting, Step 3: Developing emergent themes, Step 4: Searching for connections across emergent themes, Step 5: Moving to the next case, and Step 6: Looking for patterns across cases (Smith et al., 2009). In completing the analysis new and unanticipated themes emerged that were not part of the interview schedule. The themes were analyzed and organized as they related to the study questions. Additionally, in looking for patterns across the cases, themes were categorized as they represented sources of self-efficacy. The emergence of the four sources of self-efficacy provided evidence documenting the most common sources recognized by the participants.

Presentation of Findings

The findings are presented as they align with the research questions. The results inform the understanding of the experiences of resilient dropouts in three ways: (a) motivating factors to return to school, (b) factors enhancing or inhibiting the development of self-efficacy, (c) the influence of self-efficacy on participants' academic paths. The transcribed data were analyzed in depth to explore and identify the four sources of self-efficacy documented in the literature review: past performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasions, and physiological and affective states. Interestingly, commonalities unrelated to the research questions emerged in the stories of the participants. The analysis of the data revealed that stressors, or adverse situations, inside and outside the home that negatively affected their success in school and, in turn, contributed to their decision to drop out, affected the participants. Before diving into the research questions, the unanticipated theme will be addressed.

The participants shared that they did not leave high school because they did not value education. The dropout predictors identified by the participants were mainly associated with their background (see Table 3). All seven participants shared that the severity of some of the problems they encountered interrupted their success at school. As the participants shared the details about their background and their family, it became evident that the participants had lived through physical and emotional abuse, neglect, abandonment, violence, dangerous neighborhoods, disjointed families, drugs, poverty, and teenage pregnancy (see Table 4). The participants dropped out of school for reasons not related to academic achievement or lack of skillset, as some of the participants had been found to be ahead of their grade level in learning. Instead, other adverse factors contributed to their disengagement.

Table 3

Reported Reasons for Dropping Out

Dropout Predictor	*Frequency*
Background	7
Behavior	4
Attitudes	3
Educational Performance	7

Table 4

Exposure to Adversity

Participant	Abs. parent/ divorce	Poverty	Incarceration	Teen parenting	Abuse	Neglect
#1	Y	Y	Y		Y	
#2	Y					
#3	Y					Y
#4	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
#5	Y	Y	Y		Y	
#6	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y
#7		Y		Y		

Exposure to adversity. The seven participants navigated through adverse situations during their childhood and youth. For example, most of the participants described having absentee parents; either a single mother raised them, their parents divorced, or the parents were not concerned about their well-being. Five participants shared that they lived in poverty. Three participants reported living off government assistance. One participant reported living paycheck to paycheck, and two participants stated that their parent worked multiple jobs. One participant reported going days without a meal and having to beg for food. Of these seven, three of the participants had experienced being arrested and incarcerated before turning 18. The reasons for having run-ins with the law varied from selling or using drugs, running away from home, working as a bartender before turning 21, stealing, and writing fraudulent checks. Three of the

participants became teenage parents. Three of the participants experienced verbal or physical abuse by their parent or by a family member. Additionally, three of the participants described being neglected. The neglect varied from parents being absent or being abandoned by their parents, to parents working too much, to parents leaving the participants when young for days at a time without food and adequate care. Participant #6 described moving from one house to another and that her mother refused to enroll her in school many times because she did not want to fill out the extensive paperwork. The participants' stories were filled with accounts of chaotic and unstable environments. They all reported experiencing elevated stress that disrupted their success in school.

Undoubtedly, the participants found themselves in predicaments that led them to make choices to leave high school before graduating. The questions guiding this study focused on the experiences of the seven resilient dropouts and their resolution to return to school after having dropped out.

Question 1 Findings: Motivating Factors to Return to School

The first research question intended to explore the factors motivating the participants to return to school after having dropped out of high school. During the interviews, all seven of the participants reported returning to school because of the value associated with higher education. The participants recognized that going back to school would produce significant outcomes. Table 5 lists the motivating factors that encouraged the participants to re-enroll in school to complete the high school requirement and to earn a higher education degree.

Table 5

Motivating Factors to Return to School

Factor	Frequency
Higher income potential	7
Better jobs and employability	5
Respect and credibility	4

Higher income potential. The participants were keenly aware that a high school

diploma was the gatekeeper for an advanced degree to be competitive in the job market. The

participants agreed that dropping out of school posed a profound economic and social

consequence and considered acquiring further education to increase their earning power. They

also acknowledged that before obtaining their high school diploma and completing their higher

education degree they were at a disadvantage because they could not find adequate employment

and were not marketable. Before earning a higher education degree, Participant # 1 worked as a

driver, Participant #2 worked in marketing and customer service, Participant #3 worked as a

bartender and a food server, Participant #4 worked in customer service, Participant #6 worked in

food and customer service, Participant #7 worked in a factory. As a consequence, the

participants were not able to earn enough money to support themselves and, in some cases, they

could not afford to support their children satisfactorily. Five of the participants stated that when

they were able to find jobs, they were earning minimum wage, and at times had to hold multiple

employments to afford the expenses of living. Although Participant #5 reported making a

respectable living wage without a higher education degree, he was not satisfied with the outlook

of his future. He recalled a pivotal point in his life where he realized he did not want to be in his

thirties and still working in a job that did not afford him a comfortable living. He shared the

following:

I wasn't ready for school; there was so much other stuff I had to work on. So I moved to

the city and started waiting tables, and it was weird because I was making, and this was

1998,…I was making 64 thousand dollars a year because I was waiting tables at a very

high-class place…you know, white glove presentation nonsense. At that point, I realized

…I went through a depressive point where I realized, I'm gonna be a 35-year old waiter.

And I know there is nothing wrong with that, but I knew that wasn't planned for me, so I

needed to look for something else.

The participants expressed that they got to a point in their lives where they were no

longer willing to remain in jobs that did not provide for a rewarding future. Recognizing that

education attainment supplied for better employment opportunities and increased income

motivated the participants to resolve to go back to school.

Better jobs and employability. Furthermore, education achievement had accelerated the

participants to advance in their career paths. For Participants #3, #5 and #7, each educational

milestone was accompanied by a career promotion. Participant #3 went from being a bartender

before earning her higher education degree to becoming a teacher after completing her

bachelor's to receiving a promotion as a high school principal after completing her master's

degree. Participant # 5 was waiting tables before earning a bachelor's degree. He has reached

new heights in his career as an educator by obtaining a master's degree. Participant #7 reports

making career moves as she progressed from earning a GED to completing her bachelor's

degree, master's degree, and doctorate. Now, as a retired superintendent, she reflects on all the

blessings received because of the furthering of her education. The benefits of her training

included better job opportunities, further opportunities for career advancements and as a retired

school superintendent she expressed that education provided for a comfortable retirement.

Participant #1 benefited from better job opportunities after being accepted for a post-bachelor scholarship fellowship to earn a master's degree. She pursued her master's degree to become a college professor.

Respect and credibility. Credibility and respect was another motivating factor convincing the participants to re-enroll in school. Participant #2 stated that his mother had always expected her children to be the first ones in the family to earn college degrees. Recognizing that his mother and other members of his family highly regarded college graduates motivated him to obtain a GED and continue his enrollment in college. Participant #3 decided to return to school to show her family that she could also accomplish a career goal. Both of her parents had earned bachelor's degrees. She recognized the expectation to re-enroll because her mother was a teacher and her sister was studying to become a lawyer. Additionally, when she married, her husband had already attained a master's degree. The accomplishments of her family members motivated the need to complete school. Earning the family's respect had prompted her to act towards the achievement of her higher education degree. Participant #5 cited aligning his educational accomplishments with his wife's accomplishment as the primary reason to return to school. This participant married a college graduate and therefore recognized the need also to earn a bachelor's degree to make a comparable income rate as his partner. Participant #5 talked about the income gap between him and his wife before he received his higher education degrees. He cited that there was a time when his wife was making a respectable annual income because of her nursing degree, while he was working various jobs and earning minimum wage. The realization that there was a huge income gap between them ignited his desire to focus on getting his GED and pursuing his bachelor's and master's degrees.

Question 2 Findings: Factors Enhancing or Inhibiting the Self-Efficacy

        The interview analysis found several factors affecting the participants' confidence about their capabilities to return to school and complete the requirements to obtain a higher education degree or degrees. All seven participants reported factors that encouraged or discouraged their efforts to return to school and to persevere through their college and career path. The data in Table 6 show the common factors enhancing and inhibiting self-efficacy that were identified during the review of interviews along with the frequency of responses from the participants. Table 7 provided more details regarding the factors as mentioned by the participants.

Table 6

Factors Enhancing or Inhibiting Participants' Self-Efficacy

Factors Enhancing Self-Efficacy	*Factors Inhibiting Self- Efficacy*
Support received from positive adults	Circumstances causing stress
Educational aspirations	School attendance rate
Observation of others	Teenage pregnancy

Table 7

Factors Enhancing or Inhibiting Self-Efficacy by Participant

Participant	Positive Adults	Educational Aspirations	Observation of Others	Circumstances Causing Stress	School Attendance Rate	Teenage Pregnancy
#1	X	X	X	X	X	
#2	X	X				
#3		X	X	X	X	
#4	X	X		X	X	X
#5	X	X	X	X	X	
#6	X	X	X	X	X	X
#7	X	X	X	X	X	X

All seven participants cited educational aspirations as a vital factor affecting their confidence to complete their higher education degree. Participants described how their educational aspirations or resolution to pursue a career in a particular field provided the impetus to advance through the requirements to earn a bachelor's degree and in some instances also complete master's degrees and doctorate degrees. For example, one of the participants stated the following:

I like being an educated person, I like the sense of accomplishment I get whenever I set an educational goal, and I accomplish that…the gratification I get in accomplishing that goal that I set for myself is enough to keep me going and to keep me wanting more.

Four of the participants stated that they had aspirations to go to college from a very young age. Although Participant #1 and Participant #4 described how they changed their college majors more than once, they never scouted the idea of giving up in their pursuit of a higher education degree.

Six of the participants mentioned that the influence of positive adults weighed heavily on their decision to return to school and to not give up in college. Throughout the interviews, participants consistently talked about having at least one teacher or educator encouraging them and supporting them to overcome or eliminate obstacles. Several of the participants reported the existence of a positive relationship with an educator that inspired them to not give up in their pursuit to return to school after having dropped out and to obtain a higher education degree. For example, Participant #1 described enrolling in an alternative high school diploma program a few years after having dropped out and having the teachers and school administrators on her side encouraging her to achieve more. She described how educators had supported her with finding childcare and completing homework assignments. Participant #5 described a relationship with a

caring coach as the best encouragement to focus on his studies and to pursue higher education. Participant #7 illustrated a school administrator, who was her employer, as someone that saw her potential. Eventually, the administrator encouraged her to change her career direction and accomplish more than she thought she was capable of achieving.

The majority of the participants cited the impact of observing other individuals accomplishing the goal of graduation and success in a specific field. Participants #1, #3, #5, #6, and #7 described receiving encouragement to achieve educational success from at least one successful individual. The participants cited formal and informal relationships with at least one person that developed a stronger sense of confidence in achieving a college and career goal. For example, Participant #5 described receiving inspiration to fulfill his academic objectives from one of his soccer coaches. The participant observed how the coach improved his future outcomes by obtaining his degree. He recalls acknowledging how the coach had been able to buy a house for his family, keep a stable job and work in a field that made him happy due to the opportunities offered after receiving his bachelor's degree.

The circumstances causing stress, such as the exposure of adversity mentioned in this chapter, such as parenting responsibilities and school attendance rate were reported to inhibit at times the confidence of the participants to reach their academic goals. Navigating through various unexpected circumstances while being a student was a hindering factor postponing the school participants' re-enrollment. Participant #3 shared how her lived experiences as an abused and neglected child, her school enrollment gaps, becoming a teenage parent, and not having a stable home affected her confidence in her capabilities to succeed in school. For Participant #5, the impact of being abandoned by his father, along with his engagement with drugs, gangs, and violence resulted in missing 121 days in one school year. The gap in attendance severed his

confidence that he could ever graduate from high school. Participant #4 was many times discouraged to return to school because she had not attended high school regularly. Additionally, having become a teenage parent and not having the support of her family to return to school discouraged her and posed many doubts about one day being able to earn a higher education degree. The participants were able to overcome the inhibiting factors that at times impacted or decreased their confidence to return to school. However, although many factors inhibited their self-efficacy, the participants reported the enhancing factors overshadowing the negative ones.

Question 3 Findings: Influence of Self-Efficacy

The four sources of self-efficacy were identified during the review of interviews along with the frequency of responses from the participants. In various ways, the past performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and affective states influenced the participants' academic paths. Specifically, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and affective states were found to influence returning to school after having dropped out and impacting the completion of a higher education degree. The literature review found past performance accomplishments to be the most reliable source (see Table 8), however, although significant, past performance in school tasks was not the dominant source found in the participants' stories. The data in Table 9 show the sources of self-efficacy frequency from the participants' responses. The frequency table reveals that verbal persuasion was a dominant source of self-efficacy based on the participants' responses.

Table 8

Literature Review on Sources of Self-Efficacy

Author	Past-Performance Accomplishment	Vicarious Experiences	Verbal Persuasion	Physiological and Affective States
Bandura, 1997	Past performance attainments are the most reliable source of self-efficacy. Individuals contribute to their outcomes rather than merely predict them. Each success builds assurance, while each failure weakens it.	Modeling can affect individual's self-efficacy viewpoints through social comparison process. The greater the assumed resemblance to models, the greater the impact. Television and other visual media offer prevalent sources of symbolic models.	Meaningful feedback conveying assurance increases the awareness of self-efficacy Individuals are prone to rely on evaluation if those giving feedback have accomplished the endeavor.	Individuals are persuaded by the understanding of their physical and emotional responsiveness to various situations. Stress levels and how individuals respond to a task determine how well individuals will succeed. Individuals decode manifestations such as anxiety, stress, tiredness, and mood when judging competence.
Pajares, 1996	Knowledge, skills and prior attainments are not predictors of future accomplishments.			Individuals who feel efficacious are theorized to persevere when they confront complications. Self-beliefs will powerfully influence the way individuals behave.
Usher & Pajares, 2008		Attributes such as age, gender, and ethnicity are influential sources of self- efficacy.		Anxiety towards a demanding task may indicate that the individual is not qualified to accomplish the task. Strong emotional reactions to school-related tasks can provide expected success or failure.
Ginsburg & Jablow, 2011				When engaging in problems, individuals may change the stressor to make themselves more comfortable, or they may change

Author	Past-Performance Accomplishment	Vicarious Experiences	Verbal Persuasion	Physiological and Affective States
				themselves to adapt to the stressor.
				(continued)
				Procrastination, idleness, and monotony temporarily push the feelings of stress.

Table 9

Frequency of Sources of Self-Efficacy as Identified by Participants

Sources of Self Efficacy	Frequency
Past Performance Accomplishments	9
Vicarious Experiences	32
Verbal Persuasion	47
Physiological and Affective States	28

Verbal persuasion. According to the analysis of the data gathered for this study, verbal

persuasion was by far the most influential source of self-efficacy impacting the participants'

effort exertion and level of persistence in their educational endeavors. All of the participants

reported receiving persuasive messages from teachers, parents, partners, friends or peers. The

meaningful words received from family members, teachers, and peers served as self-efficacy

building blocks that impacted participants' resilience to assist them to persist through the

hindrances. The participants recalled the profound effect of such messages as being a critical

part of shaping the trajectory of their educational path. The praise received from impactful

sources influenced the participants to increase their motivation and efforts to accomplish their

goal of returning to school to eventually earn a college degree. Through the analysis of the

stories of the seven resilient dropouts, it was clear that they all experienced at least one positive

instance with an educator that impacted their path. Six of the participants found that navigating

struggles was more natural when meaningful individuals conveyed assurance in their capabilities

rather than expressing doubt.

Educators' verbal persuasion, without exception, was a reliable source positively

influencing the self-efficacy of the participants. Most participants spoke about a teacher or

several teachers whom they believed to be highly influential in the development of their

confidence to further their education. The participants described that their supportive educators

were influential because of their reassurance and concern for their academic success. For

example, Participant #1 recalled an encounter with one of her English professors in college. The

professor took an interest in the academic growth of the participant. The professor, as described

by the participant, not only was concerned for her well-being but also continually challenged her

to achieve more in life. The professor took it upon herself to contact the participant to offer her

support and mentorship. The professor counseled the participant for many years offering career

guidance and support to navigate the requirements to earn a bachelor's and a master's degree.

The participant recalled the professor's words telling her she has the right to this education.

Three of the participants described encountering teachers that supported them by helping

them eliminate some of the obstacles. For example, Participant #4, #6 and #7 returned to school

after becoming young mothers. Participant #4 recalls a teacher and a school administrator

influencing her to do well in school and also providing advice to care for her child. She

describes making strong connections with the educators and feeling welcomed in the classroom.

She explained how the two educators encouraged her not give up and instead seek alternatives to

get support with her child while she attended school. Participant #6 illustrated how teachers

guided her to find resources for childcare and financial aid to support her while attending school. The teachers channeled the participant persevere even when she facing unexpected obstacles.

Meaningful verbal persuasions impacted the participants to withstand positive awareness of self-efficacy to overcome the obstacles. For example, Participant #5 recalled a critical conversation with one of his teachers, even at a time when he was not doing well in school, which motivated him to pursue a career as an educator. He recalls the teacher telling him "you know, your voice can change the world. You should be a teacher." The teacher's words motivated the participant to go into the field of education. Years later, one of his school administrators encouraged him to go into school administration. These messages, as described by the participant, gave him the first inclination to believe that he could make a difference in the lives of students and also gave him the confidence in his leadership potential. Participant #5 also recalled influential conversations from unexpected sources. He recalled how one particular friend from his neighborhood that had taught him how to navigate his violent community and introduced him to sell drugs, also counseled him to seek a better outcome for his future. His friend saw his potential in leadership and encouraged him to pursue a better life away from the streets in his neighborhood. Participant #5 described that the encouragement to leave the neighborhood and continue to build on his skill set and natural aptitude to learn gave him the sense of his ability and competency.

Having supportive friends or someone in the family encouraging the participants to pursue obtaining a higher education also influenced participants' determination when facing obstacles. In various instances, the participants verified that receiving positive messages from trusted friends and family members positively affected them. Participant #1, #6, and #7 described the impact and encouragement received from co-workers and college professors.

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Participant #2 talked about the reassurance received from his brother and romantic partners. Participant #3 appreciated the support from her sister and her husband to continue her education. School staff and a case manager impacted participant #4. Friends, at-work mentors, and his wife verbally motivated Participant #5.

Participant #7, a retired superintendent, recalled how one significant conversation changed the trajectory of her life. One conversation during a job interview changed her outcome. She attributed reaching new heights of success, going from being a factory worker to retiring as a superintendent because of the impact of the appraisal from a reliable source. Participant #7 narrated the event that took place when she was interviewed for a support staff position at a school. The principal who was conducting the interview invested time to help the participant find out about her path. The participant recalled that the principal saw her potential and motivated her to get her GED and pursue a career in the field of education. She portrayed the principal's verbal persuasion as a motivator to also pursue her doctorate, as she recalls: "because if she can do it and she has that kind of faith and belief in me, I need to have that kind of faith and belief in me."

The positive impact received through verbal messages from others was evident throughout all of the interview responses. The verbal persuasion, as reported by the participants, was informal most of the time. For example, some of the participants recalled being told by their peers how they were good at a specific task, such as tutoring or leading others. Others reported powerful messages that gave them the hope they needed when they encountered hurdles or challenges. Participant #3 recalled having trouble with managing all the assignments in her first semester of college. Her sister, as described by the participant, was the driving force not to give up when facing obstacles. She recalls her sister telling her "just get up and get this paper done,

worry about the rest later." She states how this type of guided verbal coaching and expressed belief from another person prevented her from giving up multiple times during her academic path. The impact of verbal persuasion was evident in each of the stories of the participants. The guidance, support, and encouragement contributed to the participants' decision to continue in their academic paths.

Vicarious experiences. The participants described the influence of observing others with similar attributes, such as age, gender, and ethnicity as an essential source of information affecting their confidence also to obtain a higher education degree. Interestingly, all of the female participants shared that they had taken on female mentors that supported them with navigating the challenges of enrolling and pursuing higher education. The participants viewed such female models as a source of inspiration. For example, Participant #3 described having a strong female mentor, who was her English professor, helping her realize that if she could reach such achievements and success, she too could achieve in obtaining an English degree and becoming an English professor. For three of the female participants, having mentors that were mothers led them to believe that going to school while having a successful career and managing the responsibilities of motherhood was achievable.

Participant #7 extensively described the importance of not only having models that were the same gender but also having convincing models from the same ethnicity. She described how her confidence to return to school was inspired initially by observing a female administrator. She explained how this particular mentor took a risk on her and fortified her passion for also becoming an educator. She recalled the importance of their relationship as one of support and constant follow up to ensure she was on track to accomplish her goals. Additionally, she also

explained that the reason she decided to pursue a terminal degree was due to observing this

mentor reach such accolade. The participant stated the following in regards to her mentor:

Her having her doctorate, always resonated with me because there was a time when I

thought, you know, one day. I couldn't see it back then, but I thought one day I'm gonna

go for it too. Because if she could do it and she has that kind of faith and believe in me, I

need to have that kind of faith and believe in me.

Additionally, Participant #7 also explained how her confidence in reaching new heights

of success continued to strengthen when she joined an organization that exists to support Latino

administrators. She explains the mentorship program that she participated in early in her career

as a pivotal part of her moving up the career ladder. She describes how joining the Latino

organization exposed her to many successful Latino administrators. She described the

friendships and connections made through the Latino organization as an invaluable support

system. The male participants were also reported being impacted by other male models. For

example, Participant #2 described deciding to go to college because his brother had enrolled in

college before him. Although both of the males did not report having formal male mentors,

Participant #5 describes a memorable moment after having spent time at one of his soccer

coach's house when he realized he wanted the same lifestyle his coach was living. He described

observing his home and his family and starting to see what he had achieved through obtaining his

college degree. One day he concluded that that was what a healthy family life was supposed to

look like. He explained that without meaning to be disrespectful, he felt as smart as his coach

and therefore could also accomplish the same goals. This considerable realization that he wanted

the same kind of life as his coach ignited his motivation to do better in school and complete his

high school diploma after having dropped out.

Participant #2 talked about the models made available through what the literature calls entertainment education. The participant described watching commercials that portrayed happiness and satisfaction after completing a degree. The participant stated the following regarding the TV commercials for private universities that influence people to continue their education:

> They are constantly putting this information out there that they need to have some sort of education or preparation or training that will make them be able to get a job and obviously they have a great life.

He continued to explain how some commercials and marketing materials inform individuals that education opportunities are available to individuals that have to work and are parenting. All in all, this participant believed that the publicity and marketing available about higher education does encourage individuals to return to school and persevere. For him, the TV commercials that portrayed education as a pathway to success were an inspiration that motivated him not to give up.

Vicarious experiences also impacted the participants' career path decision. When asked to talk about how they were influenced by others, the participants spoke about people whom they considered influential. In selecting a career, five out of seven of the participants identified considering and choosing an occupation based on knowing people in such careers. Teachers and professors were found to be the most influential members concerning the information and guidance they provided about the profession of the participants. For instance, four of the seven participants went into a career in the field of education to become teachers, school administrator or college professor because they had observed people in those areas throughout their academic career. Participant #1 stated that she had learned how to stand in front of a class and how to be a

good teacher from observing her teachers throughout her pre and post-secondary education.

Participant #6 specified going into the field of child development because, for many years, she

had been exposed to child-care professionals. The participants felt that their teachers and college

professors, whom they met at various points in their path, were influential because of their

passion and their encouragement. Participant #2 and #3 went into their field because they had

family members or partners in the same field. The proximity to models that also provided

mentorship introduced the participants to the career path and also reinforced their sense of self-

efficacy.

Physiological and affective states. Participants were asked to describe their feeling and

beliefs about returning to school and preparing for a career. Table 10 presents a summary of the

participants' responses. The participants exhibited a sophisticated level of efficacy that allowed

them to use the emotions to energize them to accomplish goals. When engaging in difficulties,

participants used the stressors to modify their behaviors and adapt to the situations.

Table 10

Physiological and Affective States

Emotional and Physical Reaction	Frequency
Fear	6
Stress	5
Anger	5
Anxiety	3
Depression	2
Fatigue	2

Anger, fear, and stress were common emotions in the stories of the participants.

Situations such as not being marketable and not having enough money to make a living led to

constant feelings of stress, fear, and anger for some of the participants. Three of the participants

expressed that when returning to school, they had anger that in turn fueled them to move forward

with situations that were difficult. The feelings of anger stemmed from feeling unprepared for the coursework, feeling that they do not deserve their education, feeling ignorant, and feeling underserved and defeated. Participant #4, for example, shared that there were many times that people told her that she looked mad all the time and the way she explained it was that over the years, she had developed a tough exterior. She also shared that her *walls* and her *guard* were up to give people the impression that she was strong enough to overcome the challenges. For example, when enrolling at a community college, she was not familiar with the process of registering and did not know how to request information in regards to financial aid because nobody in her family had ever gone through the process of enrolling in college. She detailed that for her the fear that she felt needed to be blocked on a constant basis. Participant #1 and #3 shared how they had to push away feelings of anger and fear continually. Additionally, Participant #6 shared that there were many times that she did not feel adequately prepared to participate in class or to complete assignments. However, the feeling of fear also permitted her to continue risk-taking and not giving up.

The feelings of anxiety, depression, and fatigue were reported to stem from having to endure adverse situations that were out of the participants' control. As mentioned before, the participants reported having absentee parents, experiencing poverty, abuse, violence, hunger, neglect, incarceration, relocating, enrolling at various schools, living in a dangerous neighborhood and at times being homeless. The chaos and unsuitable environments impacted some of the participants.

The participants shared that they wrestled challenging situations with optimism. When facing difficult circumstances and hurdles they purposefully looked at the bright side of conditions, and this supported their success. Three of the participants used expressions to

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illustrate how they took one thing at a time and did not let the challenges pile up and become frustrating. Participant #3 stated the following:

> I manage stress day by day…whether it's school, work or anything, once I walk in the door, I have to turn off because I have to be present for them. It works better in theory than in action, but that is what I do… I always thrive on stress.

Participant #5 stated that he also took it day by day. The way he could accomplish goals without feeling overwhelmed was by taking one step at a time. Seeing the bright side of every situation was in one way or another present in every story shared by the participants.

Although the participants experienced challenging situations, they demonstrated to be problem-focused and were able to respond to the tasks in ways that contributed to their success rather than hinder it. The participants acknowledged their feelings of stress, however, the pressure did not prompt them to give up. They recognizably had to overcome various obstacles along their academic paths. Nonetheless, each of the participants acknowledged their role in changing their perspective towards challenging situations. All seven of the resilient dropouts participating in the interviews agreed that they would not have done anything different in their paths to success.

Past performance accomplishments. Knowledge, skills, and prior attainments were found to be the least source mentioned in resilient dropouts decision to return to school. The participants did provide information relating to their academic performance concerning mastering academic goals. The viewpoints about their faculties most strongly impacted the pursuit and eventual completion of their respective higher education degree. For example, five out seven of the participants explained that they believed they had the skillset to perform school tasks at an adequate pace and sometimes they even excelled amongst their peers. Participant #3

stated that school tasks were completed effortlessly. She passed the high school equivalency test at the age of 16. Participant #4 felt that she was equipped to succeed in school and even when absent for various circumstances, she was able to catch up and excel once she returned to the school setting. Participant #1 passed the GED test on her first attempt after dropping out before she started high school. Participant #2 also passed the GED with little preparation on his first attempt. Participant #5 recalled doing exceptionally well on an IQ test that he had to take to be admitted to a school after having dropped out.

The feeling of efficacy in completing school tasks directly impacted the resilience of the participants. Four of the participants felt highly efficient in achieving school-related tasks. For example, Participant #4 reflected on the way success in school made her feel. Although Participant #4 vaguely remembered her school experience because she attended nine different schools between kindergarten and high school, and was out of school for periods of time, she stated that she felt good when she did well in school. Her recollections included stories of self-motivation and a natural ability or inclination for school. She noted the following:

> I always knew that I was good in school. It came natural to me…so even so I was in and
> out of my high school year I was like… I always liked school…you know, it made me
> feel good about myself because it came natural…I can't say I was naturally smart but
> still…I still work for it…but…so I always knew I wanted to go back, I always wanted to
> go to college.

Participant #3 talked about the many achievement gaps she experienced in college. Although she had passed the high school proficiency exam, she failed every course attempted during her first semester in college. She said the following:

…And then I enrolled in college, at the community college but failed out because I didn't know how to study, I didn't know how to write a paper, I've never taken algebra…I took a few remedial classes to get over the math hump and basic composition courses to get an understanding of what I needed to do.

Past performance accomplishments were also found to be influential in other areas. For example, Participant #2 reported outshining others in various acting roles. He described his success in numerous acting roles. The participant reminisced about his past participation in multiple theatrical roles. He recalled his abilities to quickly memorize all his lines and his natural talent to play leading roles while he participated in a theatrical association. Participant #5 shared that he had been a talented soccer player. His performance in athletics persuaded this individual to believe he had what it takes to attempt and take risks in new settings. Participant #5 attributed his desire to return to school and persevere even when confronting setbacks.

Summary of Key Findings

In summary, this qualitative study used data from seven individuals to explore the experience of dropping out and returning to school to complete the high school requirement and earn a higher education degree. Chapter 4 included the findings explored in the research questions. The key findings are as follows:

1. Exposure to adversity and the identified dropout predictors were present in the stories of the participants.

2. Higher income, better jobs and respect, and credibility were the participants' motivating factors to return to school.

3. Positive adults, educational aspirations, and observing others achieving success enhanced the participants' development of self-efficacy to return to school and to earn a higher education degree.

4. Self-efficacy was found to influence resilient dropouts academic paths.

In the final chapter, the key findings will be compared to the literature, conclusions, and implications will be discussed, and a series of recommendations will be made.

Chapter Five: Discussion of Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

Earning a high school diploma is a significant milestone. Notwithstanding the importance of high school graduation, it is estimated that one-third of students who enter high school will not graduate with their four-year cohort (Melville, 2006). The outcomes of not earning a high school diploma generate enormous hardship for individuals. Researchers (Kominski et al., 2001; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Suh et al., 2007) have demonstrated that more than 40% of students in secondary school exhibit at-risk factors that may lead to school dropout. Understanding the dropout crisis necessitates a better understanding of the circumstances that lead individuals to leave school before earning a high school diploma. Research indicates that departing from school is not caused by one isolated event, as many factors contribute to the disconnectedness from school (Fleming, 2012; Levin, 2012; Orfield, 2004; Ream & Rumberger, 2008; Ward et al., 2012). High school dropout has been studied in depth, what remains unclear are the factors influencing individuals to return to school to complete the high school requirements and earn a higher education degree.

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's confidence about his or her capabilities on a particular task or undertaking. Self-efficacy, according to Bandura (2004), encourages the

efforts an individual exerts, the degree to cope with anxiety, the level of persistence and determination when faced with obstacles. Various studies (Alivernini & Luicidi, 2011; Caprara et al., 2008; Pastorelli et al., 2001) have demonstrated that self-efficacy impacted the perseverance of those individuals facing at-risk factors. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experience of dropping out of high school and later returning to earn a higher education degree.

The final chapter of this dissertation discusses the key findings recognized from interviewing seven resilient dropouts. These findings were compared with the literature review in Chapter Two. Next, the researcher draws conclusion and implications from the results. Finally, recommendations are made to expand this research further.

Research Questions

This study intended to answer the following questions:

1. What was the motivating factor to return to school after dropping out of high school?

2. What factors enhance or inhibit the development of the self-efficacy of those who have dropped out of high school to eventually earn their degree in post-secondary education?

3. How did self-efficacy sources influence the academic paths of resilient dropouts?

Research Design Overview

This study was a qualitative, phenomenological study that followed an interpretative phenomenological analysis research design. The study involved seven individuals represented through a purposeful sampling of resilient dropouts. The study used semi-structured open-ended interviews (see Appendix C) that were aligned with the literature review in Chapter Two. The questions were designed to explore the lived experiences of men and women who dropped out of

high school and later returned to school to earn a higher education degree. Interviews were conducted in person, over the phone, or via Skype. The researcher, assisted by a colleague, reviewed the data to ensure that the codes and themes emerging from the data were adequately categorized and analyzed.

Discussion of the Findings

Four significant findings emerged from the analysis of the participants' responses. First, exposure to adversity and the dropout predictors identified in the literature were present in the stories of the participants. Second, higher income, better jobs, and respect and credibility were the motivating factors that caused the participants to return to school. Third, the participants' development of self-efficacy was most enhanced by positive adults, educational aspirations, and observing others achieving success. Fourth, self-efficacy was found to influence the academic paths of resilient dropouts.

Research participants. This study included seven resilient dropouts. All of the participants left high school before receiving a high school diploma. The participants later returned to earn a high school diploma or an equivalent and continued on to receive a higher education degree and in some cases, various degrees. The participants did not report leaving high school because they did not value their education. The reasons for dropping out identified by the seven participants were associated with situations outside of their control. As recognized in the literature, leaving high school before graduating is a complicated decision that related to the learner, his or her family, and the community (Bridgeland et al., 2006). The literature review also concluded that dropping out was a long-term process of disengagement that began as early

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as elementary school (Ream & Rumberger, 2008). The participants' interruption in school progress was a result of the severity of the situations encountered in their young and early youth years. Participants shared that they had exposure and personal experience with physical and emotional abuse, neglect, abandonment, violence, dangerous neighborhoods, disjointed families, drugs, poverty and teenage pregnancy.

While the preponderance of research on school dropout is focused on behavioral predictors of school failure, the findings of this study correlate adverse situations as a direct effect of maladaptive behaviors that have been identified as dropout predictors. The stories of the men and women participating in this research posit that exposure to adversity and navigating unfamiliar situations disrupted the academic achievement and impacted their behavior, attitudes, and educational performance. In other words, the participants' behavior, attitude and educational performance were a result of the unfavorable circumstances in the participants' childhood and youth. The unfavorable circumstances influenced their decision to drop out of school.

The participants exhibited resilience in overcoming obstacles. Regardless of the challenges, the seven participants were able to persevere and confront the setbacks. The participants returned to school after having dropped out and have gone far beyond just the expectations of earning a high school diploma or the equivalent. Regardless of the impediments, all of the participants attempted and attained higher academic accomplishments.

Key Findings

Motivating factors to return to school. The voices of the participants help us understand that many circumstances may interfere with student performance and outcomes. The findings explain that participants were primarily motivated to return to school because of the value associated with higher education. The data showed that there was high value placed on

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education. The participant's desire to receive higher income, better jobs, and credibility were impactful motivators to encourage them to earn their high school diploma and move on to college. The stories revealed that higher income, better jobs, and employability, respect and credibility were their primary motivating factors to return to school. The participants' drive and aspirations to return to school after having dropped out encompassed intrinsic and extrinsic motivators.

The participants recognized the increased hardships encountered due to their inferior level of educational accomplishments. As identified in the literature, individuals who leave school before high school graduation endure higher levels of unemployment, earn less money in their lifetime, have higher rates of incarceration, have to depend on public aid, and are also more likely to become teenage parents (Waldfogel et al., 2005). The participants were keenly aware that the high school diploma was pivotal to increasing their earning power. The participants shared that before returning to school and earning a higher education degree, they worked in various customer service related positions that did not allow them to gain a satisfactory wage. For example, five of the participants reported working multiple jobs affording them minimum wage. The participants recognized that education attainment made for better employment opportunities and the opportunity for increased income. The realization of the limited opportunities resulting from not graduating high school convinced the participants to return to school and enroll in post-secondary education. The completion of a higher education degree not only advance the participants get jobs; it also proved to boost their pay significantly.

The participants reported that career advancements accompanied educational milestones. For example, Participant #7 progressed from earning a GED, to receiving a doctorate. She has recently retired as a school superintendent and shared that the benefits of her education provided

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for better job opportunities and career advancement. Some of the participants also shared that

each educational accolade also opened additional opportunities for employment and promotions.

Participant #5 reported that although without his high school completion and higher education

degrees he was earning a good salary, his education and preparation opened greater opportunities

for career advancement. Participant #3 also talked about the benefits of her higher education.

The benefits of further college completion and an advance degree allotted her multiple

opportunities to climb the career ladder and now works in a job that satisfies her and also

provides for further career mobility.

Returning to school and completing a degree also allowed the participants to gain respect

and credibility from other peers and family members. Most of the participants accepted that their

family members highly regarded higher education. Five of the participants shared that they were

the first in their families to obtain a higher education degree. Participant #6 is the second to the

youngest one of ten siblings and was the first one to obtain a four-year degree. She described

how this was a huge accomplishment because she was able to complete all her educational

accolades after having dropped out and having four children.

For the participants that were not first generation, completing their education gained

respect and credibility because higher education was a significant expectation in their family.

For example, Participant #3 family members and husband were highly accomplished in higher

education. She returned to school after dropping out to show her family members she could also

reach educational success. Earning her family's respect prompted her to act towards achieving

her educational goals. Education was highly regarded by Participant #2 and his family.

Although his parents had not pursued a higher education degree, the expectation was that he and

his sibling would obtain at minimum a bachelor's degree. He returned to school after dropping out because he desired being regarded as an educated person in his family.

The participants' expectations were imperative to the motivation to return to school. The participants had a strong sense of being part of their resolution to return to school. The participants first had to become aware of the benefits of returning to school to successfully implement the interventions to move toward their goal. The participants were self-motivated to return to school. Participants regulated their motivation and actions once they decided they wanted to pursue a suitable earning power, better opportunities and to fulfill the expectations of earning a higher education degree. The interview results revealed the participants' recognition of the significance of education to bridge to better opportunities associated with higher paying, career advancement, personal growth and personal gratification significantly impacted their behaviors to enlist and persevere in school.

Factors enhancing or inhibiting the self-efficacy. The participants reported various factors that encouraged or discouraged their efforts to persevere in school. Positive adults, observing others achieving success, and educational aspirations enhanced the participants' development of self-efficacy.

The relationships with positive adults developed a stronger sense of the participants' confidence to achieve their college and career goals. Each of the participants had at least one responsive educator, mentor, caregiver, sibling, partner or friend that impacted his/her decision to return and persevere once he/she came back to school. The educators and role models functioned as the participants' supporters celebrating their achievements and providing encouragement when they faced obstacles.

The adults, as described by the participants, listened and provided comfort and in some instances they correspondingly inspired the participants by conveying a sense of optimism by providing genuine feedback to support their goals. The participants consistently described the encouragement and support they received from educators. The participants described how the impact of at least one positive educator focused their trajectories and encouraged them to persevere in school and at times also motivated to select a career direction.

The findings also supported that the participants, particularly when facing struggles, increased their self-efficacy awareness when meaningful individuals conveyed assurance in his or her capabilities. Participants' belief that they could succeed was enhanced when they received meaningful encouragement about the importance to return to school and to pursue higher education.

The participants crafted their self-efficacy by associating, and at times comparing, themselves to others. Most of the participants described that observing other individuals accomplishing the goal of graduation and success in a specific field encouraged them to also pursue the same objective.   The participants described being influenced by observing others with similar attributes such as age, gender, and ethnicity. For example, all of the female participants attributed their success to having other female role models. The participants cited formal and informal instances that helped them realize that college and career success could also be a possibility for them. Same ethnicity models also increased the participants' confidence to stay on track and accomplish college and career goals. For one of the participants observing a role model that represented her sex and ethnicity completing a terminal degree consequently impacted her decision to follow the same steps to also accomplish a doctorate degree.

Observing the lifestyle and that could be accomplished through obtaining an educational degree also supported participants' decision to return to school and persevere in educational goals. Witnessing and realizing the possibility of a better life as a direct result of obtaining a college degree motivated on of the male participants to follow in the same steps as on of his school sports coaches.

In selecting a career, most of the participants attributed teachers and professors as the most influential people providing guidance to select a career path. Most of the participants became educators because they had observed various educators that impacted them in their academic career. Observing teachers provided the modeling needed to impact them to also select a career in the field of education. The participants described how the proximity to models in the same fields of interest provided an introduction to the career path and also reinforced their sense of self-efficacy.

Realizing and setting educational aspirations also contributed to the participants' performance and actions. Bandura's self-efficacy theory can be recapitulated as, "what people think, believe, and feel affects how they behave" (Bandura, 1986, p. 25). The data indicated that the participants' resolution to fulfill their educational aspirations was influenced by their belief that they could accomplish the task of earning a higher education degree. Bandura (1986), Lent and Hackett (1987), and Schunk (1991) found that when individuals have an idea of what they want to accomplish, they bring about actions to regulate their motivation and efforts to impact the goal. The participants described having clear educational aspirations.

Navigating through various unexpected circumstances inhibited the participants' confidence to return to school and reach their academic goals. However, the participants overcame the event of dropping out and achieved academic resiliency. The participants

demonstrated a high self-efficacy because although they were affected by the setbacks and failures associated with dropping out of high school they were influenced to return to school and persevere in the academic setting.

Influence of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy sources were found to influence the academic paths of the participants positively. The four sources of self-efficacy were evident in the participants' stories. Although the literature review identified past performance accomplishments as the most reliable self-efficacy source, the data collected through the interviews indicated that, although meaningful, past performance accomplishments were not the leading source. Specifically, vicarious experiences and verbal persuasions were found to influence returning to school after having dropped out.

The findings from this study revealed that verbal persuasion was the primary source of self-efficacy that predominantly influenced the participants' success. According to the literature, appraisals should come from credible sources to impact the self-efficacy of the individuals. For example, the verbal persuasion received from educators was found to be the most reliable source that positively influenced the participants' self-efficacy. Such messages received from educators, as described by one of the participants, inspired him to pursue furthering his education to become an educational leader. The majority of the participants reported encountering teachers that supported them by providing verbal persuasions that encouraged them to overcome obstacles. One of the participants described in detail how receiving verbal persuasions form one person, in particular, changed her life's trajectory. Such statement demonstrates the impact of verbal persuasions in changing the participant's educational outcome.

In the analysis and interpretation of the collected data, verbal persuasions were identified to impress on individuals' decision to return to school and eventually earn their higher education

degree. The stories of the participants revealed that they had received persuasive messages from teachers, parents, partners, friends, or peers. Most notably, the findings align with the literature in Chapter Two relating to the effects of viewing, encountering or being mentored by others having similar attributes, such as age, gender, and ethnicity. For example, all of the female participants shared that they had been proximate to female mentors that inspired them to achieve. Furthermore, participants' exposure to mentors and models with which they identify ethnically provided an increased belief that they too could achieve.

The participants also exhibited a sophisticated level of self-efficacy when engaging in difficulties. Fear, stress, anger, anxiety, depression, and fatigue surfaced in the participants' stories. Although the participants recognizably encountered various obstacles, they demonstrated to be problem-focused and were capable of navigating through the feelings and emotions by approaching challenging situations with optimism.

The discoveries in Research Questions 1 and 2 posit the importance of the proximity to at least one caring adult increased the self-efficacy of the participants through verbal persuasions and vicarious experiences. Educators profoundly impacted the motivation and perseverance of individuals to succeed in school. Each of the participants described having at least one adult who served as a source of self-efficacy in the way that they encouraged them verbally or modeled behavior. Most of the participants expressed receiving the encouragement and modeling in the school setting. The verbal persuasion and modeling accompanied by a positive relationship with a caring adult that was willing to be proximate to the individual provided a reliable source of self-efficacy to persevere through the obstacles. The analysis of the stories portrays that realistic encouragement motivated the participants to exert more significant effort and persuaded them to accomplish various levels of post-secondary attainments. The results of

this study agreed with the research conducted by Schunk (1983b), which found that feedback raised individual's efficacy beliefs combined with persisted efforts, in turn, raised the level of competency achieved. For example, one of the participants explained how having a mentor that served a positive role model and also a source of verbal persuasion gave her the confidence to earn a doctorate. She stated the following to describe the influence of her mentor:

> Her having a doctorate, always resonated with me because there was a time when I thought, you know, one day. I couldn't see it back then, but I thought one day I'm gonna go for it too. Because if she could do it and she has that kind of faith and believe in me, I need to have that kind of believe in me.

Conclusions

This study was designed to explore the experience of dropping out of high school and later returning to earn a higher education degree. The results of this study can be used as a guide to developing programs and implementing practices to reduce the high school drop out rate. The following conclusions resulted from the analysis of the findings: (a) understanding the value of education motivated the participants to return to school; and (b) educators can enhance the self-efficacy of students.

Findings from this study revealed that the participants were aware of the limited employment and earning opportunities resulting from not having a high school diploma. Understanding that earning a high school diploma and pursuing higher education was a bridged to better employment opportunities and a significant boost in pay encouraged the participants to return to school. The impact of being informed of the results of not earning a high school diploma resulted in higher motivation to pursue higher education.

Most directly related to the research objective of this study, the researcher has concluded that positive adults enhanced the self-efficacy of the participants. Although the participants encountered struggles and obstacles, the meaningful encouragement from the positive relationships resulted in increasing their self-efficacy awareness and boosted their assurance of their capabilities. According to the stories of success of the participants, they could not have overcome the phenomena of dropping out without the caring adults that believed in them, even when they were times when they doubted themselves.

Educators were found to have a powerful influence on the participants' self-efficacy. All of the participants reported having a significant adult in their lives who changed the trajectory and their educational path. The communication of positive expectations and directly hearing that there was a teacher expecting them to do well directly influenced motivation to return to school and not give up. Additionally, the participants reported that having at least one adult that had the confidence that they could handle difficult situations imparted a very powerful message and enhanced their self-efficacy and resilience.

Given that verbal persuasion and vicarious experiences were found to be the most impactful sources of self-efficacy described by the participants, it is concluded that educators have the most opportunities to increase the self-efficacy of students that may be at-risk of disengaging from high school. Positive adults and observing others was found in this study to positively influence the participants' decision to return to school and to persist through the obstacles. The voices of the participants may offer information for educators, school leaders, and policymakers to help make informed decisions to improve student self-efficacy and reduce the current dropout rate. The participants in this study described the impact of positive and supportive teachers and educators. Creating additional opportunities for students to interact with

positive educators paired with academic support, counseling and interventions would impact students that may be in danger of disengaging from school.

Implications for Practice

The purpose of this study was to examine the experience of dropping out of high school and later returning to earn a higher education degree. The findings may have implications for policy and practices aimed at reducing high school drop out. The following are implications for policy and practice based on the findings and conclusions of this study.

The participants' decision to disengage from school was not a decision made purposefully, rather, it was as a result of various adverse circumstances that inhibited their self-efficacy from completing academic tasks. Most importantly, the finding from this study support that knowing the value of education was an important factor to return to school and persevere in higher education. Educators should continue to develop clear goals to graduation while also enhancing the information relating to each students college and career interest.

The findings associated with Research Questions 2 and 3 outline the strength of mentors and role models to impact individuals' decision to return to school and persevere in post-secondary education. Additional funding should be allocated to increase mentorship opportunities. Student engagement programs should target all students but specifically provide individual mentorship to those who may have early signs of potentially dropping out. Local network systems should be developed to follow students to ensure to offer individual's options to enroll in fitting programs to guarantee they get the support and mentorship to graduate.

School leaders and educators can impact student outcomes through the implementation of research, design, and professional development opportunities geared to develop school models and strategies to enhance students' self-efficacy through verbal persuasions and observing

positive role models.   It is critical to know whether specific programs or approaches that are designed and implemented are effective. According to the findings of this study, educators profoundly influenced the success of the participants. The increased knowledge of educators and leaders along with increased efforts to be proximate to those students that may be at-risk of school disengagements would impact the self-efficacy of students while overcoming adverse factors. Teachers would benefit from professional learning communities where they can cooperate and spend time receiving additional training to target interventions for at-risk students and also to collaborate on programmatic changes to allow for increased interactions with the students.

Participants in this study described the benefits of having mentor-like relationships with adults in the learning environment. Developing small learning communities would enhance the interactions and mentorship opportunities. School environments should cultivate mentor relationships. Larger high schools should be apportioned into smaller learning communities where the students can work with the same group of teachers throughout their high school career.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study served as an exploration of the phenomena of dropping out of high school and later returning to earn a higher education degree. This study has added to the existing knowledge base relating school departure (Fleming, 2012; Levin, 2012; Orfield, 2004; Ream & Rumberger, 2008; Ward et al., 2012) by demonstrating that the known risk factors are exhibited by the participants prior to dropping out were a direct result of unfavorable circumstances in the participants' childhood and youth. This study also added to the extended investigation (Bandura, 1986, 1997; Cervone, 2000; Pajares, 1996, 2003; Usher & Pajares, 2006) that has sought to explore the role of self-efficacy as a mechanism to alter individual's performance. Also, this

study contributes to the awareness of how the four sources of self-efficacy interact to affect performance judgments (Pajares, 1996; Pajares, 2003; Schunk & Pajares, 2005) and, in turn, affect the way individuals act to overcome obstacles and achieve academic success. However, additional studies are necessary to continue to explore dropout prevention and supporting individuals to return to school after having dropped out.

There is a need to conduct a study with a larger sample size to further explore the reasons for school departure and successfully returning to school after dropping out. Considering that California mirrors the same alarming dropout statistics as the rest of the nation, conducting the same research study of resilient dropouts targeting a larger sample size with the recruitment of participants from different parts of the United States would provide for more information regarding the dropout phenomena affecting other parts of this county. Researchers (Kominski et al., 2001) found that 46% of America's children have a least one personal risk factor, and 18% have, or will have, multiple risk factors during their lifetime, it is essential to continue to explore dropout preventions and successful strategies to re-engage those who have departed from school.

The researcher would also recommend conducting a longitudinal case study to provide further insight into the effects of verbal persuasions and vicarious experiences of students that show signs of high school dropout risk. A longitudinal study could provide further details on what changes may be necessary for student support programs to impact student retention, motivation and success directly. Throughout the interviews, participants consistently related their success to at least one teacher or educator encouraging them and supporting them with eliminating the obstacles. The impact of verbal persuasion was notably mentioned in every story shared by the participants. Additionally, vicarious experiences highly impacted the individuals to stay on task and accomplish goals. Exploring the relationship of exposure to successful mentors

would allow educators to further develop mentoring opportunities for students exhibiting at-risk factors. Further understanding the impact of positive adults, educational aspirations, and observing others achieving success may provide further resources to develop dropout prevention models.

Closing Remarks

Educators are inundated with new programs and revised standards as well as changes in budgets that impact the time and effort in implementing programs that support student engagement and motivation. The importance of the results of this study focuses on the continued efforts to provided opportunities for building relationships and mentorship opportunities that impact students' trajectories even in the presence of at-risk factors. Creating and increasing opportunities for verbal persuasions and vicarious experiences could be solved in a variety of ways with little to no cost to schools. Educators have the maximum opportunities to increase the support given to students that may be in danger of leaving school. There is power in the proximity that caring adults have to encourage and mentor students that are suffering, neglected, excluded or dealing with life circumstances.

To significantly impact excellence and equity for at-risk students, educational leaders, educators and policymakers must be willing to be proximate to the individuals who are being excluded and disregarded before they leave school. Educators working with the most vulnerable population need to be disposed to articulate the challenges and the needs of these children. Policymakers are not able to be effective and solve the problems in schools if they are not aware of the individual stories. Educators can be influential in persuading policymakers to prescribe and allocate funding to increase student retention and re-engagement efforts.

Lastly, educators, educational leaders and policymakers must not lose hope for the education system and the students. Building positive relationships and changing the narrative paired with continuous hopefulness will allow educators to impact the self-efficacy and increase the resiliency of students. Hope must be present in every interaction, conversation, and decision making in our schools. This collective hope will lead to continued improvement and innovation in the education system.

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PEPPERDINE

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NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Date: June 05, 2017

Protocol Investigator Name: Norma Vijeila

Protocol #: 17-04-546

Project Title: Sources of Self-Efficacy Beliefs of Resilient High School Dropouts

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Norma Vijeila:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* at community.pepperdine.edu/irb.

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chair

APPENDIX B

Letter of Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities

Thank you for your interest in this study. As you are aware from the introduction communication, my name is Norma Vijeila, and I am a doctoral student at Pepperdine University.

Please consider this information carefully before deciding whether to participate in this research.

Purpose of the research: To understand the experiences of dropping out of high school and later returning to school to earn a higher education degree (s).

What you will do in this research: If you decide to volunteer, you will be asked to participate in one interview. You will be asked several questions. Some of them will be about your experience with the event of dropping out of high school. Others will be about your experience with returning back to school to eventually earn a higher education degree. With your permission, I will audio record the interviews and will also take notes during the interview session.

Time required: The interview will take approximately 1 to 2 hours.

Risks: Some of the questions may cause emotional discomfort, issues with self-efficacy or self-esteem, boredom and possible negative self-reflection.

Confidentiality: Your responses to interview questions will be kept confidential. At no time will you actual identity be revealed. You will be assigned a random numerical code. Anyone who helps me transcribe responses will only know you by this code. The recordings and the transcript will be kept, without your name, in a secure manner for three years, after which the data will be destroyed.

Participation and withdrawal: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time.

To Contact the Researcher: If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact: NORMA VIJEILA, (562)xxx-xxxx, norma.vijeila@pepperdine.edu. You may also contact the dissertation chairperson, DR. MATTHEW NORTHROP matthew.northrop@pepperdine.edu

Findings from the study may be presented to professional audiences and or published; however, at no time will information that identifies you will be released.

Agreement:
The nature and purpose of this research have been sufficiently explained and I agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name (print):_____

APPENDIX C

Interview Questions

3. Background information---age, schools attended, family, previous occupations.

4. Could you please describe your current occupation?

5. What experiences contributed to your decision to pursue you to return to school after dropping out?

6. How were you influenced by others?

7. What did people say to you as you were contemplating returning back to school?

8. How would you describe your feelings and beliefs about returning to school?

   - How did returning to school make you feel?
   - What were your beliefs about what you do, or the area for which you were preparing yourself to have a career in?
   - What were your emotional responses as you encountered challenges while finishing high school and while you were in college?

9. Tell me one memorable story that would really help me understand how you attained success after having dropped out of high school.

10. Why do you think individuals that drop out of high school decide to return and pursue higher education?

11. Considering your academic and career history, if you could have done anything differently, what would that be?