

Spring 4-24-2017

## **My Story: A Doctoral Candidate's Journey**

John D'Aguanno

*Concordia University - Portland*, [jdaguanno@cu-portland.edu](mailto:jdaguanno@cu-portland.edu)

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Concordia University–Portland  
College of Education  
Doctorate of Education Program

WE, THE UNDERSIGNED MEMBERS OF THE DISSERTATION COMMITTEE  
CERTIFY THAT WE HAVE READ AND APPROVE THE DISSERTATION OF

John J. D’Aguanno

CANDIDATE FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Jerry McGuire, Ph.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

Dana Sims Barbarick, Ph.D., Content Specialist

Joe Mannion, Ed.D., Content Reader

ACCEPTED BY

Joe Mannion, Ed.D.  
Provost, Concordia University–Portland

Sheryl Reinisch, Ed.D.  
Dean, College of Education, Concordia University–Portland

Jerry McGuire, Ph.D.  
Director of Doctoral Studies, Concordia University–Portland

My Story: A Doctoral Candidate's Journey

John J. D'Aguanno

Concordia University – Portland

College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in

Teacher Leadership

Committee Chair, Jerry McGuire, Ph.D.

Dana Sims Barbarick, Ph.D.

Joe Mannion, Ed.D.

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## **Abstract**

This study seeks to understand my doctoral journey. Meaning for my journey was drawn from the intersection of shared program experiences with 13 other study participants who had either already earned or were in the midst of retaining doctoral degrees of their own. Common thoughts, feelings, and behaviors associated with earning the doctoral degree were discovered during open-ended professional conversations centered on the framework of my research study: self-efficacy, motivation, perseverance or grit, and change or transformation. The shared description of my journey helped me understand my experience in a different more meaningful way. Through my narrative, I hope a better understanding of what it takes to pursue the goal of earning a doctoral degree comes through.

*Keywords:* Self-efficacy, motivation, perseverance or grit, change or transformation, autoethnography

## **Dedication**

This study is dedicated to those who have the courage to believe in themselves.

## **Acknowledgements**

This degree was not earned by my own doing. It took a village. Many people need to be thanked for their support of my goal to earn this degree. The time and effort put forth by my system of support made a positive difference in my doctoral journey. Support was received from my family, fellow candidates who matriculated through the program with me and the group of instructors who taught our courses, and my dissertation committee.

I would like to thank my family, especially my wife, for being a rock throughout my studies. She gave me the time and space needed to get the work done. This accomplishment would not be possible without her and the unwavering support of my family.

Close relationships were developed throughout my journey with other cohort members who shared similar experiences as me and the instructors who taught us. We laughed together. We cried together. We learned together. I wish you all continued success in life. Thank you.

The dissertation committee who supported my study throughout its development was essential to my success. Dana's expertise kept me in check and ensured I made sense to the social science community. Thank you for your knowledge. Joe's devotion to my success was clear in his caring words which helped me to cross the finish line. Thank you for the words of encouragement and your support.

To the person who helped me understand how to turn theory into action, Jerry McGuire, thank you. This was, truly, a once in a lifetime encounter. You helped me realize that I am worth the success that I pursue. You rock!

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

It was raining on the day I left Chicago. On a dreary Friday afternoon, the rain seemed to fall in way that questioned my thoughts, feelings, and actions in favor of doing something different with my life. At this particular point in time, I did not know what different looked like or meant. I only knew that I wanted sustainable change. Sustainable change, to me, meant entering into a profession that would ignite my passion to serve and continually challenge me to be the best that I could be. In searching for something different, I hitched up the trailer to my vehicle and began the trek westward to Portland, Oregon. While others may have embarked on a similar trip before me, this was my journey.

My journey is a story of self-discovery and the belief in my abilities to construct meaning in my life through the establishment and pursuit of a long-term goal which in this instance was a doctoral degree. The belief in my abilities to accomplish this goal was influenced by internal and external motives which drove my thoughts, feelings, and actions toward achievement. Engaging in the deliberate practice of research to support goal achievement changed me personally and professionally by challenging my perspective of the world. As my perspective changed, the way I thought, felt, and behaved toward goal achievement transformed to account for a new understanding of my experiences. Understanding how program experiences changed my perspective increased opportunities for my growth as a learner and practitioner.

### **Conceptual Framework**

As I pieced together the conceptual framework for my journey, I felt it would be helpful if I described its elements through experiences I had transitioning into a new career and life. Much of this understanding was known through experiences I had on the road moving to Portland. Other pieces were known through experiences I had while being enrolled in the

program. Making connections with the attributes of my journey was made through reflective practices which examined how I felt, thought, and behaved throughout an experience.

My long and arduous trip to Portland and my present work toward earning a doctoral degree, are emblematic of my search for meaning in my life: time on the road, in the classroom, and the many stops along the way that have provided experiences which challenged and changed my perspective. The search for meaning began with self-efficacy: the understanding and belief in my abilities to accomplish a goal (Bandura, 1997; Robnett, Chemers, & Zurbriggen, 2015; Zimmerman, 2000). My sense of self-efficacy was influenced by four different types of experiences: previous involvement or practice, feedback, modeling, and emotional engagement. As I interpreted these experiences in my search for meaning, I began judging my confidence, my skillset, and whether my abilities could be successful in different settings. This process of interpreting experiences regulated my thoughts, feelings, and behavior as I moved toward accomplishing a given task or goal. Many memorable self-efficacy experiences were encountered while moving across the country.

Moving to a new part of the country was disconcerting as much as it was exciting. I quickly found this to be true as the trailer began to hop around out of control just 4 hours into the trip driving through Wisconsin. The manner in which the trailer violently jerked from side to side led me to believe something was going seriously wrong. My body temperature quickly rose as the moment became still and solemn. After ever so slowly veering off the next exit along the rolling country farm hills in Fond du Lac, my worry was confirmed. The trailer had a flat tire. I took a deep breath and exhaled as I spied the spare hanging on the front of the trailer. I can do this I thought. The distress began to quickly dissipate and my body temperature cooled, because I had many prior experiences changing flat tires. Confidence began to take hold.

I have been in similar situations at earlier points in my life. Bandura and Adams (1977) reported the benefits that previous experiences have on our attempts to complete tasks, “Performance accomplishments provide the most influential efficacy information because it is based on personal mastery experiences” (p. 288). Because I was well-versed in changing flat tires on cars, I had confidence that I would be able to change the trailer flat. Changing a tire on a trailer was within the same domain of changing a tire on a car, which was necessary for self-belief to apply properly to the situation and the circumstances (Bandura, 1977). Reflecting on the tire-changing event using Bandura’s Self-Efficacy Theory, I know that I had a high level of confidence in my abilities to complete the task successfully because I had experienced similar tasks (van der Bijl & Shortridge-Baggett, 2001). Past successes and failures both informed me to think, feel, and act in a certain way which improved my performance at each attempt: loosening the lug nuts, jacking up the trailer, and switching out the flat tire. These experiences reminded me that I had the skillset to change the tire correctly and safely. After locating the tire-jack, I was able to recall previous experiences to understand what it took to think, feel, and act in a way that encouraged me to change the tire successfully (Bouffard-Bouchard, Parent, & Larivee, 1991). The self-efficacy process that instilled a sense of belief to deal successfully with the circumstances of the roadside emergency work in the same manner as situations dealt with during program matriculation. With plenty of road ahead, my sense of self-belief was bound to be tested yet again.

One of the more memorable stops during my journey included an instance where modeling was used to overcome an obstacle. I had a hitch installed onto my vehicle so that everything I wanted to take to Portland with me could be hauled across the country in that trailer. It was not until I entered the state of Minnesota, when I realized it was much easier to pull a

trailer than backing one up. As I exited the expressway to locate a gas station for fuel, I turned down the wrong road. The road was narrow and offered no room to turn the vehicle around without backing up. Up to this point in time, I had never driven a car in reverse with a trailer attached to a hitch before. After several failed attempts trying to turn the vehicle around and avoiding a few close calls with neighboring cars, I surrendered to frustration. I knew at this point, the only way the vehicle could be safely turned around without damaging the surrounding automobiles was if I sought out help. Fortunately, help was sitting in the passenger seat.

My wife, who was my girlfriend at the time, was traveling with me. Luckily for me, she knew how to back-up a vehicle with a trailer attached. After swallowing a little bit of pride, I asked her to show me how to back up. After watching her back the trailer up, I understood the counter intuitive nature of going in reverse with a trailer hitched to the vehicle. With my girlfriend's help, we finally made it to the gas station. After fueling the car up, I was able to recall the experience of her modeling the procedure for backing up the vehicle so that I could turn it around in the gas station. Witnessing someone successfully complete the task instilled a higher degree of self-belief in my abilities to complete the task (Bandura, 1977). The initial attempt to turn the car around failed in part because I had never attempted a task of this sort. The lack of prior experience left me with little confidence and no belief in my abilities to accomplish the task. However, witnessing my girlfriend complete the task led me to think: if she can do it, then so can I. I experienced similar successes using models when I began developing my dissertation.

I did not know it at the time while moving out west that writing a dissertation proposal would be one of the toughest projects I have ever undertaken. Researching an endless sea of dissertations, scholarly articles, and research studies to develop a conceptual framework for the

literature review and a sound methodology was a daunting task. Rarely have I felt so alone exploring the uncharted waters of vast library research data bases, which housed countless resources. Much like my trip across the United States where I laid the path to my new career, where I went with my study was up to me, alone. The experience was overwhelming, at times leaving me feelings of apprehension, worry, and restlessness. Much of this sentiment came from never having been engaged in a research study of this magnitude before. Unsure of the direction to take my writing and research for my dissertation during the beginning stages, I relied on the work of others to guide me.

My proposal was developed through an understanding of the work and knowledge of others who had published dissertations, scholarly articles, and research studies before me. In this respect, the seminal author's work served as exemplars or models from which I developed my own study. The manner in which I thought about the topics outlining my conceptual framework were "altered in the same direction as that of a reinforced model" (Kazdin, 1973, p. 71). Having the seminal author's theories to develop knowledge of the attributes in the literature review and devise a comprehensive and valid methodology instilled a sense of confidence in what I created. I knew my work was sound because it is supported by the literature. Similar to how I learned to back up a vehicle with a trailer attached, by seeing someone else complete the task first, I was able to complete my dissertation due in part to the models provided by seminal authors.

Eventually the trip across the country led me to the verdant Great Pacific Northwest in Portland, Oregon. Traveling into the unknown, the prospect of making new friends, and establishing myself in a different career was daunting and time consuming. It took time to make connections and build a network from which to operate and be successful. After doing a bit of soul searching and thinking about what I wanted out of my next career in terms of personal

reward and gratification, I made the decision to join the teaching profession. It was through teaching, that I would have the opportunity to contribute to the community by being a change agent. A couple of years would pass until I earned a Masters of Art in Teaching Program at the local university. Receiving my teaching license led me to think about how far I could go in the field of education. Shortly thereafter I picked up a job performing administrative duties for the program from which I graduated. Toward the end of my tenure, I was ask to help build the doctorate program: the same program from which I developed this dissertation. In this new vocation, I found myself able to explore my interests to pursue a program of study that would stretch and challenge me like no other academic experience.

Part of my job with the doctorate program included serving on the Admissions Review Committee (ARC) to review application materials submitted by prospective applicants interested in joining the program. In many instances, the on-campus applicants would come into the office to talk about their interest in the program and ask questions. During these times I found myself thinking, “If this person can earn a doctorate, could I?” Another part of my responsibilities included reviewing and editing courses that would be published for online courses. I often thought of how I would go about completing the assignments for the courses I had a part in editing. My attention was constantly pulled toward knowing whether I could earn a doctorate myself. At this point, I was still not sure about joining the program. I needed reassurance.

Feedback informed my decision to join the program. While discussing the possibility of setting the goal to earn a doctoral degree with my family, I was reassured that I would be successful because of previous accomplishments in earning my Master’s Degree (Bandura, 1991). Even when I doubted my abilities during the decision-making process to join, my wife kept pointing out how I had completed my Master’s while being a stay-at-home dad to our young



children and remodeling the house where we lived. She mentioned how balancing all of these things would be tough for anyone and that she was proud of how I handled it.

Previous knowledge of a task or goal, modeling, and feedback experiences perpetuated an emotional response or feeling which informed my behavior to successfully negotiate the tasks associated with the self-efficacy experiences (Bandura & Adams, 1977). When considering the prospect of setting the goal to earn a doctoral degree, my feelings of doubt, uncertainty, and insecurity, which may have caused me hesitation to apply, were nullified by previous academic successes. I began to think that I could do this. Previous experiences with academic work helped me feel good about applying to the program and realize that I am capable of completing this goal. I found during my journey that self-efficacy experiences inform self-judgement to take into account my abilities to accomplish the tasks associated with the experiences (Pressley & Ghatala, 1990). I judged my abilities to be successful in the program according to the level of confidence I had, the skillset I believed that I had to accomplish the task, and whether my abilities to complete the task could apply to different situations or circumstances. These self-judgements informed the manner in which I thought, felt, and behaved in relation to the goal.

The amount of self-belief that I had in my abilities to earn a doctoral degree informed the amount of motivation used to drive my efforts toward achievement (Bandura, 1991). The greater sense of self-belief that I had in my abilities to graduate, the greater the amount of motivation was exercised to achieve this goal. Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned how my attention had been pulled to knowing whether I could earn a doctorate while conversing with prospective applicants or editing courses for the program. Maslow (1943) would say that I was satisfying the human need to know: “we shall postulate a basic desire to know, to be aware of reality, to get the facts, to satisfy curiosity, or as Wertheimer phrases it, to see rather than to be blind” (p. 12).

Because I believed largely in my abilities to graduate, there was a high level of motivation used to move me toward goal completion. While it was possible that earning a doctorate could help me with employment opportunities, which is an external reward, most of motivation for earning a doctorate were internally driven or intrinsic (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Vallerand, 1997). An example of my intrinsic motives were evident in how I perceived myself as an example to my children. I believed that if they witnessed me work hard to accomplish this goal, then they would know that it takes long hours of practice, grit, and perseverance to see dreams through.

Because of my familiarity working in the Ed.D. Program, I knew engaging in deliberate practice to sharpen my research and writing skills would be a constant during my tenure as a candidate in the program. My 4-year-long engagement in deliberate practice pursuing a doctorate can be described using Angela Duckworth's (2007) term, "Grit" (p. 1087). The sustained effort over time evident in deliberate practice is an example of the persevering actions one endures to secure long term goals. My persevering mentality actuated deliberate practice. I subscribed to what Carol Dweck (2006) called a *growth mindset*, which perceived academic problems or failures along the way of pursuing my goal to graduate as not permanent, but opportunities to learn and improve. Through a persevering mindset and deliberate practice my actions were honed to be the best researcher and writer that I can be.

The perception I have in my abilities is my personal efficacy (Bandura, 1997). My perception of deliberate practice is initiated and managed by cognitive thought (Mezirow, 1991, p. 128), which informs the way in which I think, feel, and behave. Failed practices challenged my perspective through a reflective interpretive process (Mezirow, 1991) to learn from my mistakes (Dweck, 2014) and change my approach toward practice so that performance improved (Bandura, 1986). The way I perceived academic failure and in a larger sense the world was

continually challenged as I encountered program experiences. Self-efficacy processes relied on every efficacious experience associated with the failed practice so that I would reflect, think through, and develop a new approach thus changing the way I thought, felt, and acted toward future attempts at practice (Bandura, 1997). Efficacious experiences with deliberate practice were interpreted to understand how I self-judged my abilities to accomplish practice, challenge and change my perspectives, and transform the manner in which I thought, felt, and behaved toward achieving goals. As the process of thinking, feeling, and doing continually processed my experiences with practice, each attempt at practice was refined to enhance my overall performance. In this respect practice made perfect. Self-efficacy, motivation, grit or perseverance, and change or transformation work in a way that let me know I govern my thoughts, feelings, and behavior toward goal achievement.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There is a lack of knowledge within the educational community which examines, through a candidate's lens, the effect doctorate program experiences have on a candidate's self-efficacy and their ability to move toward goal achievement. This is important because the Council of Graduates Schools (2016) reports only 55.9% of the candidates who begin a doctorate program in social sciences actually finish. Improving one's self-efficacy can help candidates think feel, and act successfully. The advantages of having a high level of self-efficacy was characterized by Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, and Pastorelli (1996) in the following:

The stronger the students' beliefs in their efficacy, the more occupational options they consider possible, the greater the interest they show in them, the better they prepare themselves educationally for different career pursuits, and the greater their persistence and success in their academic coursework. (pp. 1206–1207)

If efficacious experiences were purposely enhanced to make the encounters more meaningful, then candidates may interpret these experiences with the higher degree of self-belief. A higher degree of self-efficacy might then produce a candidate who is actively involved in preparing themselves for success at the tasks or goals they decide to engage.

### **Purpose of Study**

I investigated and analyzed experiences in the doctorate program which have changed my sense of personal efficacy and transformed the way I think, feel, and behave toward goal achievement. My experiences were validated by the experiences of other candidates who are matriculating in the program as well as the instructors who have taught the courses. In doing so, these three sources described in depth the culture of the doctoral candidate through an understanding of the values, beliefs, and practices which guided this group.

### **Research Questions**

From my experiences moving to Portland and the encounters I have had in the doctorate program, I understood that self-efficacy, motivation, grit or perseverance, and change or transformation worked collectively to explain the human idea of individuals being in control of creating their own destiny. Because self-efficacy is the cornerstone theory guiding an understanding of my journey, I needed to know if experiences in the program changed the way I perceived my self-belief. This raised the main research question: How have experiences in the doctorate program changed my sense of self-efficacy? Motivation was a clear sub-topic with strong connection to self-efficacy. Defining my motives for earning a doctoral degree helped me understand the sub-question: Why do I want a doctoral degree?

Thoughts, feelings, and behavior changed as a result of the experiences I encountered (Bandura, 1986). I needed to understand how these changes occurred due to an experience with practice. This raised the following sub-questions:

1. How does deliberate practice make you think?
2. How does deliberate practice make you feel?
3. How has deliberate practice affected your behavior?

Practice was important because it was an example of perseverance as well as being the most influential self-efficacy experience. With regard to how modeling was interpreted, I asked the following sub-questions:

1. How does using a model make you think?
2. How does using a model make you feel?
3. How does using a model inform your behavior?

When addressing self-efficacy questions pertaining to critical feedback experiences, the following sub-questions needed to be answered:

1. How does feedback change the way you think?
2. How does feedback change the way you feel?
3. How does feedback change our behavior?

Understanding my experiences with self-efficacy helped me identify what the experiences were like, but they did not explain how these aspects have changed from one point in time from another. Understanding if a change took place takes a bit more maneuvering to discover.

Because I was interested in knowing if experiences in the doctorate program facilitated change in the way I thought, felt, and behaved, I needed to know what my experiences with the attributes of self-efficacy, grit or perseverance, motivation, and change or transformation were like before I entered the program. Subsequently, I answered questions pertaining to what my experiences with the attributes were like during my time in the program. The differences

between these two points in time might then describe what changes came from the experience in the doctorate program.

### **Definition of Terms**

Various terms which speak to conceptual or operational aspects of my study needed to be defined so that the information presented is clearly received by others who may read it. *Self-efficacy experience* is a general term used to help describe one of the four specific types of efficacious experience: previous involvement or practice, modeling or the use of exemplars, critical and substantive feedback, and emotions encountered during and experience. These types of experiences informed my self-belief through cognitive processes. As self-efficacy experiences were processed, I made *self-judgements* about my abilities to accomplish a given task. This is how self-efficacy is operationalized. I judged myself by the level of confidence or *self-efficacy strength* I have in my abilities, the skillset that I believe I possessed to accomplish a task or the *self-efficacy magnitude*, and the *self-efficacy generality* or the understanding I have in my abilities to apply the experience across different situations. *Self-regulation* is the term used to define the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors influenced by experiences and enacted through self-efficacy thought processes.

*Grit* is a term used to define the efforts one engages to pursue long term goals (Duckworth et al., 2007). Grit or perseverance supports self-efficacy (Usher, 2016). An example of the actions one undertakes to become better illustrates perseverance or grit is termed, *deliberate practice*. Dweck (2006) identifies the persevering mentality that sustains effort toward achieving goals as a *growth mindset*. Motivations which ignite the deliberate practice and a growth mindset to work toward a goal, are termed *intrinsic* or inward driven, and *extrinsic* or externally driven (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Vallerand, 1997). A *hierarchy of human needs* is the order of needs humans are constantly working to achieve or solve was termed and order by

Maslow (1943) from the important to less important: physiological state, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization. *Transformation* is a term that refers to the change in thoughts, feelings, and actions occurring as a result of challenged and changed perceptions (Mezirow, 1991). The terms defined here are in many ways delimiters to the framework of my story. They defined a narrow contextual understanding of the attributes in this study.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

The limiting, and delimiting factors that affected what I wanted to know about the efficacious experiences I had over the last two and a half years matriculating in the doctorate program were fundamental to my study. The boundaries that I placed on my search for meaning were delimiting factors. Placing boundaries on what I wanted to investigate narrowed the field research needed to help answer the research questions peppered throughout my study.

Limitations are flaws within the study that were out of my control. No matter the amount of preparedness put in place to conduct research, unforeseen problems surfaced. While I do not anticipate such issues as being too much of a threat, thinking through both the good and bad of what can happen raised a level of awareness which promoted the study to be conducted in a sound and transparent manner.

I purposely put in place boundaries to guide my study in a way that isolated my experiences. To aid in this effort, I purposely selected a group of participants to help analyze my experiences. I chose other cohort members and course instructors because their experiences came closest to matching my own encounters (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010). My experiences were best confirmed through the chosen study participants because the similarities shared between our experiences helped me construct meaning in my own story. This delimitation was essential to understand my experiences in depth as well as the accounts of others who have been with me on this journey.

Self-efficacy is a theory that is applicable to all aspects of one's life including professional and personal environments. Based on this theory, I believed changes in my efficacy would be apparent from personal or family perspectives, especially from my wife's view point. However, she was not able to speak to changes evident in my professional or academic performances that were due to self-efficacy experiences. Because my wife could not provide information in these areas, I did recruit her as a participant. While I placed delimitations on my study to define its scope, it also included limitations that were outside of my control which could have negatively impacted my study.

My relationships with the participants may have been a limitation. I could not analyze my experiences in the doctorate program by solely relying on a compilation of reflections from courses taken in the program. To investigate my experiences scientifically, I needed to look at the narrative through multiple lenses. This required seeing my story through other person's eyes. In my study, this meant looking at my doctoral experiences through people who were familiar with my journey, which included: cohort members and course instructors. Having built close relationships with the participants due to my proximity as an academic advisor, I anticipated that this would influence my study. Asking the two groups of people to help me analyze my experiences by characterizing my growth and performance as a candidate may have opened the door for untruthful responses. The participants may have been reluctant to say something that they thought might be hurtful to my feelings, given that I am in close and regular contact with them. I saw these groups of people on a weekly basis. The only way that I knew how to curb untruthful responses in this manner from happening was to remind the participants to speak freely, openly, and honestly. I also explained how more truth better describes the culture of the doctoral candidate. This was essential since my experience helps others know the plight of



candidates who are pursuing a doctoral degree. The sample population chosen for my study and the potential for their untruthful responses were closely triangulated to check for inaccuracies.

It could be the case that participants were hesitant with being frank during interviews or may not have accurately recalled experiences in terms of how they originally thought, felt, or behaved. Understanding and differentiating between what was said during an interview and what actually happened to a participant was out of my control. I could only interpret and analyze the information given to me during the interactive interviews. It was impossible for me to know definitively how a study participant thought, felt, or behaved as a result of an efficacious experience.

In the end, I had to trust the participants were recalling information as accurately as they could have. As the researcher, I was able to help prevent inaccuracies by letting the participants know to take their time responding to questions during the conversation. The reflexive notes taken during data collection, which explained my experience alongside the data, helped me know if the necessary points of the interview had been covered. Additional, tracking mechanisms were put in place to ensure the attributes were covered sufficiently. This was the place where I worked through any questions I had regarding potential inaccuracies presented by the study participants.

## **Summary**

After reflecting on my experiences moving to Portland and matriculating through the doctorate program, I was aware of the fact that I was actively engaged in charting my future. Experiences encountered along the way toward achieving the goal of earning a doctoral degree had significant meaning because they affected the way I thought, felt, and behaved. The changes in my approach were constantly reacting to these experiences in a way that managed both external and internal motives which drove me to succeed. Changes in my movement toward goal

completion were guided by this cognitive process which informed behavior. As I continued the journey to discover at depth what self-efficacy, motivation, grit or perseverance, and change or transformation were and how these theories applied to my experiences in finding meaning, I needed to build a historical reference describing the nature of these attributes to know exactly how each theory related to one another. This task to build knowledge continued in the literature review.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

The following literature helped me understand how experiences in the doctorate program have transformed my sense of personal efficacy. The conceptual framework was the theoretical basis of how my thoughts, feelings, and actions were affected by experiences with practice during program matriculation. The review of research literature and methodological literature embedded in my experience looked at the relationship between self-efficacy, motivation, and grit or perseverance and how three of these variables were typically measured within the field of psychology. By synthesizing the research findings and applying its knowledge to my study, I developed a methodology design to understand how experiences in the doctorate program have transformed or changed my sense of personal efficacy.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The idea behind my story came from the belief in myself and my abilities to work toward and succeed in relationships with family, friends, and in my profession. The journey that I took to get where I want to be in respect to these goals was a continual process of thinking, feeling, and behaving in a manner conducive to goal achievement. Self-efficacy beliefs drove this process. Self-efficacy theory informed to what degree I was motivated to accomplish personal and professional goals.

The focal point of my research was to understand the experience of how self-efficacy beliefs changed my behavior in respect to developing a sense of perseverance through practice and ultimately accomplishing goals. To me, this raises the research question: how have experiences in the doctorate program transformed my sense of self-efficacy? The research conducted toward understanding how self-efficacy beliefs developed and affected behavior, through the combination of personal, environmental, and behavioral influences, led me to

research theories in social learning, motivation, grit or perseverance, and transformation or change. I came to realize these theories related in a way that helps explain the human experience of desiring something better and seeking it out: being a good person, wanting to do good work, and having connectedness to the community.

Social cognitive theory is the guiding theoretical basis that allowed me to understand the main research question and inform the analysis of my experiences in the doctorate program. Albert Bandura (1986) is the seminal researcher responsible for coining the term and developing the theory, as it is understood in psychology today. Social cognitive theory acknowledges personal thought, environmental influences, and behavioral outcomes as having a shared reciprocal relationship with one another during the learning process (Bandura, 1989, p. 2). Bandura's theory was born out of social learning where theorists such as Neal Miller and John Dollard (1941), Abraham Maslow (1943), and Erik Erikson (1980) all provided contributions to the understanding that learning initiates within one's consciousness and has emotions, feelings, and drive attached to the decision making and behaviors associated with it. Even theorists as far back as William James (2009), who in 1890 wrote the book titled *The Principles of Psychology*, said, "All people unhesitatingly believe that they feel themselves thinking and that they distinguish the mental state as an inward activity or passion, from all the objects with which it may cognitively deal" (p. 116). While James's book acknowledged the existence of a consciousness, he never fleshed out other concepts, such as self-belief, feeling, and predictive behaviors, which could have derived from this understanding. Unanswered questions surrounding the human consciousness during James's time continued to be a problem, which caused unrest for many in the social sciences.

During this time of unrest, the psychology researcher's inability to quantify consciousness and reveal processes to help explain cognitive learning and predictions in human behavior opened the door for theories in *behaviorism*. John Watson's (2009) original 1924 publication of *Behaviorism* clearly acknowledged the frustration in the field of psychology over the ambiguity surrounding conscious thought as evident in the following:

From the time of Wundt on, consciousness becomes the keynote of psychology. It is the keynote of all the psychologies today except behaviorism. It is a plain assumption just as unprovable, just as unapproachable as the old concept of the soul. And to the behaviorist the two terms are essentially identical, so far as concerns their metaphysical implications.  
(p. 5)

The behaviorist's denial of interior subjectivity involved in understanding the conscious mind left fewer variables to control and quantify when studying behavior (Watson, 2009). With no consciousness to study, behaviorist analyzed outward influences affecting behavior, namely the surrounding environment and the consequences of one's actions. Such studies were performed on animals, which worked well because the conscious state would not be an issue. It was believed animals did not think. However, the conscious state continued to be an unsolved problem for others in the field of psychology.

Behaviorism alone was insufficient grounding to understand how thoughts, feelings, and motives affected my pursuit of goals. Dollard and Miller (1941) attempted to bridge behaviorist theory to that of the social learning theory when publishing *Social Learning and Imitation*. Dollard and Miller (1941) characterized learning by saying, "in order to learn one must want something, notice something, do something, and get something" (p. 2). In Dollard and Miller's study, an internal thought process begins to take shape starting with an individual's want or

motivation, which eventually leads to an action or behavior being taken toward satisfying that given person's need. Observing and imitating others who serve as role models to demonstrate a specific behavior or task was the model used to turn their theory into action. Dollard and Miller's methodology relied on single participants, which left out analysis of the group dynamics.

Learning through observing and imitating the behavior of others through vicarious role modeling was expanded in Bandura and Walter's (1963) publication of *Social Learning and Personality Development*. Bandura pointed out the need to study learning from a social context: "The weakness of learning approaches that discount the influence of social variables are nowhere more clearly revealed than in their treatment of the acquisition of novel responses, a crucial issue for any adequate theory of learning" (Bandura & Walters, 1963, p.2). Bandura and Walters analyzed the negative implications associated with removing troubled children from a group environment to an isolated area in an attempt to discourage undesired behaviors. The studies of Dollard and Miller (1941), and Bandura and Walters (1963) enriched my understanding of learning in relation to thinking, feeling, and acting as dependent upon experiences shared with people who were in the study I conducted which included instructors and other on-campus candidates.

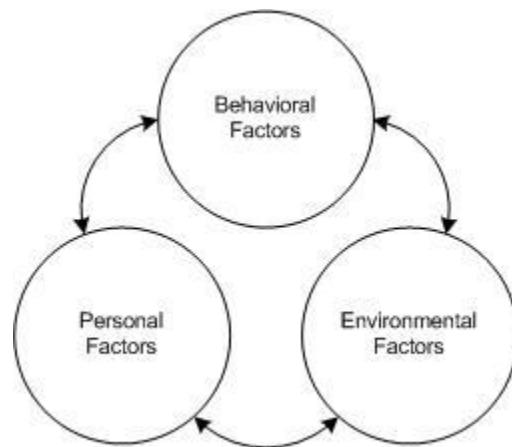
Theories in self-efficacy serve as the main cognitive or personal factor associated with social cognitive theory. Knowing that experiences with cohort members and instructors affected my sense of self-belief allowed my research to turn toward understanding the internal cognitive thought processes and influential factors which guide my behavior toward goal achievement. Bandura's (1977) publication of *Self-efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change* continued to help me develop an understanding of human consciousness by describing the

influences behind self-beliefs. Previous experiences with tasks, verbal persuasions often received while given constructive feedback, vicarious experiences such as role modeling, and feeling associated with the task, inform a sense of self-belief (Bandura, 1977). My encounters with the four types of experiences associated with Bandura's theory, gave me an idea of whether or not a goal was achievable. Bandura (1977) concluded, "experiences based on performances produced higher, more generalized, and stronger efficacy expectations" (p. 205). To me experiences based on performance included practice. Success in completing a goal was determined by the degree of self-belief I had in my abilities to perform in accordance to the experiences.

Any one, or any combination of the four sources of information are consciously judged to determine the perceived achievability of a goal across three different measurements: magnitude, strength, and generality (Van der Bijl & Shortridge-Baggett, 2002). Self-efficacy magnitude refers to the level of difficulty that I felt a task presented toward a goal. The level of confidence determines the strength of self-belief that I had toward accomplishing a goal. Self-efficacy generality expands self-belief to other areas associated with a task. Collectively, these three areas of measurement allowed me to judge the feasibility of completing a series of tasks to complete the overarching goal. Theories in self-efficacy gave me the knowledge of how my sense of belief about accomplishing a goal was informed and judged. Bandura continued to develop theories in self-efficacy through the years, which eventually served as the main cognitive or personal factor associated with social cognitive theory.

Bandura (1986) pointed out in his publication, *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory* that self-efficacy operates within social cognitive theory. The framework, which explains the reciprocal relationship that personal, behavioral, and

environmental factors play in affecting human behavior was explained by Bandura in this study. Bandura (1986) called this triadic reciprocal determinism as seen in the illustration below:



*Figure 1.* Bandura's triadic reciprocal determinism. Relationship between behavior, environmental, and personal factors.

Theories of self-efficacy function within the personal or cognitive factor. Bandura (1989a) believes: "Expectations, beliefs, self-perspectives, goals, and intentions give shape and direction to behavior" (p. 3). Experiences with the results of performed behavior informed my sense of self-efficacy when similar scenarios recalled past experiences, hence the reciprocal nature between personal and behavioral factors. As my physical traits were interpreted in social settings, the feedback or information received about such experiences changed my sense of self-belief. This is the reciprocal nature between personal and environmental factors. Bandura (1989a) characterized the reciprocal relationship between environmental and behavioral factors by saying, "Through their actions, people create as well as select environments" (p. 4). These three factors regulate and work with one another to determine the amount of motivation and subsequent behavior employed toward goal achievement.

In social cognitive theory, the three factors of personal, environmental, and behavioral, according to Bandura (1989a), "function as contributors of their own motivation, behavior, and development within a network of reciprocally interacting influences" (p. 8). Motivation comes



from either internal stimulus such as thought or external stimuli as seen with environmental influences including the consequences associated with one's actions.

Behaviorists such as B.F. Skinner (2011) saw the value only in external influences: "Our increasing knowledge of the control exerted from the environment makes it possible to examine the effects of the world within the skin and the nature of self-knowledge" (p.19). In this study, I expanded my knowledge of motivation and its affect by acknowledging external influences as well as the internal influences by researching Maslow (1943), who developed a hierarchal order of human needs in his publication of *A Theory of Human Motivation*. My motivation was explained from the perspective of understanding the goals associated with a given human need (Maslow, 1943). Maslow's (1943) work helped me understand where my needs ranked in necessity and the degree to which I exerted thought, feelings, and action in efforts to achieve them. Current research defined the actual type of motivation I engaged in respect to goal accomplishment.

Recent developments in human motivation from Robert Vallerand (1997) and Deci & Ryan (2000) lend an understanding of how the intrinsic and extrinsic motives informed my behavior. Robert Vallerand (1997) developed a hierarchical model of extrinsic and intrinsic motivations in his publication of *Toward a Hierarchical Model of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation* and describes the social factors which affect them. From Vallerand's work, I know social factors affected my motivation and that their outcomes support thoughts, feelings, and behaviors much like Bandura (1986) characterized motivation in his theory of social cognitive theory. Deci and Ryan's (2000) publication of *Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations: Classic Definitions and New Directions* defined the functional differences between the two forms of motivation (p. 55). Understanding motivation as a part of learning and that it ignites from both

internal and external stimuli, I deduced learning is just as much an inward process as it is outward.

With the understanding in place of how self-efficacy beliefs determine the amount of motivation one employs to accomplish a goal, my literature search turned toward understanding how to increase a greater sense of self-belief. Bandura (1977) showed previous experiences with a performance task or goal was the greatest influence informing one's sense of self-efficacy. Previous experience with a performance task is *practice*, which is described in my study through the writing process: writing, editing, and revising academic work. Self-beliefs can change, improve, or increase through practice. My experiences with these assignments was not only skill development but practice toward the over-arching goal of developing the dissertation.

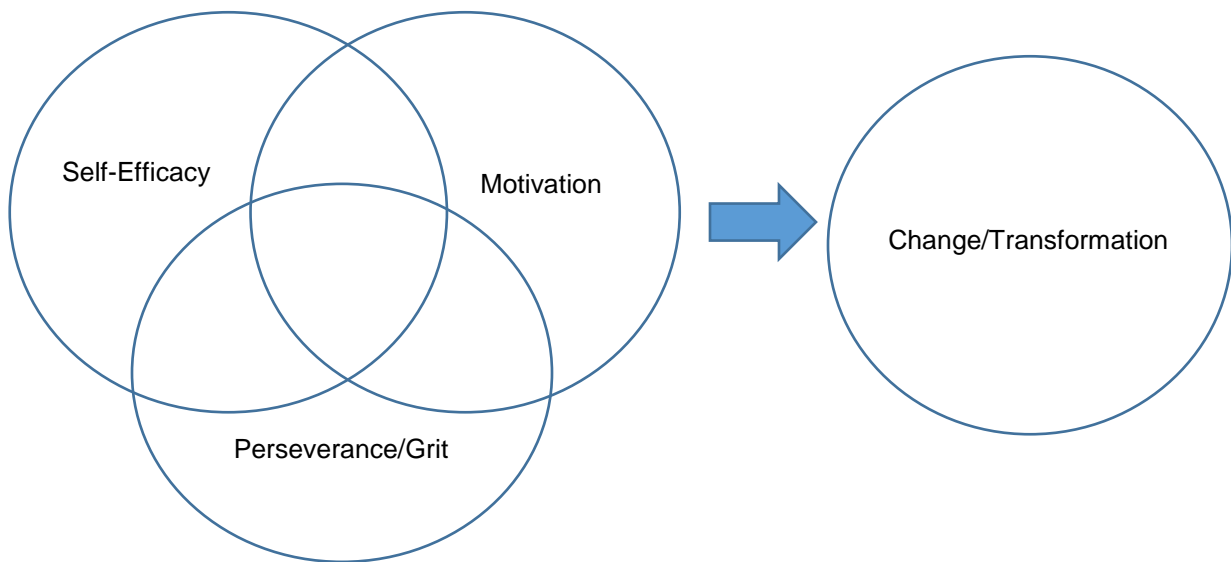
The work published by Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly (2007), *Grit: Perseverance and Passion for Long-Term Goals*, explains how grit or perseverance play a part in attaining long-term goals. Practicing is perseverance in action (Duckworth et al., 2007). Carol Dweck's (2006) publication of *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* takes perseverance to another level by acknowledging failures not as the end of something, but as a learning opportunity to continue growth and build perseverance. From the work of Duckworth et al. (2007) and Dweck (2006), I understand opportunities to practice, even if they result in a temporary failure, lent me the chance to build a sense of perseverance. Building self-efficacy through practice allowed me the opportunity to build confidence in my studies.

The ability and desire to change, to be better, and do more than what I think others expect of me is something that drove my ambition to succeed in the doctorate program. Fullan (2011) asserts in *Change Leader: Learning to Do What Matters Most* that it takes confidence to change. I understand, through the work of Jack Mezirow (1991) and Howard Becker (1964), that change

is a perspective contemplated and interpreted by the individual. As assumptions are tested for their current worth during critical self-reflections, individuals think through whether their preconceived notions still apply when given new information about an experience (Mezirow, 1991).

Through the literature search, I understood that change was elusive and hard to pinpoint from a personal perspective. It took a close awareness of my surroundings and knowledge of the reflective process when developing a perspective of a situation or experience to know whether change took place. Additionally, a strong commitment to the reflective process was necessary to understand if my perspectives changed. Getting a solid feel of how these processes operated helped me know if changes occurred in my thoughts, feelings, and practices.

As I looked at the major themes of self-efficacy, motivation, grit or perseverance, and change or transformation, my understanding of the literature indicated self-efficacy beliefs determine the motivation and behaviors used to pursue a goal. Practicing for perseverance, as seen in completing academic work toward the over-arching goal of program completion, built personal efficacy, which in turn increased my motivation to succeed in my relationships and in my profession. The connection between the major components in my conceptual framework are described in Figure 2.



*Figure 2.* Conceptual framework. My framework operates within Bandura’s triadic reciprocal determinism. Grit and perseverance seen through practice and a growth mindset supports positive changes in self-efficacy which in turn moderates motivation to achieve goals. The conceptual framework illustrates how my story is structured.

### **Self-Efficacy**

Self-efficacy is the belief one has in his or her ability to accomplish a task, a goal, or even a series of tasks that lead toward an overarching goal (Bandura, 1997). This understanding of self is influenced by four major self-efficacy information sources:

- previous experiences with a task or practice,
- constructive feedback,
- modeling or the use of exemplars, and
- the emotions felt during an experience.

All four of these self-efficacy information sources are socially driven and contribute to the motivation exerted to accomplish the task at hand. Bandura (1989a) explained how self-judgement is formed as self-efficacy information sources are interpreted, “Judgements of self-efficacy, whether accurate or faulty, are based on the four principal sources of information” (p.

60). Once self-judgement is rendered, thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and motivations are regulated to accomplish the task. My sense of self-belief helped direct thought into action with the confidence needed to achieve goals. Through my first two years of doctorate work, I have lived the experience of turning thought into action with each assignment researched, written, and presented. These experiences continually challenged me to be better as time continued in the program.

**Previous practice.** Previous practice with a task helped me recall experiences from past courses to help me realize that I was capable of successfully completing a program milestone (Van der Bijl, Shortridge-Baggett, & Lillie, 2001). Many doctorate programs have in place comprehensive exams to review the candidate's first year of studies. Practice with research and writing to develop a skillset and synthesizing content knowledge as a capstone of the first year of doctorate studies in the form of a comprehensive exam embodies the idea of practice that I experienced after my first year of doctorate work. The assignment called for me to make connections with self, profession, and community through my understanding of the literature studied throughout my first year of studies. In this respect, the seven classes taken during the first year were practice for developing the comprehensive exam, which offered an opportunity to explain how the content learned influenced me as a person and a professional.

I felt anxiety, stress, and a general feeling of uneasiness in completing this assignment. There was pressure to do well because continuing through the program depended on whether I passed the exam. If I did not pass the assignment, then I would not be able to continue the work that I had been pouring my heart and soul into over the previous year. In my mind, plenty was at stake. Previous experiences in the courses leading up to the development of the comprehensive exam gave me the background knowledge needed to make the necessary connections and

successfully complete the academic task. I felt empowered. The experience developing the comprehensive exam inspired confidence and helped me realize my potential. Farrington (2013) believed, “self-efficacy and the belief in one’s likelihood of success are generally more predictive of academic performance” (p. 5). The self-belief built up over previous experiences in the courses associated with the comprehensive exam enabled me to perform at a high level and as a result pass my first year of studies.

It took hard work and dedication to complete my first year of doctorate work successfully. While I did well completing the work and receiving above average grades, not every instance was successful. Bandura (1977) characterizes both good and bad experiences with tasks by saying, “Successes raise mastery expectations; repeated failures lower them, particularly if the mishaps occur early in the course of events” (p. 195). Constructive feedback helps turn those failing moments into moments of opportunity. Without constructive feedback pointing out the strengths and weaknesses of a piece of academic work, I would not know how to improve and be better. Such support was crucial to my success.

**Constructive feedback** was experienced in the first course taken. Bandura (1977) described the influential nature of feedback by saying, “People are led, through suggestion, into believing they can cope successfully with what overwhelmed them in the past” (p. 198). The editing process performed during class to identify errors and offer feedback was constructive, enabling me to revise work and resubmit a better piece of writing. I felt anxious and had a feeling of anticipation as I began my doctoral experience. Because I am in an administrative position to the Ed.D. Program, I saw myself as a representative of the very program I was in and felt it was important to for me to make a good impression on my classmates and the instructor, who was the author of the course. I was nervous.

The first assignment in the ethics course asked me to develop a professional ethics statement. The idea of turning in my first doctorate level assignment was met with great anticipation; after all, an accomplishment of this nature was never made by anyone in my family. I was going to be the first. Therefore, I spent many hours trying to cram every big word I knew into my paper. I was brimming with confidence until I received my grade. I must admit that I was shocked to see the B+ after putting forth all that time and effort. As a result, I was not feeling good about my skills as a writer or the prospect of earning a doctorate.

A corner was turned, however, when the instructor's suggestions for revision proved to be constructive and guiding in a manner that alleviated my insecurities about moving forward. Previous experiences with editing before entering the doctorate program dealt with APA deficiencies, and did not go into depth concerning content development or writing skills such as synthesis. The advice that I received acknowledged opportunities to develop the content in areas that I had not seen the first time around. In addition to the well thought out response, the instructor set aside time to talk to me specifically about this assignment. From this experience, I learned that the instructor knew what he was talking about and I could trust him. The instructor's detailed comments inspired me to continue, do better, and turn in a more polished piece of work. Bandura (1977) characterized the benefits associated with feedback by saying, "people who are socially persuaded that they possess the capabilities to master difficult situations and are provided with visual aids for effective action are likely to mobilize greater effort than those who receive only the performance aids" (p. 198). I became a better thinker, writer, and researcher because of the feedback that I received in the course.

**Modeling** and exemplars were used extensively in the residency component of my program, which was taken alongside every core course taken during my first year of studies.

Modeling and the use of exemplars supports the idea that one can feel better about his or her chance in succeeding at a task if he or she sees someone else successfully completing the task first (Bandura & Barab, 1973). I believe the use of writing style exemplars was instrumental in developing my sense of personal efficacy. Throughout the course, candidates were given exemplars of writing from other authors who exhibited high levels of writing. Bandura (1997) viewed this type of modeling as a representation, which informs a certain comfort level to someone observing others who are confronted with a task. If this author could do it, then I could do it. Modeling and exemplars helped me understand the complex nature of the doctoral level writing assignment requirements as well.

Exemplars served as a visual understanding of the evaluative criteria that is expected of a given assignment. Bandura (1977) explained how an exemplar must be clear in describing the expected outcome by saying, “Modeled behavior with clear outcomes conveys more efficacy information than if the effects of the modeled actions remain ambiguous” (p. 197). This means the exemplar for the assignment must be carefully chosen to illustrate what is being exactly evaluated. From my perspective as a candidate, I needed to meticulously read the exemplars, understand what the authors did well, and use this knowledge to create my own piece of quality writing, that is, produce a similar expected outcome. Exemplars of synthesis were also used to illustrate how attributes between several studies were organized together into one coherent piece of writing. When synthesis is not properly applied, the writing reads like article summaries.

Instead of writing article summaries, I knew from the exemplars to write according to the common attributes presented by each article. This allows me to use my voice to explain the attributes, while the authors serve as references for claims and supporting evidence for the thesis. Adhering to this method of synthesis allowed me to explain the literature cohesively and



coherently rather than in a disjointed list. The exemplar provided by the instructor gave me the confidence to produce something that was clear, original, and informative. Kazdin (1973) explains the purpose of using models by saying, “Through vicarious effects it is hoped that the behavior of the observer will change in the same manner as that of the model” (p. 71). The interpretation of the exemplar strengthened my knowledge of synthesis and as a result helped me utilize new knowledge and learn a new behavior in analyzing and producing something from visual aids. Previous experiences with a task, feedback, and the use of exemplars conjured emotions, which affect my beliefs moving through the doctorate program.

**Emotions.** Emotions were felt during my experience in the Qualitative Research Methods course, which affected my behavior. I experienced a variety of emotions in the class that resulted in me becoming a more confident, resolute, and effective scholar and researcher. It took time to develop a feeling of confidence. I was exposed to an unfamiliar kind of learning experience in the course. Candidates were responsible for teaching each other various qualitative designs in small groups called small research communities (SRC). In this sense, candidates were learning about research by teaching it. Not only was I responsible for my own learning I was responsible for the learning of others as well. I felt the weight of the world on my shoulders. Initially, the prospect of being responsible for teaching the content to other candidates in the course left me feeling unsure, inadequate, and hesitant. Emotions felt during the completion of a task generated feelings that were associated with the experience (Bandura and Adams, 1977). Whether it was a good experience that made me feel positive about my ability to teach the content or a bad experience that made me feel dejected, affective factors develop a feeling about a task and my ability to succeed. Previous learning experiences were different from what I experienced in qualitative methods course.

In previous undergraduate and graduate experiences, I would repeat what a given instructor taught through presentations or written assignments. From my perspective, much of the responsibility to make sure other students learned seemed to fall on the instructor. However, in the qualitative research methods course, I felt that the onus was on me. These feelings were much different from the ones traditionally experienced. While I felt insecure to teach the researched content to other candidates, I knew that others in the SRC depended on me to learn. These feelings of inadequacy motivated me to spend more time checking my resources, notes, and outline that I used to facilitate instruction to the other SRC members. Dweck and Leggett (1988) explained the connection between my insecurities and how they provoked me into trying harder by suggesting, “the occurrence of failure simply signals that the task will require more effort and ingenuity for mastery” (p. 261). I found that the more time that I put into preparing my instruction for the other SRC members, the better I felt about facilitating the content to them. Teaching the content also, helped me better understand it. As a result, I felt that I effectively taught the content to other SRC members.

The initial feelings of inadequacy, uncertainty, and insecurity eventually turned into confidence, poise, and self-reliance. I believe the fear of failure propelled me to dig in, try harder, and succeed (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Weiner (1985) pointed out how my feelings likely affect behaviors toward goal achievement, “It seems reasonable to pursue the idea that causal ascriptions influence emotions, and that emotional reactions play a role in motivated behavior” (p. 559). There were certainly feelings of self-doubt when I began the course, but these feelings did not stop me. Previous experiences, constructive feedback, modeling techniques, and emotions helped me develop the necessary research and writing skills to move forward to place where I felt confident and capable to teach and succeed.

Bandura (1986) defines self-efficacy in the following:

People's judgements of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances. It is concerned not with the skills one has but with the judgements of what one can do with whatever skills one possesses. (p. 391)

Understanding the sources of information, practice, feedback, modeling, and emotions, which inform thinking, feeling, and behavior in a way that moves me toward goal completion, is integral to my study and educators interested in getting the best performance out of their students. Applications of self-efficacy are an essential part to developing a well-rounded curriculum for students. The development of cognitive skills in thinking, affective growth in feeling, and progress of psychomotor abilities in actions is widely accepted within the field of education.

Current practices call for K-12 teachers to identify and develop cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skills by establishing performance indicators, which are facilitated to develop these areas of student learning. By developing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skills, teachers are in fact fostering self-belief. Bandura et al. (1996) speaks to the sustainability and power of self-belief by saying, "Students' firm belief in their efficacy to manage their own motivation and learning activities provides the staying power and enhances performance accomplishments" (p. 1220). Educators affect a student's efficacy through the avenues of feedback, modeling, and facilitating an experience. The experience gained in these areas set precedents of previous knowledge with tasks and feelings attached to an experience and if taken in a positive light, can illustrate to students a path to success. If educators can help perpetuate a positive experience from self-efficacy information sources, then students will react to those experiences inspired to

continue toward goal achievement in the same way it did for me. As previous experiences, feedback, modeling, and emotions are internally processed, judgements are made regarding the task's magnitude, strength, and generality across different situations or other tasks.

**Self-judgements** regarding my abilities to complete a goal were determined while interpreting self-efficacy information sources to gauge motivation and action (Zimmerman, 2000). Knowledge of self-judgement was essential to realize my potential. Bandura (1989a) acknowledged the interpretation of self-efficacy information sources, "In the self-appraisal of efficacy these different sources of efficacy information must be processed and weighed through self-referent thought" (p. 60). This happens through self-judgement. Each task or goal was judged to determine the level of difficulty that I associated with a task or goal, the amount of self-confidence I had to complete the task, and the different areas or situations in which my self-belief could serve (Bijl & Shortridge-Baggett, 2001). Respectively, these are scales of magnitude, strength, and generality. It is in these three areas that I commonly found self-belief operationalized within the field of psychology. Self-judgements determined the scope and level of confidence needed to surmount a task by regulating my thoughts, feelings, and behaviors used while achieving a goal (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001).

If I perceive that I do not have the knowledge or ability to enact the type of behavior needed to successfully complete a task, then I felt the magnitude of the task was too great for me to overcome. The skillset needed to successfully complete a task in part determines task or goal achievability. In this respect, magnitude refers to the level of complexity associated with a task or a goal. Self-efficacy strength is characterized by the confidence one has in their ability to accomplish a task (Lee & Bobko, 1994). When thinking about engaging a task or establishing a goal, my mind generated a preconceived notion of how well I would perform and whether I

could accomplish the goal. These preconceptions reflected my self-confidence and an understanding of my abilities to address the task or goal. Understanding whether the strength or the magnitude of one's self-belief could transfer over to different situation was important to determine its efficacious generality.

The more experiences one has with a task, the more confident one will be in his or her ability to succeed in other areas associated with that task. As I reflected on my experience developing the comprehensive exam, my efficacious experiences with my first year of studies lent to the perceived self-belief of successfully completing my comprehensive exam. While I did not complete an exam of this nature in every core course, parts of the experiences associated with this task were prevalent in those courses. For example, synthesis was experienced in accordance to each course's content, whereas the comprehensive exam looked to synthesize the experience across courses. While there may be differences in content between each individual core course and the comprehensive exam, the belief in my skills to illustrate synthesis in a piece of academic writing spanned those differences in content. This is self-efficacy generality: the understanding and belief to achieve a task across different experiences or situations. O'Sullivan and Strauser (2009) explained how the self-belief in my synthesis abilities covered varying contexts, "Generality is the extent to which expectations will generalize and affect performance in a variety of tasks and environments" (p. 252). Self-efficacy is measured through self-judgement.

The relationship between self-efficacy information sources, self-judgment, and performance was explained in a correlational study presented by Bandura in 1977. Bandura used self-efficacy information sources as strategies to aid his study participants in overcoming their fear of snakes when engaging in snake-associated tasks. Participants rated their self-judgement

in terms of strength, level, and generality to complete tasks associated with the snakes before and after the previous experiences with a snake related task, modeling, feedback, emotion-based treatments. Regulated behaviors, seen in the percentage of task completed during the snake sessions, were measured positively in congruence with self-judgements after treatments to determine the correlation between self-belief and performance (Bandura, 1977). The results of Bandura's study as Pajares (2003) points out, explains how, "individuals are viewed as proactive and self-regulating rather than as reactive and controlled by biological or environmental forces" (p. 139). The three pieces of self-efficacy information sources, self-judgement, and self-regulation explain how my thoughts, feelings, and actions, while considering the environment, were purposely driven toward goal accomplishment.

Bandura (1977) pointed out the order from most to least influential self-efficacy information sources, "Consistent with the social learning analysis of the sources of self-efficacy, experiences based on performance accomplishments produced higher, more generalized, and stronger efficacy expectations than did vicarious experience, which in turn exceeded those in the control condition" (p. 205). The treatments helped Bandura's participants believe in their ability to perform snake related tasks at a higher level. My self-judgement to complete the comprehensive exam built over time with each experience in the core classes thus increasing my capacity to manage progressively complex assignments. A continuum of successful experiences during my tenure in the program built confidence and raised self-belief to handle the workload of developing a dissertation. Bandura and Adams (1997) explained how a rise in self-belief increased my capacity to address a problem by saying, "The stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the more active the coping efforts" (p. 288). The more that I believed that I can accomplish a goal, the greater the efforts are put forth to accomplish the goal. Bandura and Adams (1977)

reported, “The higher the level of perceived self-efficacy at the completion of treatment, the higher was level of approach behavior ( $r=.75$ ,  $p<.01$ )” (p. 296). Bandura’s results told me the more that I believed in my abilities to earn a doctorate, the more likely I would accomplish the goal. The belief in my abilities regulated my thoughts, feelings, actions, and motivations.

**Self-regulation.** Self-regulated thoughts, feelings, behaviors and motivation were guided by the self-judgements made about my abilities to accomplish a task or goal (Bandura, 1997). Zimmerman (1989) published a study that examined the social cognitive impact of self-regulated learning and defines self-regulation as, “In general, students can be described as self-regulated to the degree that they are metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviorally active participants in their own learning process” (p. 329). I regulated specific thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, which align with the goal of successfully defending my study and graduating. This self-perpetuating process is rooted in the understanding that program completion and the many tasks that lead up to it were a central goal and focus in my professional life. The efficacious process of interpreting information sources that informed self-belief and subsequently thinking, feeling, and behaving in a regulated manner to achieve goals speaks to the human nature of advocating for oneself and understanding that change for something better was within my grasp as long as I am willing to work toward it.

During the development of the comprehensive exam, I synthesized connections to self, profession, and the community with content learned in the core courses. This assignment necessitated reflection, which informed the behavior of writing while monitoring progress toward the goal of completing the assignment. Bandura (1989) expressed the value in developing thinking skills by saying, “Training in cognitive skills can produce more generalized and lasting effects if it raises self-beliefs of efficacy as a well as imparts skills” (p. 733). Using

reflection in multiple ways was a skill sharpened with every core course. Weighing experiences in the courses against the task of this paper and in a larger sense the goal of program completion involves constant monitoring. Pressley and Ghatala (1990) say, “monitoring is at the heart of self-regulated thinking” (p.20). Thinking about connections to the larger goal of graduating helped me realize that I am focused and on track heading toward program completion. Feelings in addition to thought inform my behaviors and motivations to succeed. My experiences with a task, situation, or event generated feelings associated with them (Bandura, 1997; Erickson, 1980). Developing the comprehensive exam was a stressful point in my program because the assignment, in part, dictated whether I was able to continue my studies. If I did well, I would be able to continue. If not, then I could not continue forward. Contemplating failure was stressful. The way in which I dealt with stress associated with a task spoke to my coping abilities. Bandura (2012) explained, “This affects the quality of their emotional life and their vulnerability to stress and depression” (p. 13). Constructive feedback from peers and instructors produced insightful direction and helped alleviate much of the stress experienced during this period. My thoughts and feelings about a task controlled my actions.

Experiences, beginning with the elementary years to more current times, have helped shape and develop habits which support academic performance (Erikson, 1980). Using a certain skill or employing a specific behavior to complete the comprehensive exam was directed consciously from my thoughts (Bandura, 1997). Zimmerman (2000) explained where the control lies in self-regulated behavior by saying, “internal locus of control should support self-directed courses of action” (p. 85). Zimmerman’s account tells me that I was in charge of and responsible for my actions. This perspective is much different than those of a belief based on behavioral theory. Skinner (2011) reiterates the behaviorist protocol when studying behavior as stated by



Max Meyer, “consider only those facts which can be objectively observed in the behavior of one person in its relation to his prior environmental history” (p. 14). Much like my behavior was guided from self-belief so were my motivations to accomplish the goal of program completion.

Regulation of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors supported the idea that I have control over my being to move toward goal completion. Such control regulated motivation toward goal achievement as Zimmerman (2000) pointed out, “Self-efficacy beliefs also provide students with a sense of agency to motivate their learning through use of such self-regulatory processes as goal setting, self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and strategy use (p. 87). The idea of self-agency and having control over my life to guide it toward the goal of program completion was empowering. I knew through self-efficacy theory that my destiny was my own. The framework of my study illustrated a close connection between self-efficacy and motivation in that they moved in the same direction once self-regulatory process begin moving me toward goal completion.

**Methodological issues.** Methodological issues within self-efficacy were seen in the limitations of generality spanning over multiple domains. Development of the comprehensive exam exemplified how my self-belief was based on my experiences with synthesis in specific situations with multiple courses. This does not mean my self-efficacy itself was generalized across multiples domains, only the situation or circumstances of the task make self-belief generalizable. Bijl and Shortridge-Baggett (2001) reported the misuse of generalizing self-efficacy beyond the parameters of the experience and circumstances of a task by stating, “broader and more general dispositional measures are usually better suited for predicting more general patterns of behavior or outcomes that arise across multiple contexts” (p. 197). An example of general self-efficacy measurements were produced by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995) who built a general self-efficacy scale (GSE) covering a broad range of personality

domains. Schwarzer, Gutierrez-Dona, & Luszczynska (2005) reported that GSE related to personality by adding, “As expected, optimism, self-regulation, self-esteem, and orientations towards the future were positively related to GSE” (p. 84).

Believing in my abilities to synthesize does not mean that I believed that I could be successful with a complex topic like quantum physics. My level and magnitude for believing in my abilities to succeed in both vary because the tasks and the domain are too different. Bandura (1997) explained the reason why researchers should view self-efficacy as task specific and situational, “self-efficacy beliefs should be measured in terms of particularized judgements of capability that may vary across realms of activity, different levels of task demands within a given activity domain, and under different situational circumstances” (p. 6). I reject the use and necessity of a broad range personality scale in my study because the scale does not speak to the specificity needed in understanding the academic tasks experienced in this study. As self-judgements regarding the strength, magnitude, and generality associated with the ability to accomplish a task or goal were weighed, motivation and behaviors taken toward such tasks and goals were performed.

My methodological issues stems from how self-efficacy was quantified. Typically, Self-efficacy was measured by rating self-efficacy strength, magnitude, and generality. Bandura’s correlation study does not offer a candidate perspective of how practice, feedback, modeling, and emotional experiences affect my thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. To tell the story of my culture’s values, beliefs, and practices, I need to measure self-efficacy qualitatively through autoethnography (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010). Surprisingly, no published autoethnographic studies analyzing the candidate experience with self-efficacy during program matriculation were

found. The lack of studies focusing on candidate experiences with self-efficacy through autoethnographic means supported the need for my story to be told.

**Critique of the self-efficacy.** Critique of self-efficacy research comes from the behavioral theory perspective. A behavioral analysis published by Biglan (1987) reported how Bandura's experiment with snake phobics, and the microanalysis gleaned from it, was answerable through an understanding of environmental effects on behavior. I did because of external influences (Skinner, 2011; Watson, 1998). At the very heart of the behaviorist perspective was how self-efficacy ratings used to measure self-judgments were as Biglan (1987) reported types of verbal behavior. Skinner (1987) states, "Verbal behavior is behavior that is reinforced through the mediation of other people, but only when the other people are behaving in ways that have been shaped and maintained by an evolved verbal environment, or language" (p. 90). In this respect, self-judgment ratings created and maintained an environment from which behaviors derived. While there may be some merit to the behaviorist perspective, the limit imposed on free thought did not allow for the type of analysis needed to describe the cultural beliefs, values, and practices of the doctorate candidate.

### **Motivation**

The self-belief in my abilities to achieve tasks moderates the motivation used to pursue goals (Bandura, 1989). The greater the self-belief I had in my abilities, the more motivation I exerted to pursue goal attainment (Zimmerman, 2000). Human needs, intrinsic, and extrinsic, are the three classifications of motivation relative to my study with each playing a role in goal achievement. The connection between earning a doctorate and the motivation that drove me toward achieving this goal were interrelated (Maslow, 1943). In the matter of degree completion, developing a thorough comprehensive analysis of motivation helped me understand the needs I satisfied. Providing a thorough analysis of motivation in terms of classification,

connection to goals, and the affects toward behavior clearly and accurately delineated my drive to be a better scholar and researcher.

**Human needs.** Human needs constantly moved my efforts toward satisfying them (Maslow, 1943). With my physiological, safety, and love needs satisfied, the need to earn a doctorate satisfied self-esteem and self-actualization. Maslow (1943) characterized the constant push and pull to satisfy these needs in the following:

Human needs arrange themselves in hierarchies of pre-potency. That is to say, the appearance of one need usually rests on the prior satisfaction of another, more pre-potent need. Man is a perpetually wanting animal. Also no need or drive can be treated as if it were isolated or discrete; every drive is related to the state of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of other drives. (p. 3)

Maslow's theory led me to believe other goals I wanted to achieve in profession and life did not measure up in terms desire and drive toward achievement like pursuing my doctorate. My need to earn a doctoral degree satisfied a strong curiosity.

In order for me to be comfortable working in the field of education, it was important that I received respect from the colleagues and students that I worked with daily. Many of the faculty that I worked with hold terminal degrees in various capacities. I admired that many of the colleagues that I work with have put in the hard work and long hours to achieve the goal of earning a doctoral degree. I wanted the people that I work with to admire me in the same way and attain *self-esteem*. Maslow (1943) theorized personal benefits associated with self-esteem by saying, "Satisfactions of the self-esteem needs leads to feeling of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability and adequacy of being useful and necessary in the world" (p. 10). Retaining the same recognition as many of them would in my eyes help level the playing field or place me

in similar standing of the people who I respected. The road to reach the level of expertise that my colleagues shared involved motivation to do the actual work.

By enrolling in the doctorate program, I satisfied a need that placed me in a position to serve students and the community in a more direct manner helping people reach their own potential and succeed. Performing this kind of work conjured emotions that I no longer felt in my previous career in the restaurant and hospitality industry. The lack of happiness that I felt after the end of a shift in my previous profession pushed me to reflect on the need to go back to school and work toward earning a degree in a profession that I respected. I needed to discover what I was meant to be. My journey in receiving an education to become a teacher served this purpose. Maslow (1943) characterized my drive to find meaning in life as the need for *self-actualization*. From Vallerand's (1997) perspective such motives surrounding my participation in the field of education was rewarding and at the end of the day left me with emotions of pleasure and sense of good will (p. 279). My needs have both intrinsic and extrinsic value.

**Intrinsic motivation.** Intrinsic motives to move toward earning a doctorate were inherently satisfying to me (Deci and Ryan, 1985). When the Ed.D. Program began commissioning writers to develop the courses and build the curriculum, I participated in the editing process before the courses were offered to the candidates. During this time, I often found myself thinking how I would go about completing the assignments: wondering if I had what it took to earn a doctoral degree. It was not long until I needed to know whether I could complete the program myself. Maslow (1943) hypothesized the human need to know as, “a basic desire to know, to be aware of reality, to get the facts, to satisfy curiosity or as Wertheimer phrases it, to see rather than to be blind” (p. 12). I certainly wanted to see for myself. The program launched and candidates began matriculating through the courses both on-campus and online. The need to

know became insatiable at this point. The need to know seem to become a weight that I was carrying around constantly daring me to apply to the program. After discussing the possibility of beginning this journey with my family and receiving their support, I gathered the admission materials needed to apply and signed up.

The need to know and understand, in the mindset of an aspiring doctorate candidate, challenged me to ask. Why do I want a doctoral degree? There were multiple motivating factors, both intrinsic and extrinsic, which focused movements and efforts toward achieving the goal of program completion. Gagne and Deci (2005) characterized intrinsic motivation by saying, “When people engage an activity because they find it interesting, they are doing the activity wholly volitionally (e.g., I work because it is fun)” (p. 334). Because the nature of understanding why I wanted a doctorate ignited the motions to search out truth autonomously, the need to know was intrinsically motivated. By my own will, in accordance with my interests, I chose to research and understand why I wanted a doctoral degree. In addition to the personal interest of understanding whether or not I could complete the program lies the extrinsic reward of graduation, which to a certain extent satisfied the need to know.

While the work to earn a doctorate was nothing like I have experienced during my undergraduate and graduate work in terms of rigor and demands of my time, the work continuously challenged me and constantly moved me toward a new understanding of how the world works. This sense of fascination and desire to research and investigate more was intrinsic and characterized by Vallerand (1997): “Intrinsic motivation toward accomplishments focuses on engaging in a given activity for the pleasure and satisfaction experienced while one is attempting to surpass oneself, or to accomplish or create something” (p. 280). Even while engaged in deep practice to refine a skill or develop a better piece of writing that does not necessarily discover

something new, I found pleasure in the sense of accomplishment that followed. My dedication to develop my skills as a scholar, researcher, and practitioner were both inherently satisfying as well as serving external rewards and constraints.

**Extrinsic motivation.** Extrinsic motives driving me to earn a doctoral degree looked to satisfy external needs associated with earning a doctoral degree (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Such external needs would not be as necessarily interesting as the inherently or intrinsic ones. Many of my colleagues hold terminal degrees. Having a degree of this nature is a requirement for employment as a faculty member for most higher education institutions. Pursuing this degree to satisfy institution job requirements was outside of my inherent interests. Although, Vallerand (1997) explained that even external influences can be internalized to drive performance: “individuals replace the external source of control by an internal one and start imposing pressure on themselves to ensure the behavior will be emitted” (p. 282). While I am not personally concerned about a university’s given job requirement, I do respect and understand the reasons why a higher education institution seeks those who have terminal degrees. The fact that I eventually want be considered for a faculty position places pressure on me to complete the degree requirements and earn the degree. In this example, I have used the institutional job requirement of having a terminal degree to push me that much more toward the goal of program completion. Maslow theorized that motivation was better understood if the goals associated with a given motive were the center of analysis (Maslow, 1943, p.3).

**Motivational connection to goals.** Examining my goals helped me understand why I am pursuing a doctoral degree. Both intrinsic and extrinsic factors contributed to goal-directed behavior (Cheung, 2004). By determining, outlining, and analyzing my goal of earning a doctoral degree, I identified both the intrinsic and extrinsic reasons why I drove hard to

accomplish this goal. To me this explains my reasons for entering into an endeavor of this magnitude. Goal setting, developing a sense of personal efficacy to perform task associated with a given goal, and arranging reward and punishment incentives to support goal completion helps manage motivation (Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1986). As with many doctorate programs, the one that I matriculated through had in place several milestones or goals which needed completion before eventually graduating.

One of the program milestones is the completion of the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) modules, which educates candidates on the proper application of ethics when using human subjects in research. Completing the modules took up approximately six to eight hours of my time outside of my doctoral studies to complete, so it was something I needed to plan. This was a particularly stressful period because time is very difficult to come by when matriculating through a doctorate program, working a full-time job, and raising a young family. Completion was especially important because not completing the modules would halt my matriculation. I needed to plan and allot time to make sure the modules were completed. Planning and committing to the time to complete the modules made it that much easier to accomplish a task needed to aid in achieving the over-arching goal of earning my doctorate (Schunk, 1991). With various types of motivation defined in my study, understanding how motivation was operationalized helped me understand the approach to measuring motivation in my study.

Many experimental studies have employed one of two methods to measure motivation: free choice and self-reporting. The free choice method determined whether participants performed a task because they wanted to out of their own will or because they were influenced to by external means (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Other studies used the self-report method to understand



whether participants were interested or enjoyed completing a given task. Given the nature of my study and its narrative form, the self-report method seems to offer the most potential and was more consistent with structured interviews used in narrative research. As motivation and the needs to succeed in the doctorate program explain why I earned a doctoral degree, grit or perseverance was necessary to get through the work associated with earning the degree.

**Methodological issues with motivation.** The means by which free choice was quantified raised methodological issues within the motivation attribute. In free choice, measurements only assess how many times a participant may have made choice or the frequency in which a choice was made over time (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Tour-Tillery & Fishbach, 2014). The more one chose to engage in a task or choose something, the more likely it was intrinsically motivated: because I wanted to. While these measurements may do well to predict motivational outcomes, my study in terms of motivation, wanted to understand why I was pursuing a doctorate. What are the goals driving me? My perspective of motivation could be defined through both intrinsic and extrinsic means through self-reporting. The self-reporting method would work for this study because it lends direct access to why a participant may or may not choose to engage in a goal through means that can be qualitatively analyzed. Paulhus and Vazire (2009) explained the reasons for using the self-reporting method, “These include easy interpretability, richness of information and motivation to report, causal force, and sheer practicality” (p. 227). Through self-reporting, I might have been able to understand why I earned a doctorate.

**Critique of the motivation research.** Understanding psychological needs associated with motivation allowed me to contemplate and summarize critique within its research. Maslow (1943) explained in his theory that humans are constantly working toward satisfying their needs.

Environmental factors, consistent with social cognitive theory, affect the pursuit of satisfying these needs. Deci and Ryan (2000) mention the effects of environment by saying, “Motivational strategies such as rewards and threats undermine autonomy and thus lead to non-optimal outcomes such as decreased intrinsic motivation, less creativity, and poorer problem solving” (p. 234). The opposing perspective of Vallerand (2000) suggested, “they do not explicitly propose the nature of the causal sequence through which the environment affect outcomes, as well as the role of need satisfaction in the process” (p. 315). The discrepancy between these researchers highlighted the need for my study to fully acknowledge the environmental factors affecting the choices made throughout my doctoral experience along with a complete understanding of how my needs were affected.

### **Grit or Perseverance**

Building grit by persevering through practice supported my sense of personal efficacy. Duckworth et al. (2007) defined grit as, “perseverance and passion for long-term goals.” (p. 1087) Matriculation through the doctorate program, successfully completing my first and second year studies, and developing my dissertation all exemplified the dedication to practice and persistence needed to garner success and eventually graduate from the doctorate program. Engagement in deliberate practice at each of these levels while pursuing a goal was a strong indicator of grit (Duckworth et al., 2007). Perseverance is also evident in the growth mindset perspective of understanding each experience in the program, good and bad, taught me something useful to my overall development (Dweck, 2006). My experience with perseverance through practice and the growth mindset perspective that I have developed during my tenure in the doctorate program supported my sense personal efficacy and built confidence to continue to grow and improve.

**Practice.** Practice is an indicator of perseverance (Duckworth et al., 2007). The more time I put into deliberate practice the better my performance and greater the odds that I would succeed (Ericsson & Charness, 1994; Duckworth, 2013). My devotion to deliberate practice was evident through the edit and revision of every assignment, every course successfully passed, and every milestone accomplished on route to the defense of this study and program completion. An example of my dedication can be drawn from the iterative learning process experienced throughout my studies. In many of the courses, I was given an opportunity to edit and revise my work. This style of practice reinforced my learning as well as offer an opportunity to illustrate learning gains by resubmitting a better piece of work. Additionally, more time for practice meant there was more opportunity to improve performance. Duckworth et al. (2007) reported a positive correlation between grit and time devoted to deliberate practice, “Gritty finalists outperformed their less gritty peers at least in part because they studied longer” (p. 1097). Ericsson and Charness (1994) said, “performance increases monotonically as a function of practice” (p. 727). Practice, therefore, was an indicator of performance: the more that I practiced, the better I performed. The amount of time that I reserved for practice to become a better scholar and researcher, dictated my performance and ultimately was determining factor for achieving the goal of graduating.

Practicing the completion of tasks in the manner of the iterative learning process was experiential in nature much like having experience with a task. Bijl and Shortridge-Baggett (2001) connected practice to previous task experiences, “Practicing is the most important source of self-efficacy because it is based on a person’s own experience” (p. 191). Even when experiences with revising work left me feeling vulnerable or lost, previous successes provided the mindset needed to believe in my abilities, see my mistakes as learning opportunities, and

push through. Bandura (1997) mentioned how positive experiences help people get through tough times, “After strong efficacy expectations are developed through repeated success, the negative impact of occasional failures is likely reduced” (p. 195). Aside from devoting myself to the practice necessary to sustain success throughout my tenure in the doctorate program, a growth mindset developed along the way evolved.

**Growth mindset.** Growth mindset was the preserving perspective, which viewed failures as learning opportunities to improve future outcomes (Dweck, 2006). I saw success even in failure. Duckworth (2009) says, “Growth mindset is a great way to build grit” (para. 3). The perspective from which I interpreted how well I was doing with a task or handling a situation changed over the last two years of program matriculation. This is especially true for balancing time between raising a family, working a full-time job, and earning a doctorate. Having my family’s support through this endeavor did not make me impervious to the stress, pressure, and frustration associated with balancing life while earning a doctorate. Organizing my time to complete assignments inevitably conflicted with family time leaving my wife with the burden of pulling more than half the weight in raising two young children. Times like these were stressful. Sometimes, I felt as though there was not enough time in the day to turn attention satisfactorily toward my family when professional deadlines needed to be made. Reading my wife’s emotions, I knew that she became stressed too. When there were disagreements, we tended to work them out.

Placing continued stress on my family for too long a period of time, however, could have caused unrepairable damage. In this respect, persistence produces a negative effect. Opponents of grit saw *nonproductive persistence* as counterproductive and unhealthy (Kohn, 2014). If earning this doctorate costed me my marriage, then I would have seen how too much persistence

could be harmful. McFarlin, Baumeister, and Blascovich, (1984) call this “nonproductive persistence.” Constant communication with my wife regarding our family needs helped keep everything out in the open where it was dealt with collaboratively. Even when our relationship was strained due to demands of both our jobs, parenting, and school, a growth mindset perspective spurred the need to put extra work into communicating clearly and nurturing our marriage (Dweck, 2006, p. 150).

Because my wife believed in me, and what I was trying to accomplish, she picked up my slack and allowed me the space to read and write as needed to be a successful candidate. My wife’s support allowed me to be gritty, push through, and complete the work time, after time, after time. Previous experiences successfully balancing family, work, and school has conditioned my perspective to see through challenging situations, work through them, and be better because of them (Dweck, 2014). It was important to me that I did not take for granted my wife’s support.

**Methodological issues with grit or perseverance.** Methodological issues with perseverance or grit were evident in their quantification. In the Duckworth et al. (2007) publication of *Grit: Perseverance and passion for long-term goals*, study number six drew a positive correlation between performance and the amount of practice one engages. Duckworth et al. (2007) results reported, “a simultaneous multiple regression with study time as the dependent variable and age as a covariate, we found grit was a significant predictor ( $\beta = .28, p < .001$ ).” (p. 1098). While the empirical evidence was sound enough, this method did not explain the participant’s perspective of what the experience was like with practice, the emotion felt during practice, or the first-hand experience of completing a goal after countless hours of practice. Yet,

the understanding of deliberate practice as an indicator of grit helped me understand the need to know how efficacious thoughts, feelings, and behaviors were affected by practice.

**Critique of grit or perseverance.** Critique surrounding the grit or perseverance theory was evident in situations where socio-economic challenges prevented students from persevering. Osgood (2014) believed the grit theory unfairly characterized one's sense of perseverance even though external influences such socio-economic challenges may have a significant impact on performance and academic success. Osgood (2014) explained how external factors had a significant effect but did not necessarily speak to one's lack of perseverance in the following:

My students are overwhelmingly students of color and many are students coming from the most debilitating poverty. And the oppression, neglect, and abuses they've experienced often manifest as significant mental health problems. Many have severe depression, suicidal ideation, debilitating anxiety, aggressive outbursts, or self-harming behaviors. According to Duckworth fans, these are kids significantly lacking in "grit".  
(Para. 3)

In Osgood's (2014) rebuttal to grit, external influences had a damaging effect on student performance. This does not mean students had a lesser sense of perseverance. While I appreciated and was in agreement with Osgood's position, my socio-economic status did not have anywhere near the same debilitating effect as those who come from such challenged backgrounds. Comparatively, I perceived myself as well-off. Having sufficient resources to matriculate successfully through undergraduate and graduate work over the last seven years, my story does not fairly compare to one who has experienced real socioeconomic hardships.

### **Transformation or Change**

Changes in my self-belief and motivation brought on by self-efficacy information sources and deep practice, introduced changes in my perspective of the world I not only worked in but

lived in as well. Changes in perspective as seen in development of a growth mindset to look at failure not as a determining factor but as a learning experience (Dweck, 2006) changed my worldview through intentional and critical reflection (Mezirow, 1991). These perspectives and the reflections used to refine and move my worldview toward a collaborative perspective allowed me to think beyond my own needs, desires, and outcomes to accommodate the community perspective where I worked and lived. This helped me connect more closely with my community. In addition to understanding how my perspective changed, I needed to understand how my changes in perspective affected my thoughts, feelings, and behaviors toward goal achievement.

**Perspective.** My perspective was influenced by the experience with my cohort and the instructors in the classroom (Bandura, 1986; Erikson, 1980; Mezirow, 1991). Mezirow (1991) described the multiple dimensions of a changed perspective as, “Perspective transformation involves (a) an empowered sense of self, (b) more critical understanding of how one’s social relationships and culture have shaped one’s beliefs and feelings, and (c) more functional strategies and resources for taking actions” (p. 161). Working successfully through obstacles in the first two years of program matriculation helped me more comfortably address current research. I also developed a strong bond with fellow cohort members during this time. The stories and experiences they have shared with me during the last two years of matriculation, in many ways, have become my own and as a result informed my own perspective (Mezirow, 1991). Over time, the trust to share experiences increased between me and my cohort. Solidifying these bonds meant I needed to share my own experiences: failures, successes, doubts and beliefs. To open up was uncomfortable in the beginning. However, as time went on and the uncomfortable feeling went away, I found myself seeking out others for their opinions, beliefs,

or perspectives to help build a consensus so that I could make informed decisions about a given problem. Through reflection, these experiences were interpreted.

**Reflection.** Reflection was the interpretive process which shaped my perspective. I reflected on experiences to, as Clark (1993) says, “identify the effects that they have had on our development, on who we are as human beings” (p. 47). I have always thought of reflection as one of the teacher’s most valuable tools to use for improving instruction and learning. Changing or transforming the way that I thought, felt, or behaved through reflection was an intentional process initiated by me. Mezirow (1991) characterized my depth of change in the following:

Transformative learning involves an enhanced level of awareness of the contexts of one’s beliefs and feelings, a critique of their assumptions and particularly premises, an assessment of alternative perspectives, a decision to negate an old perspective in favor of a new one or to make a synthesis of old and new, an ability to take action based upon a new perspective, and a desire to fit the new perspective into the broader context of one’s life. (p. 161)

Through intentional reflection developed over the last two years of studies, I changed my perspective of failure, which perpetuated feelings of self-doubt, uncertainty, and insecurity, to a growth mindset perspective. As a result, I now look at problems in a different way. I now meet challenges with unwavering determination, certainty, and the confidence to research and find solutions.

**Methodological issues with transformation or change.** The methodological issues with change or transformation relating to self-efficacy were evident in the lack of qualitative information offered. Bandura (1977) measured changes in performance by calculating the percentage of a task completed after participant’s experiences with a given task, feedback, and



modeling. While Bandura (1977) quantified changes in performance, his study does not explain if and how self-efficacy information sources may have changed participant perspective or subsequent professional practices. My study looked to understand, through a candidate lens, how self-efficacy information sources affect change within my professional practice and my personal perspective. My experiences with practice, feedback, and modeling or the use of exemplars helped me with understanding how changes may have occurred in my perspective and professional practice.

**Critique of change or transformation.** Change or transformation critique was evident in how they were perceived. Mezirow (1991) viewed transformation as reflective process, which challenged premises to the point where newly redefined perspectives developed. Mezirow's ideas allowed me to look at the world differently. Opponents to Mezirow's theory of transformative learning saw change happening within one's personality at an individual level. Boyd (1989) characterized the individual perspective of transformation, "a fundamental change in personality involving conjointly the resolution of a personal dilemma and the expansion of consciousness resulting in greater personality integration" (p. 459). Conversely, Mezirow (1991) described transformation as a cognitive conflict resolved through a greater understanding or culture and community. While I believe Boyd's personality-based perspective may have a place in understanding change within one's character, I am interested in knowing how experiences with practice, feedback, and modeling changed my self-belief, not my personality.

## **Summary**

I wanted to tell the story of my experiences with self-efficacy in the doctorate program, and understand how practice and perseverance affected my goal of earning a doctoral degree. After researching the literature, it was clear that I needed to investigate my experience with self-efficacy. An analysis of these experiences explained how these experiences have changed my

personal efficacy. Understanding the motives behind my pursuit of a doctoral degree explained why I decided to take on this monumental goal. Exploring experiences with practice and examining the growth mindset perspective used to overcome obstacles lent a candidate perspective of how grit or perseverance moved me toward goal achievement. Changes in self-belief resulting from experiences with self-efficacy needed to be discussed to have an idea if my thoughts, feelings, and behaviors transformed my perspective and practice as an educator. Developing the means to research this information helped understand if changes have occurred. Bandura's quantification of self-efficacy does not tell the candidate's story of how my thoughts, feelings, and behavior were affected by experiences and practice. Through a candidate lens, I told this story.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

I wanted to tell my story. I wanted to understand my lived experience and that of other doctoral candidates who think, feel, and behave in a manner conducive to goal achievement. Additionally, I wanted to know how efficacious experiences helped me rise above the advent of obstacles and temporary failures to move forward, continue learning, and improve my thinking and practice. Through researching the literature, I understand self-efficacy beliefs determined the degree of motivation exerted to accomplish a goal (Bandura, 1989). Because previous experience with a performance task associated with a goal is the strongest source of information to cultivate self-belief (Bandura, 1977), the grit and perseverance associated with the practice of such a task changed and improved my sense of personal efficacy (Duckworth, 2007). Understanding the nature of change helped me identify the interpretive process needed while critically reflecting on experiences, which informed me to change unresolved perspectives, and as a result think and act differently (Mezirow, 1991). I wanted to understand how self-efficacy, motivation, grit or perseverance, and transformation or change worked together to enlighten my journey through the doctorate program and make me a better person. This raised the major overarching research question. How have experiences in the doctorate program changed my sense of self-efficacy? Chase suggested that through narrative autoethnography, I can therapeutically expedite personal change (as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) and help others understand the culture of the doctoral candidate (Ellis et al., 2010).

#### **Research Questions**

With the knowledge of what the literature indicated about self-efficacy, motivation, grit or perseverance, and transformation or change, specific sub-questions in the following section needed to be asked to understand how experiences in the doctorate program have changed my sense of personal efficacy. In the manner of social learning theory, my experiences of academic

growth were shared with instructors and fellow cohort members (Erikson, 1980; Bandura & Walters, 1963). These experiences informed the self-efficacy process of thinking, feeling, and behaving. To understand my experiences with self-efficacy during program matriculation, I needed to ask the following research sub-questions:

- (1) how have previous experiences with practice changed the way I think, feel, and behave?
- (2) how has feedback changed the way I think, feel, and behave?
- (3) how has modeling and the use of exemplars changed the way I think, feel, and behave?
- (4) how did emotions experienced in the doctorate program affect or change the way I think, feel, and behave?

Questions linking my experience to self-efficacy explained how my thoughts, feelings, and behaviors changed during program matriculation.

Questions centered on motivation helped identify the human needs and the motives that I satisfied by pursuing a doctoral degree. Maslow (1943) believed motivation should be defined by the establishing goals intended to satisfy a given human need. Maslow's beliefs purposed that the following research sub-questions needed to be answered during my research in the field: (1) what goals am I satisfying by earning a doctoral degree? (2) Why do I want a doctoral degree? Deci and Ryan (2000) explain the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motives, "The most basic distinction is between *intrinsic motivation*, which refers to doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable, and *extrinsic motivation*, which refers to doing something because it leads to a separable outcome" (p. 55). From my perspective, doing something that brought me joy was personal, which prompted the research sub-question: what are the personal reasons for earning a doctoral degree? Extrinsic motives satisfy external reasons for earning a doctorate, which prompted the question: what are the external reasons for earning a doctorate?

Understanding why I wanted a doctoral degree explained the motivation that drove me to engage in deliberate practice with the intent to sharpen my skillset as a scholar, researcher, and writer.

To better understand how grit or perseverance contributed to the research of understanding my experiences in the doctorate program, I answered questions dealing with practice and perspective. Duckworth et al. (2007) indicated deliberate practice that one engages in toward satisfying a goal as an example of perseverance. To understand how practice affected my sense of personal-efficacy, I researched the answer to the following question: how has practice changed the way I think, feel, and behave toward goal achievement? Addressing the growth mindset perspective where temporary failures were considered learning opportunities (Dweck, 2006), I researched the following research sub-questions: (1) How have I dealt with academic failures during program matriculation? (2) How do academic failures make me think, feel, and behave?

Developing questions to research change or transformation, I turned to the work of Mezirow (1991) to understand how reflection was used to interpret premises and challenge previous perspectives. For an understanding of how reflection was used in the doctorate program to challenge my own perspectives, the following research sub-questions needed to be answered: (1) How are reflections used throughout program matriculation? (2) What perspectives have changed during program matriculation?

Additionally, my research called for an understanding of how experiences in the doctorate program have changed or transformed my sense of personal efficacy. To identify and explain change or transformation from a methodological standpoint, I needed to know how the participants and I thought, felt, or behaved before and after experiences in the doctorate program. The differences in the responses from before and after the experiences may explain how change

or transformation occurred as a result of the experiences in the doctorate program. The following sub-question helped me understand what thoughts, feeling, and behaviors were like before entering the program: (1) how would you describe your thoughts feeling, and behaviors before entering the doctorate program? The following sub-question will help me understand how experiences changed the way I think, feel, or behave: (2) how did experiences in the doctorate program make you think, feel, and behave? The differences in how questions one and two were answered may have described how experiences in the program changed the way a candidate thinks, feels, and behaves. The questions asked throughout this section helped inform the purpose and design of the methods used to research how experiences in the doctorate program transformed my sense of personal-efficacy.

### **Purpose and Design of the Proposed Study**

Hitting the open road and venturing out west for a better way of life, and in doing so earning a doctoral degree, was a long and difficult journey. I researched and analyzed this journey using autoethnography to understand the culture of doctoral candidates earning a doctorate (Holman Jones, 2005). Through my experiences, others will know how the doctorate candidate's thoughts, feelings, and actions promote success through practice toward goal achievement. Chase believes the opportunity to tell my story uses narrative therapeutically to move me toward the sustainable change that I have been seeking (as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). I have been seeking such change since I moved to Portland nine years ago on another, earlier journey to complete my undergraduate and graduate work. By using autoethnography, I was able to use methodology qualitatively to understand the motives and practices used throughout my tenure in the doctorate program to succeed and move closer to program completion.

Autoethnography was the qualitative narrative method used to understand a culture (ethno) through the analysis (graphy) of the researcher's personal experience (auto) (Ellis et al., 2010). Compared to ethnography, which is an older and more commonly used approach to understand cultures, autoethnography is still an emergent methodology in the social sciences. Patton (2015) says, "David Hayano (1979) was credited for originating the term autoethnography to describe studies by anthropologist of their own cultures" (p. 102). While this method has been more widely utilized over the last 25 years as a valid form of understanding culture through experience (Patton, 2015, p. 102), the traditionalists who subscribe to the canonical approaches of research perceived autoethnography as *rampant subjectivism* (Crotty, 1998, p. 48). I was willing to live with these differences of perspectives (Rorty, 1982).

Addressing and moving beyond the politics of legitimizing autoethnography allowed me, in the words of Ellis et al. (2010):

to concentrate on ways of producing meaningful, accessible, and evocative research grounded in personal experience, research that would sensitize readers to issues of identity politics, to experiences shrouded in silence, and to forms of representation that deepen our capacity to empathize with people who are different than us. (p. 2)

Traditional approaches to understanding the values, beliefs, and practices of my culture limited my study by disregarding my first hand experiences matriculating through the doctorate program. To honor my experiences (Patton, 2015, p. 102), my study helped make sense of self and the plight of other doctorate candidates (Ellis et al., 2010, p. 2).

The purpose of this study was to understand, through reflection and analysis, how experiences in the doctorate program transformed my sense of personal efficacy. Through this understanding, I knew how experiences in the doctorate program have helped shape my self-

efficacy to successfully navigate and overcome challenges while moving toward goal achievement. The accomplishment of a goal was driven by a level of motivation, which was determined by my sense of self-belief (Bandura, 1997). Social factors, evident in modeling and the use of exemplars, feedback, and emotions experienced during program matriculation, informed my self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993). This sense of self-belief was strengthened through opportunities to engage in deliberate practices associated with program advancement and in doing so promoted perseverance (Duckworth, 2007). A review of the topics of self-efficacy, motivation, grit or perseverance, and change or transformation helped me realize approaches to measure my experiences.

Through an understanding of the literature, Lee and Bobko (1994) explained common operationalization of self-efficacy in the following:

When operationally measuring self-efficacy, researchers typically ask individuals whether they can perform at specific levels on a specific task (responses are either yes or no) and ask for the degree of confidence in that endorsement (rated on a near-continuous scale from total uncertainty to total certainty) at each specific performance level. (p. 364)

These measurements were studied through quantitative disciplines, which identified and described self-efficacy from an outside perspective. My lens described personal efficacy from an inside perspective, which explained how I thought felt, and behaved as result of experiences encountered in the doctorate program.

Motivation was the force that drove me. These forces were internal or intrinsic and external or extrinsic (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Both types of motivation explained why I earned a doctorate. Both motives explained why I chose to stretch myself academically, professionally, and personally. Deci and Ryan (2000) acknowledged that motivation was primarily measured



through experimental methods. The quantitative nature of the experimental design neglected to describe the candidate's perspective and experience with identifying a goal or motive for earning a doctoral degree and subsequently feeding off that motivation to sustain efforts toward achieving the goal of graduating.

Duckworth (2007) operationalized grit or perseverance through the development and used of a grit scale described in the following:

we sought a brief, standalone measure of grit that met four criteria: evidence of psychometric soundness, face validity for adolescents and adults pursuing goals in a variety of domains, low likelihood of ceiling effects in high-achieving populations, and most important, a precise fit with the construct of grit. (p. 1089)

Duckworth validated her findings through a quantitative correlational study that matched the grit scale against goal attainment, age, self-control, and IQ. As with studies in self-efficacy, grit was validated from an outside perspective.

I wanted to tell my story of personal-efficacy, motivation, and perseverance or change in a narrative form. Ellis (2004) and Muncey, (2010) explained my position as both researcher and participant, "Autoethnography is written and recorded by the individuals who are the subject of the study" (as cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 73). Through the method of narrative auto-ethnography, I was able to share the relational practices, common values, and beliefs of the doctorate candidate in terms of how I thought, felt, and behaved toward goal achievement (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Examining self-worth required the kind of deep introspection that was prevalent in reflective components of auto-ethnography as mentioned by Ellis, (2004): "personal reflection adds context and layers to the story being told about participants" (p. 18). Through this process I hoped to "invoke readers to enter into the "emergent experience" of doing and

writing research, conceive of identity as an “emergent process”, and consider evocative, concrete texts to be as important as abstract analysis” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 20). Because experiences with a task, by way of vicarious modeling and verbal persuasion, increased one’s self-efficacy, it made sense to understand what these experiences meant to me as the candidate in terms of how such experiences made me think, feel, and behave.

### **Identification of Variables**

I am investigating how experiences in the doctoral program have changed my sense of personal efficacy. Within the research question, the areas of self-efficacy, motivation, grit or perseverance, change or transformation were described to understand how goal achievement made me think, feel, and behave. Within the area of self-efficacy, I wanted to know how experiences with practice, feedback, modeling, and emotions experienced during program matriculation changed the way I thought, felt, and behaved in relation to accomplishing goals. The area of motivation prompted me to ask and understand why I was earning a doctoral degree. Perseverance or grit helped me understand how deliberate practice and a growth mindset perspective changed my thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The area of transformation and change was measured by understanding how experiences in the program have altered perspectives through the interpretive process of critical reflection. The topics of self-efficacy, motivation, perseverance and or grit, and change or transformation were measured through an understanding of self, the collective interpretation of my fellow candidates, and the instructors that we have shared our time with over the last two and a half years.

### **Research Population and Sampling Method**

The population that I drew a sample from needed to be able to speak with depth to the attributes outlined in my study. My experiences surfaced throughout the first two chapters of this study were experienced by other doctoral candidates who matriculated through the same

courses taught by the same instructors. Examining the intent of the instruction and curriculum as presented by the course instructors against the account of the candidates who matriculated through the courses was an insightful perspective to analyze; perspectives that would add depth to how I perceived my own experiences. Cultural aspects of the participants in my study furthered knowledge of the doctoral candidate by adding descriptions of the relational practices, values, and beliefs of this sub-culture. Because of the need for thick, rich, and detailed information needed to examine the candidate culture, the sampling method that I used was purposeful (Saldana, 2009).

In order to verify and validate my story, I corroborated my story against the stories of other candidates matriculating through the doctorate program and some of the instructors who taught us. Because I took courses on-campus, it made the most sense to investigate the stories of other on-campus doctoral candidates matriculating through the program at the same time. The decision to use other on-campus candidates is acceptable to Ellis et al. (2010) who said, “Autoethnographers must not only use their methodological tools and research literature to analyze experience, but also must consider ways others may experience similar epiphanies” (p. 4). Fellow candidates in my cohort who have gone through the same course work with the same instructors had similar experiences which were relatable to my own. Having determined the kind of participant needed for my study, my attention turned towards identifying the number of participants needed to present an optimal amount of thick, rich, and detailed information.

I found that having at least two participants was a sufficient number from which to collect narrative data (Creswell, 2013; Huber and Whelan, 1999; Plummer, 1983). Because I have the means to include more participants to strengthen the findings, my study analyzed the stories of at least eight other on-campus candidates: one candidate from my cohort and seven

candidates from a different on-campus cohort that has matriculated through the same number of courses. Along with my story, a total of eight candidate perspectives were used to understand how experiences in the program shaped the way we thought, felt, and behaved toward pursuing the goal of graduating. While eight participants were mentioned as a final count, I did not stop collecting information until the data became saturated. Saturation is defined by Morse (1995) as, “‘data adequacy’ and operationalized as collecting data until no new information is obtained” (p. 147). Collecting data until there was no new information to disseminate ensured the story of the doctoral candidate was told to its fullest extent. This meant the final number of participants used may go under or over seven as long as an adequate amount of information was collected.

The participants in my study were chosen because they can provide specific information needed to tell the doctoral candidate’s story. Purposeful sampling encompassed the idea of targeting specific populations from which rich data was extracted to address the research questions (Saldana, 2009; Patton, 2015). Only other doctoral candidates could provide the rich information which described the candidate culture. The decision to use on-campus doctoral candidates as participants is used, because my study aimed to tell the story of participants who have similar experiences thus characterizing the sub-culture in depth (Saldana, 2009). As a sub-culture, my participants provided more depth to the findings within the program experiences than my story could alone (Patton, 2015, p. 283). The attributes in my study, which dictated how a candidate thought, felt, and behaved, was told through the candidate perspective. This type of group characteristic sampling meshed well with the principal instrument used to collect the pieces of my story, interactive interviewing.

The on-campus doctoral candidates attended one core course once a week on the same day throughout their first year of studies. Additionally, candidates took the writing course in that

first year once a month. The on-campus candidates attended school at a faith-based institution. For many of us attending school at a faith based institution was a personal choice which aligned with the belief systems that were culturally significant to this group. Many of the ethical considerations that guided our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors were derived from our program experiences. One of these considerations was evident in field of education by those who serve students in school. We saw the teaching profession as a call to duty, to serve the community.

Within this scope of responsibility to serve was the need to continually challenge ourselves and our practice by engaging in inquiry to find the best strategies and practices that facilitated good learning. Steering attention and efforts toward continuous improvement through inquiry was an example of being engaged in scholarship as a matter of duty (Markie, 1994). Engagement in inquiry was a cornerstone of the beliefs and relational practice common among doctoral candidates. It is through inquiry that we are able to develop and defend a dissertation, and with it add to the body of knowledge that we were studying. During this process, we were constantly questioning the literature and ourselves in respect to how new knowledge was implemented and practiced. Bonhoeffer (1955) comments on the constant pull to find truth: “The “ethical” can only wish to keep interrupting this life, confronting it at every moment with nothing but conflict of its duties” (p. 278). In finding the best strategy, practice, or way, we were also finding a sense of truth to know how best to serve our students.

The sample population for this study spoke to the attributes outlined in my study because they share similar experiences with the instructors and the assignments that I have had over the last two years. Additionally, the culturally significant relational practice evident in responsible inquiry supported the similarities needed in an autoethnographic design to validate experiences with others from the same culture. With the sample population identified as the on-campus

doctoral candidate and the instructors, attention turned toward constructing an instrument for acquiring the data as well as developing a multifaceted process to analyze it.

### **Data Collection, Validation, and Analysis**

Safe data collection from interviews, which were validated through a comprehensive qualitative analysis was an important aspect of my study. Interactive interviews conducted during field research was the instrument from which I collected data from participating on-campus doctoral candidates. The participants were asked to attend as many interviews needed until each candidate has had an opportunity to speak to all of the attributes outlined in my study. With this in mind, two or three interview iterations were needed. The data collected from the interviews were analyzed qualitatively, which included the concept of reflexivity to understand how the stories of my participants have change my perspective. Triangulation was used to establish consistency between the candidate's stories by comparing experiences for similarities and differences in their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Thematic coding was another part of the analysis used to develop meaning from the data by isolating themes within the story of the participating doctoral candidates (Patton, 2015: Saldana, 2009: Robinson & Clardy, 2010). Member checking was used to authenticate the story told by the participating candidates. Finally, the themes were analyzed to present key findings in the data (Creswell, 2013, p. 74).

Interactive interviewing was a supported instrument used to collect data in autoethnography, and offered me the opportunity to work collaboratively with the candidates to share personal stories, feelings, and perspectives experienced during our time in the program (Chang, et al., 2013, p. 59). The interviews were *conversations*, which Kvale (1996) characterized: "Through conversations we get to know other people, get to learn about their experiences, feelings, and hopes and the world they live in... The research interview is based on the conversation of daily life and is a professional conversation" (p. 5). It was not easy to begin

these conversations. Already having a professional and somewhat close relationship with the candidates due to my proximity as their academic advisor, a level of comfort already existed (Ellis et al., 2010, p. 7). Getting people to open up in a deep and personal manner did not come easily. In order to facilitate meaningful reflections of our experiences, I began many of these conversations by telling my story and detailing the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors associated with them (Ellis, 2004, p. 64). My sharing may have made it easier to elicit others to open up and share.

In preparation for the interviews, I had examples of my experiences with the attributes ready to go to help generate conversations with the study participants. Regarding the self-efficacy attribute of previous experience or practice before entering the Ed.D. Program, I shared a story from my career in the restaurant industry. A month into my new position as general manager of a popular casual dining chain, the power to the restaurant went out for three days. It was the first major situation that I had to deal with in my new position. Talk about trial by fire. I was feeling the heat. One of the biggest concerns included finding out a way to preserve thousands of dollars of product before it spoiled. Previous experiences with short term power outages helped me realize what actions were needed to preserve the inventory (Bandura, 1997). The few times this happened in the past, management placed big blocks of dry ice in the cooler to keep the refrigerator and freezer units' cool. This solution was fine for outages which lasted for a couple hours or even a half day, but not one where the power would be out for three days. Because the current situation differed in terms of time and how long the power outage would last, the domain I was experiencing was slightly different from previous knowledge dealing with power outages. To overcome the difference between the two domains, I thought having bigger and better means to keep the food preserved would help. As a result, I actuated the solution by

calling our primary food distributor asking that a refrigerated semi-trailer be dropped off. A couple of staff members were called in to move all the perishables into the refrigerated trailer and the food was saved. I felt reassured because the cooling source was more reliable. This solution worked, in part, because I had previous experiences saving food from spoilage due to power outages. In this example, I illustrated how previous experiences informed thought, feelings and action for completing the task of saving the food.

For cultivating conversations centered on modeling, I told a story pertaining to my writing experiences prior to entering the program. During my undergraduate studies, strict use of APA was encouraged and expected. I never crossed this line due to the fear of receiving poor grades. I chose to follow instead. To help model this writing behavior many instructors provided exemplars of writing that aligned with the firm APA expectations. I judged myself as having the necessary level of confidence to write in the prescribe manner expected of me, because the exemplars showed me how. I also had the skill set necessary to deal with the magnitude of the APA expectations effectively. Not having enough freedom to personalize pieces of writing, by using first person point of view, left me feeling disconnected with the message I was trying to send across to the reader. Disconnectedness was especially felt when trying to link my experiences to a given assignment from the third person point of view. It just seemed awkward. Even though I felt limited in how I was able to express myself, I was for the most part successful in applying the tight APA standards to my work. Much of this success was due to exemplars provided in class because I was able to modify my style of writing to that of the model provided (Kazdin, 1973). The style of writing did not leave enough opportunity to draw people into the experience. The exemplar illustrated how to write with an active voice, which



was import for research writing. In this example, I was able to describe how the experience with using a model helped me develop a style of writing consistent with course expectations.

Experiences with feedback were answered from a couple of different angles given the participants consist of candidates and their instructors. Comparing the instructor's philosophy for providing feedback to that of the student's experience was worth exploring. For experiences with feedback before entering the program, I explained how constructive comments given during my undergraduate years concentrated on writing mechanics. Seldom would I ever receive comments on the content discussed in a writing assignment. The red ink was saved for what I considered benign stuff. Given what I knew about narrative writing, I would have preferred my undergraduate instructors to develop thick and rich detail so as to draw out meaning from my writing (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). The feedback given to me during my undergraduate years did not delve into developing the writer inside me in terms of content, style, and context. Instead feedback was given through the assignment's rubric so that I was be able to effectively address all of the graded criterion. This feedback often left me feeling as though more was needed to be better. There was more to develop than understanding that a few writing mechanics were overlooked. In this respect, I felt as though feedback was missing something. For many years I did not think of my writing as something to improve upon. As a result, I never practiced writing, because it was something that never really stuck out as needing help. From the example receiving feedback, I explained how poor experiences with writing perpetuated a resistance to practice at becoming a better writer.

As self-efficacy experiences are encountered, an emotional response was usually felt. This feeling or emotion helped me understand whether I had the ability to complete the task (Bandura, 1997). To elicit conversations pertaining to emotions felt during the completion of a

task or goal, I reviewed the three previous stories and explained the emotions felt during those times. Regarding the previous experience with the power outage, I described how I felt the weight of the world on my shoulders to quickly define a strategy for preserving the restaurant inventory. Feelings of anxiety coupled with time running out and what I knew as a precedent solution, informed me to respond quickly and call in the truck so that the refrigerated unit could hold the store inventory. Emotional responses to using exemplars which ensured APA readiness included feelings of safety and comfort in compliance. While I was not excited about adhering to strict APA standards, I followed the protocol to receive passing grades. The poor feedback received during my undergraduate years left me feeling frustrated and wanting more input from my instructors. These thoughts, feelings, and behaviors were processed cognitively so that I understood my chances for being successful.

Self-efficacy experiences were interpreted through self-judgment in terms of strength, magnitude, and generality (Bandura, 1977; van der Bijl & Shortridge-Baggett, 2001). To understand how participants judged their experiences with the attributes before entering the program, I used probing questions and comments to extract thick and rich detail. The self-judgment probes are described in the following:

1. Describe in detail your level of confidence with the self-efficacy experience you are recounting.
2. Describe in detail the skillset you had or needed to complete the task you are recounting.
3. Explain or describe if the resolution to the task you are describing applied to different situations.

Self-judgements explained how the participants judged their own capabilities to achieve a task or goal. Self-regulated behaviors are the actions resulting from one's self-judgment (Bandura and Adams, 1977). To receive the necessary information regarding self-regulated behavior, I asked the sub question: how did experience with the task or goal that you described change your behavior or practice moving forward? Self-efficacy attributes contain many pieces that helped define and describe how thoughts and feelings informed our actions and behaviors. For the attributes describing motivation, grit or perseverance, and change or transformation I began the general attribute questions appended in this study (Appendix A). If the questions were not answered with enough thick and rich detail, then I asked probing questions to extract as much information as possible.

The stories previously mentioned explain my experiences with the study attributes before entering the Ed.D. Program. I would use stories illustrated in my literature review to help generate conversation during the set of interviews which describes my experience with the attribute during program matriculation. The difference between these two time periods may explain how experiences in the program changed my personal efficacy. The information gained in these conversations will reflect the topics researched in the literature review including the pieces of my conceptual framework (Kvale, 1996: see Appendix A for attribute questions). The instructor participants were asked to engage in the same conversations as the candidate participants in an effort to collect information pertaining to experiences with the study attributes they had while earning their doctoral degrees. Additionally, the instructors will be asked how they perceive or intend their influence to affect the study attributes for candidates matriculating through the program (Appendix B). The atmosphere needed to be familiar, comfortable, and conducive to opening up so that the candidates were more willing to share their stories.

The thought of conducting interactive interviews in the sterile environment of a classroom on campus seemed to work against the idea of being comfortable, open, and casual. The interview may provide a deeper understanding of the doctoral candidate culture if my participants came over for a social gathering to discuss their experiences. If the object is to elicit open and honest feelings about experiences in the program, then I needed to catch the candidates in a manner that promoted openness. When the candidates are relaxed and given multiple opportunities to interview, the data that surfaced was rich adding a level of depth that appropriately and more importantly truthfully characterized my culture and the experiences we have faced throughout the last couple of years (Ellis, 2004). Once an atmosphere conducive to the type of comfort needed to encourage other candidates to be frank and share their stories was created, I needed to ensure that the data was handled responsibly.

The data retrieved from the participants in my study needed to be handled and stored in a safe and responsible manner. The experiences and stories told by the participants were recorded on a hand-held digital recording device. Videotaping the interviews as another point of reference during the interview. Once the interviews have been recorded, the information will be translated into text using speech to text software, Dragon. Subsequently, the translated text will be stored in the coding software, Atlas Ti for a minimum of three years. The software and the data was downloaded onto my personal computer of which no one else had access. Further efforts to protect my participants included providing a pseudonym each one to hide his or her identity. Aside from the participants themselves, I was the only one who can identify who said what during the interviews. As the data came in, several qualitative approaches were used to interpret, analyze, and piece together the doctorate candidate's story.

The approaches used to analyze the data received from the interviews include the following:

1. Reflexivity,
2. triangulation,
3. member checking,
4. thematic coding, and
5. restorying

Reflexivity in the words of Patton (2015) was, “an ongoing examination of what I know and how I know it” (p. 70). I was reflexive by taking extensive notes throughout the interview process to understand how my cultural perspective compares and differs to that of the participating candidates in order to develop a new understanding about the candidate culture. My experience with the data, in terms of how it is received, analyzed, and expressed is a *layered account*, which according to Ellis et al. (2010) will, “invoke” readers to enter into the “emergent experience” of doing and writing research” (p. 6). Pulling readers into the field research with me offered an opportunity to share how my personal beliefs, values, and biases impacted the study (Creswell & Miller, 2010). These personal beliefs, values, and biases were culturally defining characteristics of the doctoral candidate’s culture. While reflexivity added depth to my study by adding a layered account of my experience with the data, triangulation helped verify my story against the other doctoral candidates that I was interviewing.

Triangulating and member checking data were two qualitative techniques used to validate the information pulled from the data received during the interactive interviews. Each technique offered both the researcher and participant an opportunity to validate the data. As the researcher, I cross-referenced the stories between each participant in the study to establish consistency. This

was done by comparing the stories between each participant to identify similarities and differences in their responses to the questions (see Appendix A for study attribute questions) discussed during the interviews. Similarities support commonalities and emergent themes that rose out of the data (Creswell & Miller, 2010; Saldana, 2009) while differences may support extending knowledge. Validating the data through triangulation was a process where the responsibility laid within me as the researcher to analyze the data in an objective, responsible, and honest manner. Member checking on the other hand relinquished this role to the study participants to validate their responses to the interview discussions (Creswell & Miller, 2010).

Member checking was the process where the participants authenticated the experiences they described during the interview. Jones et al. (2013) defined member checking as an opportunity, “where individuals are given a chance to read and comment on stories in which they appear to check accuracy and interpretations” (p. 253). While the initial set of interviews were in place to respond to all of the study attribute questions, the member checking part of the analysis sequence was completed on an individual basis. I individually met with the participants to review and go over their responses. During this time, participants had a chance to comment on their stories to add yet another layered account to the interview and data collection process by possibly expanding on their responses to the interview (Ellis et al., 2010). Because the validation of the data came directly from the participants, their authentication was crucial to establishing the data’s credibility. Lincoln and Guba (1985) acknowledged the importance of the member checking approach by calling it, “the most crucial techniques for establishing credibility” (p. 314). As the participants confirmed the data pulled from the interviews, additional comments were used to add thick and rich detail. Member checking also offers continuing opportunities to

reveal my own reflexive accounts of applying the technique and reacting to additional responses from the participants.

During triangulation, both before and after member checking, the data from the interviews were analyzed to reveal the links connecting my conceptual framework to the doctoral candidate's cultural experiences in the program (Saldana, 2009, p. 137). Comparative analysis is used in autoethnography (Ellis, 2004 in Robinson and Clardy, 2010) to guide efforts in developing meaning from the information inducted from the data (Creswell, 2013, p. 45; Saldana, 2009, p. 140; Patton, 2015, p. 64). I used Atlas Ti coding software to organize descriptions within data. As meaning surfaced from the data, the themes were analyzed to give further definition and detail to conceptual framework from which the interactive interviews were based and rewritten in chronological sequence (Creswell, 2013, p. 74).

The themes rising from the data were restoried in a logical order to understand the story of the candidate experience with clarity and perspective. Restorying is defined by Creswell (2013) as, "the process of reorganizing stories into some type of general framework" (p. 74). The framework is bounded by the experiences of the candidates in accordance to the attribute questions (see Appendix A for study attribute questions). Because the questions were developed through an understanding of my conceptual framework, I assume the themes surfacing from the data were closely related to the attributes defined in my study and describe what it was like to be dedicated to a goal and driven to succeed through many kinds of obstacles. The story was ordered chronologically (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), while the candidate's experience with the attributes added detailed meaning (Hubber & Whelan, 1999). Using reflexivity, member checking, and triangulation as means to build credibility and validate the data are common practice in narrative research.

It is at the point of restorying in which the audience was able to identify and understand how the attributes of self-efficacy, motivation, grit or perseverance, and change or transformation were measured. These attributes are measured by the experience of the participants. This is evident in the meaning surfaced by the analysis which will tell the story of the doctorate candidate. Findings from narrative research cannot be generalized, only transferred depending on whether the information is relative to his or her situation or circumstances. This is known as transferability. Morrow (2005) characterizes transferability: “transferability (vs. external validity or generalizability) refers to the extent to which the reader is able to generalize the findings of a study to her or his own context” (p. 252). From this passage, I understood that the audience will know if the findings from my study applicable or revealing.

### **Limitations and Delimitations of the Research Design**

Limitations and delimitations were conditions that affected my study. Limitations were the conditions or circumstances outside of my control, which affect or restrict my study. Delimitations were the boundaries that I had placed on my study. While a comfortable social venue may have aided in helping participants open up and be honest in their responses, truth still may have been limited. I would like to have thought that the participants were as truthful as possible. However, I understand that the social pressure of sharing personal feelings during an interactive interview may have encouraged people to follow each other’s answers. Because I have a somewhat personal relationship with the participants and that they wanted to see me succeed, my hope was that they spoke truthfully about their experiences. Another limitation to my study was evident in the familiarity I have with the participating on-campus doctoral candidates.

I have a close relationship with the participants in my study. I imagined the familiarity existing between the participating candidates and myself could have allowed certain things to get



past me during the interview. My research relied on noticing every little subtlety, which included observing the body language of a participant while he or she was confiding in me. Speaking to such details added to the thick and rich description needed in my narrative study. A fair amount of vigilance was needed while I kept an eye out for those details. Having a list of characteristics needing to be covered on hand during the interviews helped me speak the subtleties. Such subtleties included the observable body language and emotional state of the participants during the interview process. While it was unreasonable to think every nuance was noticeable, I believed building awareness helped me keep a watchful eye. Truth and familiarity were limitations that I could not control, whereas delimitations were the boundaries I set place in my study.

Delimitations were the boundaries that surrounded my study. The population sample that I am using to participate in the interactive interviews was a delimitation. Self-efficacy is a process that affects me personally and professionally. Because I had a personal and professional relationship with the on-campus doctoral candidates, it made the most sense to draw study participants from this pool of people. I did not choose to have online doctoral candidates participate in my study for a couple of reasons. The interviews depended on a close relationship between the researcher and the participants so that the information received is unfettered, genuine, and honest (Ellis, 2004). This was more likely to happen in a trusting environment where the participants are relaxed with someone they knew. Secondly, on-campus candidates had more similar experiences to my own than online candidates.

The fact that we have experienced the same instructions from the same on-campus instructors, the experience of the on-campus candidates was closer to my own than candidates who matriculated online. This was evident in the instructors who provided support aligned with

efficacious experiences like providing exemplars and giving feedback. A population receiving support from the same instructors who use the same or similar approach provided an account which came closest to resembling my own. Choosing from a pool of on-campus candidates brought more credibility to my study than including online candidates whose experiences may have been much different. My wife would have been a good participant to interview since she witnessed me undergoing personal change due to my experiences in the doctoral program. However, my wife would not be able to identify such changes from a professional perspective. For this reason, she was omitted from being a possible participant.

### **Expected Findings**

I expected the findings to confirm many of the theories exhibited in my story. One such finding was exemplified in how deliberate practice, feedback, modeling, and the emotions experienced during program matriculation changed the way a doctoral candidate thinks, feels, and behaves. While my study does not seek to quantify the effects of self-efficacy sources, I expected to understand how these experiences changed the way a candidate approaches problems during the pursuit of the long-term goal of successfully defending their dissertation and graduating. The participants in my study should open up and share the motivating factors that drive their ambition to achieve these goals. The findings explained how deliberate practice and the concept of a growth mindset perspective changed the way candidates think, feel, and behave toward goal achievement. It was expected that the findings described how perceptions have changed as a result of the reflection process employed during program matriculation. While there were no gaps to fill in the literature other than understanding the quantitative heavy theories through a qualitative lens, the theories of self-efficacy, motivation, perseverance, and change were confirmed through my story and the story of the participating doctoral candidates.

In addition to findings of my study, ethical concerns were taken into account during the development of my study.

### **Ethical Issues of the Purposed Study**

My position as both a researcher and a program administrator offers a unique perspective as I worked toward completing my study. Ethical issues within my study included any conflicts of interest that I may be a part of because of my unique position as candidate and program administrator. My position in this regard lent benefits that I did not take for granted. Other ethical issues were reviewed to understand the benefits and risks associated with participating in my study.

**Conflict of interests.** Conflicts of interest were evident in my study. One potential conflict was that my program administrator role had potential to cause professors to be less apt to assign me a failing or low grade on my work. Serving on academic committees and handling the course surveys from which candidates make comments about instructor performance could have potentially made me seem like someone who should be treated more carefully than another who is not both administrator and candidate. I prided myself in not letting those lines be crossed. I would even go so far as to say that my position as both researcher and program administrator invited tougher expectations from the faculty who taught within the program. I do not feel that I was given any special treatment in this regard. The best way I know to dissolve any conflict of interest in this sense was by being honest and performing at my best. Aside from the conflict of interest evident to me, I had bias toward what I studied.

It seemed natural to have bias toward the subjectivity in an autoethnographic study. Traditional approaches toward social science would have asked me to dismiss my thoughts and feelings in favor of keeping an objective distance. The whole story would not have been told as Jones et al. (2013) explains, “objectivity obscures the twists and turns research projects often

take” (p. 33). I needed to account for those twists and turns to support the reflexive aspects of my study. Speaking to what I learned and how I learned it added the layered account needed to develop thick and rich detail. Subjectivity was welcomed in autoethnography because it helped others understand my perspective and culture as Plummer (2001) points out: "What matters is the way in which the story enables the reader to enter the subjective world of the teller—to see the world from her or his point of view, even if this world does not 'match reality” (p.401).

My position as researcher and program administrator offers unique access to program materials and information. Previous to my entrance into the Ed.D. Program, part of my job called for me to help build many of the processes and policies that are currently in place. Such experiences included building the process and modules for the CITI Training that was currently operated by the university IRB. Being the first person to test run the process of registering and completing the CITI modules gave me insight as to the ethical implications involved in human subject research. I came to this understanding as an employee before any of the other candidates in the program were offered their research modules. In addition to building systems and creating policy, I also played a part in developing the program curriculum.

Before any candidates were enrolled in the program, the courses were contracted out to experienced writers who held expertise in the course’s subject area. As the courses were written and sent back for review, the Ed.D. Program would perform the final edits before the course would go to publication. I sat in on a majority of those course reviews. While sitting through the final course reviews, I would often contemplate how to go about completing many of the assignments. In this respect, I had access to the course materials before the program began its inaugural semester, before any other candidates began their programs. I believe my experience as an administrator afforded me an understanding of the program requirements and insight into

the course materials that other candidates were not able to have. When I eventually enrolled in the program myself, access continued to be unique.

In addition to having unique access to materials and program information, I had access to support. Sharing an office space with the program director, I had access to knowledge and support that others did not. Be able to ask questions regarding my study when needed was something that I appreciated and tried not take for granted. The same type of access was evident in my proximity to the professors who taught in the Ed.D. Program. At times, I have approached these people and asked for guidance or advice as to how to handle issues that I might have had with an assignment. Having this type of access placed me at an advantage when compared to the access other candidates had who may have felt obligated to wait until class to ask such questions. After witnessing the extent to which instructors were willing to offer support to other candidates, I did not see my proximity as an advantage, only a convenience.

**Ethical Issues.** Ethical issues in the proposed study were evident in the benefits and risks involved in my study. There is personal benefit for those who participate in the conversations during the interactive interviews. This time is important because candidates have an opportunity to get together outside of the classroom and exchange experiences. Engaging in narrative is therapeutic benefit to those who open up and share their thoughts and feelings in efforts to bring meaning to a story (Ellis, 2010). Jesus said, “truth will set you free” (John 8:32 New International Version). Maybe truth along with meaning drawn from the interviews brought with it benefit. Risk on the other hand had to be minimized.

The vulnerability of opening up was an emotional risk. Participants were notified of the risks and benefits of participating in my study. I promoted such transparency by supplying candidate participants with the general topic areas of discussion points, which were aligned to

the attributes of my study (see Appendix A for study attributes). My study asked candidate participants to share their experiences with the variable outlined above through conversations that helped the reader understand how doctoral candidates think, feel, and behave when moving toward goal achievement. Being up-front with the participating candidates and letting them know what will be asked of them hopefully alleviated any emotional risk that they may have before interviewing.

### **Summary**

The purpose of my study was to understand how experiences in the doctoral program have changed my sense of personal efficacy. Story telling as seen in narrative work was the way in which I wanted to understand what my experiences in the program have meant to me as a person and professional. Telling my story gave me an opportunity understand how experiences in the program with self-efficacy, motivation, grit or perseverance, and change or transformation have had an effect on my professional and personal attitudes, beliefs, and practices. By employing multiple points of qualitative analysis, I was able to come to a consensus of perspectives that spoke to the culture of doctoral candidates. Through autoethnography, the story of my experiences contributed to this understanding by illustrating how doctoral candidates thought, felt, and behaved when experiencing self-efficacy processes.

## Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

### Introduction

I began this journey to understand how experiences in the doctorate program changed my sense of personal efficacy. In a series of prescribed conversations with other candidates I have matriculated with on-campus, and the instructors who taught us, I examined how experiences in the doctorate program have changed me to become a better scholar, researcher, and person. Examining the experiences associated with the goal of earning a doctoral degree helped answer the major research question guiding my study: “How have experiences in the doctorate program changed my sense of personal efficacy?” As I extended the findings of the major research question, I was able to offer insight into the cultural experiences of other doctoral candidates and of the program through an autoethnographic narrative research design.

This chapter presents data collected and analyzed in my study. A description of the 13-participant sample is defined in detail. The sample represented three different perspectives: fellow candidates, course instructors, and myself. Data was gathered in conversational interviews with each participant, coded, and analyzed using the study attributes as a framework:

1. motivation;
2. self-efficacy;
3. grit or perseverance; and
4. change or transformation.

From the analysis, I was able to isolate descriptions of comparable doctoral experiences between the candidate and instructor participants. Similar experiences between these two groups of perspectives furthers an understanding of my own program experiences.

It is through my research that I find out who I am. I can better understand my experience through critical reflection. The attributes I chose framed the research designed to understand that

experience. I employed a reflective autoethnographic research design to allow me to critically develop my story. Biesta and Stengel (2006) characterize Dewey's interpretation of an *experience* by saying, "stimulus and response together, that is, the trying and the undergoing as well as the reflection that links them meaningfully, constitute "an experience" (p. 20). It is important for me to be able to describe, analyze, and reflect on my experiences because I want to provide a voice to the group of people, the doctoral candidates, who navigate personal, professional, and academic hurdles over the course of several years of study and in the end earn a terminal degree. The conversations offered an opportunity for me to discuss my experiences alongside those of the other two participant groups. Critically reflecting on program experiences of my own along with the participants sheds light on my journey and describes what has been my path over the last three years.

### **Description of the Sample**

Three factors affected decisions concerning the sample used in my study: (a) having enough participants, (b) ensuring the data was saturated, (c) and drawing in the right kind of participants. Verifying the proper way to understand and integrate each of these three pieces was necessary in order to validate my data. I accomplished this through an understanding of the literature.

The sample size of 14 in this study was adequate. Because the study is autoethnographic, I am included in the sample. There were eight doctoral candidates and five instructor participants. The literature backing a specific number of participants needed for a valid narrative study such as autoethnography is vague. The autoethnographic piece as presented by Wolcott's (1983) *Adequate Schools and Inadequate Education: The Life of a Sneaky Kid* indicated autoethnography as having only one participant aside from the researcher. Throughout Ellis's (2004) book, *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel*, many of the autoethnographic



accounts were supported by the experiences of multiple participants who had similar experiences to the author. In determining the sample size for a narrative study, Creswell (2013) said, “I found many examples with one or two individuals” (p. 157). Because it was difficult to verify a standard number of participants needed to support a valid narrative autoethnographic study, I used the concept of saturation to assure that my data contains enough rich information.

I needed to collect data until I found the information coming in was repetitive or saturated. There needed to be adequate detail to describe the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors associated with the study attributes to assure the data was credible. Baumberg (2012) described data saturation as, “*sufficient depth* on the *full range* of the phenomenon they’re interested in” (p. 37). I focused on collecting rich and thick information (Sandelowski, 2000; Patton, 2010). I had a system in place to help identify repetitive information between the participants. Part of the process included having the Attribute Conversation Checklist (Appendix F) of all the study attributes and sub-attributes in front of me while I was interviewing the participants. If a repetitive thought, feeling, or behavior was described during the interview, I placed an “S” for saturation next to the corresponding attribute which was being discussed. Additionally, the data was transcribed and coded in Atlas Ti according to the attributes. With this software, I was able to group descriptions according to the attributes, which allowed me to more easily compare conversations. In those comparisons, I was able to see repeated information along a majority of the study attributes.

After coming to terms with the sample size and understanding how to track saturation, I needed to be sure that I had information-rich participants. The study participants make up a purposeful sample. Patton (2010) noted “the purpose of purposeful sampling is to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (p. 169). In my

study, the right kind of participant is someone who experienced the same instructor and course work. In addition to the curriculum and its delivery, my study needed participants to be able to articulate the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors associated with their experiences. Like Patton (2010), Sandelowski (2000) believed, “the ultimate goal of purposeful sampling is to obtain cases deemed information-rich” (p. 338). I chose good storytellers who I perceived as having the ability to discuss their experiences in great detail.

Sample size, saturation, and participant status were validated in terms of the literature. The work of seminal authors guided me to know what a valid population sample would look like and produce. The sample size, rich depth of data, and understanding who was best suited for describing their experiences were three areas I perceived as critical to validate through the literature. The following is a detailed description of the participants who collaborated with me to build the details of my story.

**Doctoral candidates.** The description of the candidate participants varies in demographics, different areas of specialization study, and faith. While demographic information such as ethnicity, age, or location between the candidates is explained, demographic information alone, because the backgrounds were similar, is insufficient to fully characterize the participants. I also looked to the different types of professions represented by the group which indicated a desire to serve. This quality of service was reinforced by choice of specialization to study.

The study population matriculated in two different cohorts. There were seven females and one male in total, ranging in age from 30 to 60. All were located within an hour of the Portland metropolitan area. One candidate, originally from Africa, was the only Black candidate participant. Six of the other seven candidates were Caucasian and raised in or near the Pacific Northwest. One candidate participant was from the Midwestern United States. Classes were

taken together one night a week for three hours on-campus. Aside from attending many of the same courses together over three-year period, the cohorts shared resources electronically through the Blackboard learning management system. One of the cohorts built and kept communications between themselves through a social networking account.

All of the candidate participants in the sample held full-time jobs while earning their doctoral degrees. Five candidates taught or supported elementary school children. Two of these participants worked with special needs children while the other two were general education classroom teachers. Another candidate served as a principal for an elementary school within a large school district. One of the candidate participants was a professional in the field of social work. Two other candidates held administration and faculty positions at the university.

This doctoral program offers an Ed.D. Degree which is characterized by practical application of research rather than a Ph.D. which stresses pure clinical or professional investigations. Many of the candidates aligned their professional interests to their specialization study. The cohorts were fragmented, or broken up, during the second year of study while candidates completed their specialization courses. The candidates' choice of specialization was widespread, representing four of the five specializations available in the program. Five of the candidates were enrolled in the Transformational Leadership specialization which focused on the elements of organizational development. One candidate, who wanted to experience an even mix of administration and teacher-based courses, matriculated through the High Education track. The candidate who held a principal position completed the Educational Administration specialization courses during her second year of study. The eighth candidate participant enrolled in a different discipline so that some of her previous master's work transferred into her program. All of the

participants came back together as one cohort in year three of the program when dissertation development commences.

As I became more familiar with my participants, I realized that faith played important role during trying periods in the program. The program is a part of the College of Education within a small faith-based university. All of the candidate participants consider themselves orientated to the Christian religion. Two of the eight candidates perceived their faith in God a source of emotional strength sought after during challenging periods in the program. “God’s will,” as it was referenced by the participants, helped these two candidates realize there may be a higher power calling on them to succeed. During the interactive interviews, many of the candidates mentioned how much they appreciate and value the small school experience of less than 15 candidates in a class, in addition to the Christian faith.

My position as the candidate’s academic advisor seemed to create a pre-existing, trusting relationship with the participants that helped promote a fruitful interview environment. The invitation-list of prospective candidates I developed to invite participants to join my research study was based on two important considerations. There needed to be a level of comfort and openness in place to promote honest conversation between myself and the participant as well as an understanding that the individual would be able to speak freely. From my perspective, open and honest conversations needed to be unrestricted. I felt the only way to achieve this level of frankness was through an understanding that the interview was a safe space to confide sensitive information. Many times throughout the interview experience, I assured the participants of their anonymity. Additionally, I explained that anything mentioned during the interview which caused regret afterwards would not be used in my study. I did this during the member checking

session by highlighting parts of the transcription which were deemed by the participants as regrettable. Later during the analysis, I knew the highlighted quotes could not be used.

Because there was an existing relationship with participants, I had a good feel for who could provide details or tell a good story. Relationships developed over the two previous years naturally predisposed me and the participants to the necessary level of trustworthiness needed to alleviate participatory fears and promote open and detailed conversations. The two-and-a-half average hours of interview time with each participant proved invaluable in mining rich, detailed information.

**Instructor participants.** The reasons I included instructors are different than the reasons I included the doctoral candidates. I chose instructors as participants because they provided experience, past knowledge, and rich information. As teachers, they have a different perspective that could be valuable in understanding candidates and program culture. The instructor participants matriculated through a variety of doctoral programs. Those programs are similar to this one in terms of degree preparation but different in philosophy and curriculum. Their experiences in their respective programs proved to be insightful information. In addition, many of the instructors are considered expert instructors and were instrumental in writing and developing program philosophy and curriculum. Democratic participation, ethical formation, and inquiry are some of the philosophical pieces developed by this group of instructors.

The instructor participants were described through an explanation of demographic information, their connection to program philosophies and candidate culture, and whether sufficient data was collected. Four of the five instructor participants taught classes that I had taken during my first year of studies. This particular group consisted of three females and two males. The five instructors ranged in age from age 35 to age 75. Three different ethnicities

represented the instructors, three of whom are Caucasian. The other two instructors are American citizens but were born and raised outside of the United States. Like the candidates, the instructors lived within an hour of the Portland area. The instructors were available for office hours aside from the three hours we spent together in class once a week. I knew the data was sufficient because repeated descriptions were identified in some of the attributes discussed between the instructors similar to the saturation found with the candidate data.

Important aspects of our interview time were establishing trust with the instructors and ensuring there was a comfortable atmosphere to hold conversations. My pre-existing relationship with them as an administrator, and a doctoral candidate in the program fostered trust, (Ellis et al., 2010) with the instructors, allowing them to become comfortable enough to disclose the personal thoughts, feelings, and behaviors experienced when they were earning their doctoral degrees. The interviews were held in familiar surroundings to help accommodate a comfortable environment.

All five of the instructors are Christian and believe strongly in servant leadership. This faith-based university stipulates all faculty members need to be Christian and offers chapel every day. All the instructors have pledged in a chapel service to support and be of service to students. Service to the candidates in the program is guided by philosophies in servant leadership, which “focuses primarily on the growth and well-being of people and the communities to which they belong” (Greenleaf, 2016, para. 4) and mission of the university.

### **Research Methodology and Analysis**

I wanted to tell my story in this study. The research design I chose, autoethnography, allowed me to explore personal experiences and relate them to social and cultural influences. While theories of motivation, self-efficacy, and grit or perseverance have normally been researched quantitatively, I needed a qualitative design to answer my research question: How

have experiences in the doctorate program changed my sense of self-efficacy? I believed that comparing my story with the stories of others in the program, underscored by theories of motivation, self-efficacy, and perseverance or grit, would explain how the participants and I changed as we pursued our goals.

Implementation of my study required one change from my initial proposal. Previously, I thought comparing pre- and post- program experiences would describe meaningful differences brought on by influential moments in the program. Instead, the pre- and post- treatment measures were ineffective in describing the more holistic perspective of the entire experience.

I collected experiences from participants through deep interviewing and organized them according to study attributes. I stored and analyzed data in Atlas Ti, and used summative content analysis to identify and compare (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) similar descriptions between the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors between students and instructors. Transcript quotes which directly described an attribute were organized in a matrix for easy access and comparison. Common descriptions of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in a given attribute were highlighted with the same color. Matching colored cells within the spreadsheet signified there were common descriptions between two perspectives. Descriptions for my story were drawn from these shared descriptions.

### **Summary of Findings**

Experiences shape the way people think, feel, and act. The candidates, instructors, and I told rich and detailed stories about our experiences in our respective doctoral programs. Through these stories, I learned that experiences were similar and shared because the way in which we *process* our experiences does not change. Thoughts, feelings, and behaviors differ only because the experiences are unique to the individual. This uniqueness explains why individuals interpret and react to experiences differently. The differences in experiences add to

the rich detail of my study. Our conversations were guided by the literature-based attributes and sub-attributes listed in Table 1.

Table 1

*Study Attributes and Sub-Attributes*

Study Attributes	Self-Efficacy	Motivation	Perseverance/Grit	Change/Transformation
Sub Attributes	Practice Feedback Modeling Emotional Involvement	Intrinsic Extrinsic Goal Connection	Deliberate Practice Growth Mindset	Critical Reflection

*Note.* A list of the four major study attributes and sub-attributes. The attributes represent topic areas discussed during interviews with the study participants. Together we described shared experiences encountered throughout our respective programs.

Self-efficacy was characterized by the thoughts, feelings, and behavior experienced and responses to those encounters. When participants had a positive experience, they generally felt positive about it and responded or behaved in similar manner. These outcomes were positive and in many instances inspired confidence. When the experiences were perceived as negative or emotionally intense, the participants reacted in a way which did not immobilize them. In many instances, movement continued because of the support sought to get through tougher times. It appears there was more intrinsic than extrinsic motivation for all participants. The main extrinsic motivator was economic. Intrinsic motivation, often defined as interest and love of learning was much more prevalent, and seemingly, important to the participants. With only a few participants subscribing to lower levels of human need, a majority of them sought to self-actualize themselves.



The perseverance or grit attribute was intended to illustrate the commitment to practice to become better and the growth-mindset needed to meet and successfully address challenges. Most of the participants agreed that deliberate practice needed to be intentional. The feeling surrounding deliberate practice as seen with inquiry did not always garner positive feelings. However, it was the goal ahead which for many served as motivation to engage in deliberate practice or seek solutions for problems encountered.

Reflection was used in my study to describe change and transformation. Participants described the process undertaken when having reflective moments. Many of the participants acknowledged in some fashion that reflection is synonymous with learning. Learning in this sense is an example of change because it takes the learner from questions to answers. For this group, reflection needs to be an intentional practice. Transformation is different, deeper, and more meaningful. In this respect, changes in the participant's perception informed a different way of thinking, feeling, and behaving. It transformed them.

### **Presentation of the Data and Results**

The four major attributes and supporting sub-attributes (Table 1) which frame the story of my journey are connected in a way to describe goal attainment. The self-belief I have in my abilities to earn the doctoral degree determines the amount of motivation used to pursue this goal (Bandura, 1997). Perseverance and grit support the self-belief (Usher, 2016) I have in my abilities to achieve my goal.

The presentation of the data and results in my study are separated according to the three different groups of people who participated. Other candidates whom I have taken courses with on-campus, the instructors who taught us, and I represent the three different perspectives of doctorate program experiences. These three groups of perspectives are summarized within the framework driving my research study. Motivation, self-efficacy, grit or perseverance, and

change or transformation are the four major attributes which frame my story and help describe my journey toward goal achievement. Understanding the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors within the attribute framework aids toward developing a cultural understanding of the doctoral candidate.

The following is a summary of what was found in the data taken from the interactive interviews. Candidate and instructor responses are presented through summary and comparison by attribute before being compared to my responses in Chapter 5.

**Motivation.** The first question asked of every prospective candidate who applies to the program was “Why do you want a doctoral degree?” It was also the first question I asked of the participants when discussing the motivation attribute. The response to this question helped me understand the reasons why candidates enroll in a doctorate program.

Motivation is primarily understood through exploration of the external (extrinsic) and the internal (intrinsic) motives for establishing goals and working toward completion. Intrinsic motives are driven by internal influences which bring pleasure and are supported by a high degree of interest (Vallerand, 1997, p. 280), while extrinsic motives are influenced by external influences operating outside of individuals such as rewards for achieving a task (Deci & Ryan, 2000). All motives are known through an understanding of the connection to the goal and the human need being met (Maslow, 1943). Maslow (1943) described five hierarchal ordered human needs which one is constantly working toward satisfying: (a) physiological state, (b) safety, (c) love, (d) esteem, and (e) self-actualization. The physiological state is the most basic and pressing need humans constantly work toward fulfilling while self-actualization is less detrimental to the individual. All participants were motivated to pursue and complete their doctoral degree. The next section begins with external motivation of both candidates and

instructors because motivating factors were similar in both groups. However, intrinsic motivation and human needs associated with goal attainment are more complicated and nuanced and therefore are discussed by separate groups before comparison.

*Candidate and instructor extrinsic motives.* There were common external factors for both candidates and instructors in pursuing a doctoral degree. The external factors included career advancement, employment opportunities, or making more money. From the perspective of the candidate participants, six out of eight mentioned earning a doctorate may help advance or solidify their careers. One candidate participant said she is earning her doctorate “because I had to get so many units to keep my administrative license by a certain date.” While she is satisfying licensure requirements, she also wanted to gain “credibility,” an external influence, in the eyes of her peers and colleagues.

Not every participant had an external motive for pursuing a doctorate. During conversation about extrinsic motivation, two candidate participants and two instructor participants did not specifically identify external influences, but instead continued to talk about intrinsic motives. Collectively, these four participants were purely motivated to enter into the doctorate program from the intrinsic motives driving them to succeed and graduate. One of the candidate participants brought this point home when she said, “I’ve never gone to school because I had to go to school, well except for maybe getting my teaching degree. In this program, it’s always been because I wanted to.”

Two of the instructor participants were not able to talk about external motivation because they believed no extrinsic motives influenced their decision to enter into a program of study. One instructor explained his rationale for having no external influences by saying, “I didn’t do it for money. I did it for the interior-drive of wanting to know that field, and with the hopes that

when I got out, I could do something with it, and make a living, and all of that.” While the instructor did mention the possibility of making a living based off his decision to pursue a doctorate, his influence was clearly internal. Aside from these four participants, during our conversations every other participant mentioned that they were externally motivated to earn the degree for employment purposes.

*Candidate intrinsic motives.* All eight of the candidate participants were intrinsically motivated to pursue the doctoral degree and complete the program. Most of the conversation time with candidate participants was centered on the internal or intrinsic reasons for pursuing a doctoral degree. Intrinsic motivation generated longer, more in-depth, and stimulating conversation than the topic of external motivation. Hearing what other candidates had to say about their internal motives driving them to succeed brought me closer into a personal part of their lives and helped me think about my own intrinsic reasons for pursuing his degree.

Love of learning and personal challenge were the two main reasons people were motivated. Four of the eight participants used the word *love* to describe how they felt about learning or researching during the intrinsic motivation discussion. One person articulated his love for learning by offering, “I love the process of learning new fields, new things, and new knowledge. There's personal satisfaction going through the process and learning something new.” While the love of learning was evident with these four candidate participants, others mentioned how earning a doctorate was a personal challenge.

Three people mentioned their intrinsic reason for earning the doctoral degree as being *personal challenge*. One of these three elaborated on this thought by speaking to what it may feel like after she reaches her goal of program completion:

The end goal is being more knowledgeable, being more competent, and being more aware. The fancy hat is great, but there's a sense of accomplishment or will be when we get to the end of this path. It's going to feel really, really good to be like, 'Hey, we climbed that mountain.'

Love of learning and personal challenge were the two main motives used to describe the internal influences for earning a doctoral degree. Reasons stemming from personal family beliefs or situations also spurred interest and desire to accomplish the goal. Two candidates connected their intrinsic motives for earning the degree to their families. One person discussed that she wanted to set an example for her children. During out time together this person said, "I want to inspire them. I want them to know that they're not held back. They're not restricted to only going so far." The love of learning, satisfying personal challenges, and care of family were all internal influences which drove thought, feelings, and behaviors to interrelate and move people toward their goals.

***Instructor intrinsic motives.*** My discussions with the instructors offered an expanded perspective of why candidates search out the doctoral degree. Five instructors who had taught classes in my program participated in my study. There was one instructor who used to the word "love" to describe how she felt about reading. She expressed her perspective by saying, "I like to learn. I love to read. I like to write. I know it's a struggle just as it is for anyone. Because of that, I'm constantly wanting to know more, learn more." Her response, as well as those from the candidates who used the word love in association of learning is not an indicator of Maslow's human need for love, rather it is more like loving to do something instead. Satisfying the human need for love according to Maslow (1943) is described as, "He will hunger for affectionate relations with people in general, namely, for a place in his group, and he will strive with great

intensity to achieve this goal” (p. 9). From Maslow’s theory of human needs, love is intended as a need for affection and to be loved by others. Descriptors besides love were used to describe the internal motives for pursuing a doctoral degree.

In addition to love, a strong interest and passion for the area of study was an internal motivator for instructor participants. Two instructor participants in particular felt this strong passion and high degree of interest for their studies. One of the two talked about considering a career in medicine prior to working on her doctor of education. She describes her thought process for choosing between the two fields by saying, “Understanding human behavior was so complex to me. It was so fascinating. I was thinking, I get a chance to either delve into the human mind or the human body” She chose the field of education because it gave her an opportunity to study human behavior, which from her perspective was “fascinating.” Other intrinsic motives drove the instructor participants toward earning their doctorates degrees.

Like with the candidate participants, family centered motives were a strong internal influence for instructor participants pursuing their doctoral degrees. The intrinsic motives driving two instructors stem from family situations. One instructor pursued his doctoral degree to match the educational status of his grandfather. “My Grandfather was an exalted figure for me because he was a doctor.” The instructor’s respect for his grandfather was great enough to ignite an internal desire to be a doctor himself. Other matters with family were strong motivators.

The other instructor’s internal drive for earning her doctorate came about from a situation concerning the passing of her father. Through education and eventually earning her doctoral degree, she was able to support her family. With her father’s passing, the responsibilities of supporting the household, which included her sister and her mother, fell squarely on her

shoulders. Because of the connection she had in education due to her father's previous work, she sought out education to continue growth and use it to support her family. She spoke to this point when she said, "I know that me being here and sending home money monthly, because I send home money every month, is a better position for us in general than for me to be home and be paid as a professor there." My reasons for pursuing the goal of earning a doctoral degree were confirmed through the conversations pertaining to intrinsic motivation. Aside from reflecting on and analyzing the intrinsic and extrinsic motives, there was another way to understand the reasoning for pursuing a doctoral degree.

***Candidate human needs and goal connection.*** Safety, self-esteem, self-actualization (Maslow, 1943) are the human needs identified by all participants as being related closest to the goal of earning a doctorate. Five of the eight candidate participants sought self-actualization. One candidate perceived her doctorate as an opportunity to self-actualize change as a change agent within her profession: "I want to be a part of big change, significant change." Two of the candidates are parents and see the way in which they model behavior associated with their aspirations for earning a doctorate as a way of self-actualizing parenting skills. One of these candidates made this point known when he said it was important to "be a good role model for my kids." Two candidates mentioned learning as a way of self-actualizing talents associated with researching and teaching. One of these candidates likened her learning as a researcher in terms of skill development as an avenue of self-actualization: "developing my leadership skills and when I'm teaching and engaging with educators is when I feel actualized." Conversations centered on learning and researching as a way of self-actualizing the inner-teacher helped the candidates understand improvement was continuous.

Two other candidate participants looked to satisfy different human needs. One candidate satisfied an esteem need because she wanted to earn credibility among her peers and colleagues. She confirmed this by saying, “I’m doing a lot of innovative things in education and I feel that having those letters after your name give you a certain amount of credibility that you wouldn't have otherwise to make those changes stick.” While this person sought esteem, another participant was looking to satisfy the need for safety. This person wanted to protect her child. Part of her motivation to earn a doctorate stems from an incident where her daughter was coerced into sex trafficking. The motive stemming from this experience was strong enough to persuade her to switch program specializations because the new specialization offered more opportunities to learn about how to change organizations. She believes her knowledge can help others achieve safety by offering the following:

My switch over from teacher leadership to transformational was somewhat the hope that maybe some of the knowledge that I gained can eventually be used in some format towards helping with nonprofits that are dealing with sex trafficking victims and not just working within the school system, but within other avenues.

This candidate wanted to make the world a better and safer place by improving organizational planning and implementing change.

***Instructor human need and goal connection.*** Three of the instructor participants are also seemingly satisfying the need to self-actualize through curiosity or a high degree of interest as motive. Curiosity and having interest in something can be considered intrinsic (Vallerand, 1997; Deci & Ryan, 2000), however for the doctorate candidate these qualities expand into a different understanding of motivation. Just like a chef needs to create a dish of food, a doctorate candidate needs to research. One instructor summed up this point by saying, “I’m always one of



those students who asks ‘Why?’ I’m very curious by nature.” In this example the curious nature of the candidate necessitates the action of research to satisfy the human drive to self-actualize.

***Motivation summary.*** Describing motivation through the lens of the candidates and the instructors offered a varied description of why the study participants decided to pursue their doctoral degrees. The love for learning and having a high degree of interest in learning were expressed as intrinsic influences for both candidates and instructor participants. In this respect, love was associated with having a strong interest in learning. Four of the eight candidates had either a strong interest or love for learning, while three of the five instructors described how they had a strong interest in what they were studying during their doctorate work. Three of the eight candidates described the internal motive influencing them to earn a doctoral degree as a personal challenge. None of the instructors described their intrinsic motive as a personal challenge. Two of the eight candidates perceived their family as an internal influence, while two of the five instructors cited family as the intrinsic reason for pursuing a doctorate. With a majority of the participants having a strong interest for the learning associated with their respective doctoral degrees, the description of the internal influence was well described. As a result, I considered the data for the intrinsic sub-attribute saturated. Perspectives concerning a different type of motivation were evident between the two participant groups.

Common external influences for pursuing a doctoral degree were shared by both the candidates and the instructors. Six out of eight candidates and three out of five instructors believed they were earning doctoral degrees to satisfy employment-related external influences. Because employment influences were shared by so many in both groups, data adequately saturated the description of the extrinsic motivation sub-attribute. Similarities were seen in the human need driving participants toward goal completion.

Self-actualization was the human need most described by both participants groups. Five of the eight candidates and three of the five instructors described how they see themselves self-actualized while matriculating through their respective doctorate programs. With eight of the 13 total participants satisfactorily describing the self-actualization sub-attribute, the data was saturated. Aside from the way in which a majority of the participants described how they see themselves self-actualized, two other human needs were met. Only one candidate participant reported themselves as wanting esteem. One candidate and one instructor each looked to satisfy the need for safety when pursuing the doctoral degree for their respective programs.

The results of the analysis confirm that every study participant was motivated to earn a doctoral degree. The comparison analysis of the conversations associated with the three sub-attributes revealed common descriptions of the influences, needs, and goals which motivate doctoral candidates to succeed. These details helped inform my own story of motivation.

**Self-efficacy.** In the previous section motivation attribute explains why a person would want to earn a doctoral degree. In this section, the self-efficacy attribute described the experiences encountered upon beginning the program. In his Self-Efficacy Theory, Bandura (1977) identified four types of experiences which influence one's self-efficacy: (a) previous experiences with a task or practice, (b) modeling, (c) feedback (d) and emotional involvement. These four types of experiences effect the self-belief people have in their abilities to successfully accomplish the task associated with the experience. Consequently, this process self-regulates thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in an adaptive way to move forward successfully from the experience and onto the next one. The perspectives of both participant groups, candidates and instructors, provided descriptions of their experiences associated with self-efficacy.

*Candidate previous experiences or practice.* Previous experiences with a task provided insight into accomplishing the same task in future attempts. Previous experiences in my study means practice. The experience of practicing self-regulates behaviors so performance in future attempts can be optimized (Zimmerman, 2000). More experience or practice means there may be more belief in the ability to accomplish it. From the perspective of the candidates, practice needed to be useful, interesting, and viewed as necessary.

Candidate participants had some things in common regarding their experiences with practice. Four candidates thought practice, by way of writing assignments and projects, leading up to dissertation development, needed to be useful and have a practical application. For example, "In my mind, it's really hard for me to do something that I don't see a use for." When it was understood that useful practice means practical application, two of the four candidates found "value" in what they were practicing. One of the candidates who found value in practical practice commented, "If I found purpose in it, if I knew I could apply it, then I valued it." Making connections between practice and the objective is one way of knowing when practice is useful. Another one of the four candidates who thought practice needed to be useful provided an explanation to her point when she said, "There needs to be a direct connection between practice and the task that is necessary."

A different feeling emerged when there is no connection between practice and the objective or when practice is deemed useless. Three of the four candidates who talked about the usefulness behind practice felt "frustration" when they were not able to make a connection between what they were doing and the objective. One of the candidates who experienced frustration while working on what they perceived as a useless assignment dealt with the stress of the emotion by thinking about the goal of graduating. She said, "Keeping the end goal of

graduating in front of me helps me push through.” The same candidate saw this goal as a “beacon of light.”

Two other candidates believed practice needed to be interesting. One participant believed there needs to be a connection between the amounts of time spent practicing and the amount of interest involved. She said “Interest and time; for me interest is essential. I'll go without sleep if I'm that interested in something.” In this statement, the amount of time she was willing to spend practicing was dependent upon the amount of interest associated with the practice. The candidate's response aligns with Duckworth's (2006) theory of grit and perseverance, which concludes the correlation between the degree of interest and the amount of time one is willing to spend practicing as an indicator of success.

Two other candidates had a different view of practice. They believed practice was painful and not fun. One of the two candidates perceived practice as painful but necessary when she said, "I knew going into it that I had to be diligent and organized and that the pain, that at times, it was going to be painful and the pain was necessary." In this context, the candidate understood the amount of work and the practice involved in the program was going to be formidable. Later in the interview, she continued her thought on practice, "Although it is very demanding, it fills me up in a way." In this context, the pain felt and thought of in terms of practice was a part of the growth process experienced during her program.

***Instructor previous experience or practice.*** The instructors perceived practice in three different ways. Practice was described as a discipline. Practice strategies were described by this group of participants. In the eyes of the instructors, practice needed to be applicable.

Practice was associated with *discipline* by one candidate. “I think this idea of practice, one thing that before the program that I did not do very well was discipline.” A “mind shift” was

needed to accommodate the demanding schedule for then four years of her life. Establishing goals helped. “What practice really taught me is putting goals and sticking to it to rigor, to be focused.” When challenges did present themselves, she “refocused” and continued forward.

The “iterative learning process” was acknowledged as one instructor’s teaching strategy. “That notion about still coming back to something that’s complex practice. From his perspective, offering opportunity for the candidate to experience achievement through “sustained effort builds confidence.”

One spoke about a pivotal kind of practice during his doctoral journey which prepared him for success:

I think the most important piece of practice in my doctoral program was practicing writing from that very first disastrous time until Dick would have you write and write, over, and over, and over, and over, and over, and over, and over, and over again.

His intent to practice multiple times helped the instructor build proficiency to successfully write a dissertation. Additionally, the skill gained from practicing applied to the over-arching goal.

*Candidate modeling experience.* The candidates described experiences using models in the program from three different perspectives. The use of models in the program was perceived as instructive. Candidates believed models instilled a sense of confidence in what they were doing. This group also understood the use of models as being too restrictive in terms of developing a personal voice in their writing. In the following the candidates described their experiences with models and how it changed the self-belief they had in their abilities.

Four candidates believed the models provided in the program were instructive. Two candidates talked about positive experiences which described how instructive the mentors and leaders were in their program experience. When they saw such people present in class they

asked questions within themselves to understand how and why the presenters' qualities were something to be emulated. One participant asked questions centered on skills and traits. "What is the quality or the skill or the trait that they embody or are modeling that I would want to see in myself?" The other candidate asked, "What kind of strategies do they use?" Answering these types of questions while experiencing a modeling moment helped the candidate know what personal qualities they wanted to develop further.

Instructive nature of using models helped another candidate know how to approach assignments. She believed "effective models provide a strong connection" to the expectations of the assignment. "Until you see it, how are you going to know what it looks like?" Models used throughout the program for this candidate provided "concrete examples" of what was expected from assignments.

Models which were perceived as negative or bad were also instructive. One of the candidates described the difficult relationship she had with an instructor who in her eyes modeled bad behavior. The behavior in question, according to the candidate, was related to the instructor's "lack of supervision." From her perspective, the instructor did not have "enough experience" to competently lead a classroom. She believed bad models illustrate, "not only what to do but what not to do."

For three other candidates, models inspired "confidence." One candidate began writing the literature review without reviewing the program writing guide for the corresponding chapter of her dissertation. Not having a model to follow during this period caused "angst." "Having no structure was "very difficult" and made me feel anxious in every class." After reviewing the writing guide, she felt differently. "Yeah, the writing guides were really, really helpful for me, and made me feel more confident about 'Okay, I see how this is done.' I can do that."

The other two candidates described their model in a different context than the previous six candidates. One of them said models can be “restrictive.” His discomfort using APA as a model for writing his dissertation was described using the classroom where we were conducting the interview as a metaphor:

You're operating but within the walls of this classroom. You can see something on the outside but you can't really use it because it's outside the window. You can't get it because you have your four walls. You can't go past this because if you do then it's not accepted anymore. It feels restrictive in some ways.

It seems he thought of APA as keeping him contained within the classroom walls.

***Instructor modeling experience.*** The instructors believed models experienced in their respective doctoral programs were instructive in some way. Experience with models for some were described as a “test of fortitude.” For others, models were a way of finding balance and comfort. Models also help this group understand what not do.

The type of instruction modeled by the professors of two instructors was called “tough love” by one of them. This term characterized the interaction she had with her committee chair who had “very little time to spend” with her. She figured this was so because he chaired, “25 committees.” Time was not an issue for the professor of the other instructor. His instructor modeled tough love by asking questions which would knowingly send him back to the library to find answers. “Why do you think that about this person’s theory? Don’t you think you could be wrong about that? I don’t agree with you, why should I agree with you?” He described the type of teaching model endorsed by his professor as “a Darwinian approach to learning.” The tough love models were effective and instructive because it helped the instructors get to a “point of strength” to push through and succeed.

Two other instructors saw their experiences with models as a way of finding balance in behavior. The PowerPoint modeled by the professor caused one instructor to question her presentation strategy. The professor's model used less text and more imagery which was perceived by the instructor as somewhat exciting. "It helped me think more about how to put together a good presentation that, yeah, doesn't bore the audience."

Another instructor used the company of his colleagues as a model to find balance in his behavior. The instructor and his wife attended a social function with a group of superintendents. With it being his first time attending an event of this nature, he placed a pressure on himself to fit in. He felt like an "outsider." The scene at dinner did not help. While sitting with his wife among his peers, the instructor cut into his Cornish hen causing a piece of game bird to fly across the table onto his wife's blouse. Things seemed to get worse when the instructor felt that he answered a question poorly in front of his peers. He said, "I felt like an idiot." After conferring with a friend at the event about the situation, the instructor later realized he needed to be who he was and not who they were.

The last instructor to talk about modeling thought it was important to be exposed to models which opposed her instruction philosophies. She said to me during the interview, "I believe modeling is also what not to follow." She characterized her experience with modeling in the following:

I have instructors who acted in a certain way during my program and I think when I become an instructor, that's not what I'm going to do and I follow that. To me, that was a model and I thank them for that because they were all role models that I didn't need to follow.

Her experience with this model guided her behavior as an instructor.



*Candidate feedback experience.* Three of the candidates' experience with feedback received during the program was said to spark "confidence." One candidate believed the manner in which feedback was given or interpreted determines if the experience inspired confidence. "The derogatory feedback made me feel frustrated. I also felt kind of frustrated with myself. That was frustrating to me for it to be addressed in that manner." Conversely, when the feedback was given in a thoughtful and gentle way, and received well by the candidate, a different perspective and behavior took shape. "I found that his way of guiding the writing and asking for deeper insight made me feel like I could take risks safely in what I wrote." She added, "It also helped me improve my writing definitely, and feel more confident about my writing because his suggestions were constructive."

Another candidate associated feedback with her experience with the iterative learning process endorsed by the program. Previous academic work during her masters' degree experience did not allow for a revision process. She explained the difference between then and now in the following:

What I like for the first time, what this program has allowed me to do is the iterative process. I was not familiar with that at all. You mean you're giving me a passing grade and I get to resubmit it for an even better grade?

Having that second opportunity to revise, learn, and resubmit something better, "bolstered confidence."

Two candidates discussed their experiences with peer editing and the feedback they received from their fellow candidates. For one, it took time to warm up to receiving peer feedback. "That feedback, once you got comfortable with it, was really good." Once "trust" was established in the relationships within the cohort, the feedback was easier to accept. "I think that

all of that helped me to feel more comfortable and confident with myself not to be so afraid.”

The other candidate saw her peer edit feedback as “invaluable.” She added “the opportunities that we had for peer feedback were really valuable for me in this program too. Sometimes even more so than the feedback from the professor.”

For two candidates, feedback was described as instructive during their dissertation development phase. One candidate liked how the feedback “directed” her to know what to do. “Once she started giving me that direction I thought “Oh okay. All right. I can do this.” The other candidate “loved” critical feedback because it “made sense” to her. The feedback gave specific direction in a way for the candidate to think and behave in a way which garnered success.

For one candidate, the experience with feedback was an opportunity to break away from old habits that did not make sense anymore. In previous academic programs, the candidate looked to the grade for feedback because she always did well in school. In her eyes, if a good grade was received, “there was nothing else to know.” This experience with feedback in this program was different. Her experience “forced me to grow was to look at the feedback and not care as much about the grade, and look at content of the words that were being said in response to what I had put on my paper.” This experience changed her behavior. “It's undoing 30 years of schooling for me, to not care about the grade.”

***Instructor feedback experience.*** Two of the instructors characterized feedback as instructive. One of the instructors talked about feedback from a strategic perspective. “For me, providing feedback meant to help students look at their own thought process and writing process and look for ways to improve their own skill set, their own ways of looking and thinking about writing.” Another intention of this strategy was to empower her students “to start doing that

assessment of their writing as they're writing and so my feedback is geared toward helping them develop those thinking patterns.” The other instructor talked about an experience in which he decided against accepting the feedback offered to him. “I submitted to a professor I was hoping to impress who offered an iterative process but I did not take that person up on it.” As a result, the grade stayed the same. Reflecting on his decision as the fact “stimulated the idea that, hey, you had options, next time take them and keep at it, and I did.” In this situation, not considering the feedback had a negative consequence.

For another instructor, feedback was *discovered* because of the way it was facilitated by the instructor’s professor. In this experience, the professor asked the instructor to explain his writing to a peer in class during group work, “Tell him what you wrote.” Because the instructor wanted to impress his professor and classmates, he wrote something “complicated.” As a result, the instructor was unable to explain what he wrote. The instructor believed that this type of feedback was discovered because of how the professor strategized the lesson. The feedback was effective because it guided his writing.

Experiences with feedback for another instructor indicated that feedback is a “way of creating social presence.” Giving feedback takes thoughtfulness. “Because you're willing to give, it doesn't mean someone is open to take the feedback.” In her mind people react to feedback differently. “Everyone has to take their journey by themselves and not you can just ... If it is the right time, they will come to a place for you to give the feedback.”

***Candidate emotional experience.*** Candidates were subjected to an array of intense emotions at different periods in the program. While experiencing anxiety driven moments, decisions needed to be made in order for movement to continue. For some, this meant going

through thought and feeling processes to render a decision. The following are accounts of the candidate's emotional experiences and their outcomes.

Three candidates at one point in their program believed they may have to take a break or withdraw from the university. The decision to continue was "emotionally based" according to one of the candidates. Another candidate was "unsure" if she could continue because her schedule became too crowded. The other candidate experienced health problems which caused her to think about taking a break. Some of the emotions felt during these vulnerable times included "defeat, uncertainty, and frustration." In each scenario, the candidate's instructor played a role in supporting and helping the candidate realize he or she had what it took to finish. One characterized the instructor's support, "he held my feet to the fire."

"It was an emotional decision to join the program" according to one candidate. "When I finished my masters, a couple of my friends that I went to school with were kind of thinking about that, and then I thought I won't let them beat me." The candidate's competitive nature added to the emotions surrounding his decision to join the program. "They challenged me without telling me they were challenging me to do this." While contemplating the decision to join, he felt "scared" because he would incur more financial debt by going into the program. After discussing this opportunity with his wife and receiving her support, he made the decision to join.

"Intense emotions" were felt by another candidate while writing to meet a deadline. These feelings were different than the ones experienced in previous academic work. "The Ed.D. Program has been more emotional than when I was pursuing a bachelor's or my master's degree. I think that's because all that I'm doing is for myself." Here, the candidate indicated the personal nature of the work she was doing in the program. Because the program experiences were in her

mind, personal and intense, she believed “it's definitely more draining than the other degrees” she pursued.

The last candidate to comment on the emotional decisions experienced in the program pointed out the dual nature of making an emotionally based decision. In every decision made she said, “You have emotional processes, and then you have logical processes.” Once these two processes run their course, she was “able to merge the two together to make a decision.” From her perspective “it takes both processes to make a wise and emotional decision.”

***Instructor emotional experience.*** Three of the instructors discussed the fears they felt while making emotionally charged decisions during their respective program experiences. One instructor encountered fear as he came to terms with his decision to join a doctorate program. His self-proclaimed “massive ego” assured him that he could apply and complete his program. His fear came from somewhere else as his decision to join became certain. He said, “Then, as it got nearer and nearer and nearer, I became less and less and less sure. Not that I wouldn't make it, but I was scared of the unknown.” This emotion subsided as the instructor moved closer toward program completion.

Another instructor experienced “fear” when his initial dissertation proposal was rejected because his committee chair believed it could not be supported. This decision came after “a ten-page prospectus proposal for a project was submitted.” “I can remember just feeling like the bottom had dropped out.” The time leading up to his submission he “anticipated that there were people who could support it but they didn't think they could.” “I didn't have a backup plan and I didn't know what to do, so that created fear and negative worry.” His standing changed after consulting with a mentor. “It was through dialogue with a mentor in the program that I was able

to slowly move through that, those emotions to engage someone to reflect on them and talk and know that one, my experience was not unique.”

Fear experienced by another instructor stemmed from the negative feedback she received due to problems related to her dyslexia. During a bout of writer’s block while developing her dissertation, she kept reverting back to that fear. “Part of writing that literature review was that fear that emotion was stalling me because I was bringing back all the negative feedback.” She took a trip to a secluded place to work out her feelings and complete writing the chapter.

For one instructor, a decision needed to be made despite the conflict which kept her at a stalemate. The instructor was paired with a committee chair who was highly regarded at her university. “I was lucky when he said yes, he would sit on mine, because he had refused so many others.” Problems surfaced though which cause conflict. “He was not active, so I felt a lot of frustration towards him and I was fortunate enough to have the, for our program, the statistics teacher who was known to be very good.” “Like I said, my chair was very *laissez-faire*.” “I couldn't get certain things confirmed because he was never around and so in the end I had to let him go.” She ended up with an inferior statistics professor.

Another instructor felt *intimidated* when she experienced choosing her committee chair. “For me, it was worrisome and intimidating to begin with because most of the faculty that I had classes with have not been in the same track where I wanted to go.” The instructor seemed worried about being paired with an unfamiliar face. Upon meeting her soon to be dissertation mentor, things changed as described in the following:

I was just feeling very uncomfortable and nervous and very unsure that I was connecting with her the way I wanted to and when we finally both figured out exactly where it was I was trying to go with this topic, she got really excited.

After meeting her prospective mentor and making a connection the nerves cooled.

*Self-efficacy summary.* Four candidates thought practice needed to be useful or applicable. Three of them believed practice experienced in the doctorate program early on led to the development of skills which helped with the dissertation process. Two of the instructors acknowledged practice in their respective programs as an experience which helped them with their dissertation. This meant the practice for these two was applicable.

Two of the candidates believe practice was worth the time and effort as long as it was interesting. In this respect, the kind of practice, especially in terms of a writing topic, needed to appeal to the candidates for them to fully engage in the behavior. None of the instructors mentioned that practice needed to be interesting. One did however, talk about his fondness for puzzle solving.

Two of the candidates associated practice with pain. One of them acknowledged the pain experienced was necessary to grow as an academic. While none of the instructors said practice was painful, two of them shared details which indicate practice was hard and difficult.

For the candidates who shared their encounters with using models, four of them described how instructive the models were. Four instructors also believed their experiences with models were instructive in some way. For one candidate, and one instructor, from this group, models which were perceived as displaying negative behavior were also instructive of what not to do.

Three of the candidates associated confidence with their experiences with using models in the program. Having a path to follow to experience success inspired confidence. Two others said models were restrictive. None of the instructors mentioned confidence during discussions centered on modeling. One instructor did indicate that models could be restrictive if they are not properly applied.

When the interviews turned to discussions concerning experiences associated with feedback, four of the participants illustrated the instructiveness behind feedback. For three of the candidates these experiences inspired confidence. One instructor mentioned confidence as being one of the qualities gained from his experiences with feedback.

Two candidates described the value behind experiences with peer editing which was performed during the writing courses. Before editing took place one of the instructors mentioned there needed to be trust in place. Time with the cohort helped develop trust. The other candidate saw value in the feedback received only if she respected the person giving the feedback. None of the instructors associated peer-editing with their experiences with feedback.

Another candidate perceived feedback as a way of understanding how to think about the evaluation process differently. The feedback which helped her develop ideas and improve her skillset became more important than the grades received after completing an assignment. I characterized this understanding as finding balance in knowing what was important. Feedback contributed to one instructor who sought to find balance in his behavior.

For the other four instructors, feedback was largely instructive. One instructor characterized feedback as a way of building social presence with someone. From her perspective, there are social consideration to think about before approaching someone with feedback. Another discovered feedback through an experience facilitated by his professor. From his view, the instructor's teaching strategy encouraged the instructor to find answers for himself.

An array of intense emotions and how they affect decision making were discussed by seven candidates. Three of the candidates spoke about the emotions experienced during critical periods in their program which almost necessitated a break or withdrawal from studies. In each



instance instructor support aided the candidates to believe they could finish. The emotions experienced during this time included defeat, uncertainty, and frustration. The emotion behind coming to the decision to join the program was discussed by one candidate. One candidate indicated the nature of her doctorate was more emotional than previous academic work in other programs. For her the experience with doctoral work was personal.

Three of the instructors talked about the fears they experienced in their respective programs. In each instance much like the candidates, the instructors turned to support from mentors or professors to get through their issues causing the fear associated with the experiences. Intimidation and worry experienced during committee chair selection was cooled by discussions with the professor who ended up being her mentor. Another candidate spoke about the conflict she experienced when making a decision to replace her committee chair.

The attribute self-efficacy contributes knowledge of influential moments that affect self-belief and are supported by perseverance or grit.

**Perseverance or grit.** Deliberate practice (Duckworth, 2007) in the form of inquiry and having a growth mindset (Dweck, 1986) were cornerstones of the perseverance and grit attribute. Experiences with inquiry and research defined practice during the dissertation development phase of the participants' respective programs. This is different than the self-efficacy practice attribute which described experiences outside of dissertation development. In addition to inquiry-related experiences, the participants in each group described challenging moments during their programs.

***Candidate deliberate practice.*** Deliberate practice in the form of inquiry means that the practice was intentional. Even in moments where inquiry was ambiguous, it was the intention behind the researcher which moved the candidate from questions to answers. Experiences with

inquiry-based practice have encouraged candidates to change their behavior and use inquiry in their professions. All of the candidate participants described their intentions.

There was consensus between the candidates who perceived inquiry as deliberate practice. Four of the eight candidates believed inquiry-based practice should be intentional and practical. One candidate said practice “should be deliberate.” Another candidate described her feelings when she is committed to deliberate practice. “When I truly engage in deliberate practice I am focused, I’m happy. I’m feeling those behaviors. I’m focused. I’m productive.” For another candidate, intentional inquiry was drawn from personal desire to understand the research study because she “had a vested interest in wanting to know what’s really driving this thing.” Navigating ambiguous inquiry takes “patience,” as one candidate mentioned during her interview. The candidate described her feelings about the ambiguous nature of inquiry when she developed the literature review for her dissertation. “Something that’s been challenging for me is, not always having the answers.” Not having the right answer during periods of research left the candidate “worried.” The *intent*, though, is to keep moving and not give up. “Not having those answers and still moving forward. Allowing that not to debilitate me in the process or being like, ‘Okay this is a hard time that I’m going through, but-I do it anyway, because it’s the end goal.’” The intent of not giving up overcomes the feelings of ambiguity.

Three other candidates continued to use inquiry to problem solve and improve their professional craft in the work place. One of the three candidates believed her experience with inquiry as a deliberate practice encouraged changes in her behavior toward work. “I’ve totally changed ... I’ve put in research and I’ve put in this and I’ve put in that to supplement the practical applications of things that I’m presenting about racial equity and family and community

engagement and other things.” As new skills are developed through practice, information discovered through inquiry encouraged another candidate to “apply it in the workplace.”

***Instructor deliberate practice.*** Experiences describing inquiry –based deliberate practice by the instructors varied in two ways: the ambiguity in research and the intentionality needed to get through it and cultural values and beliefs which affect the perception of practice.

Three of the instructors characterized inquiry-based practice as ambiguous. One instructor made this association by comparing inquiry to a “puzzle.” Two of the instructors felt “frustration” when they were engaged in inquiry during their respective programs. One of the instructors described the process undertaken when frustration was experienced in the following:

When I got to that place, which was a very frustrating place, I'd go take a bath. I'd get in this hot water and I'd sit there. ‘What the fuck am I going to say?’ Get out, go back in, type for a bit. I'm doing fine. Everything's going fine. This is good. I've got this research, and I'm doing this. It's working. Then I'd get stuck again. I don't know what I'm going to do, so go back there and take another bath.

The intention behind deliberate practice, though, keeps momentum moving because although he got stuck, he always kept moving forward.

Another instructor said one has to be able to accept the tension between ambiguity and deliberate practice, “You have to be willing to deal with ambiguity at times though and things just not going perfect. That uncertainty you have to be willing to embrace that as you're going through the inquiry process.”

One of the instructors described deliberate practice through a cultural lens; practice is just natural. One instructor mentioned how practice in all of its forms was “ingrained” in her culture. She made her point by comparing her homeland experiences with practice experienced in the

United States. “I come from a very different culture from America. We have lot of practice. We do not believe in quick solution to anything.”

For another instructor, practice was easy to engage because the poverty experienced during her program did not allow for her to do anything else but “practice.” There was nothing else to do except engage in deliberate practice.

***Candidate growth-mindset.*** Candidates experienced two different kinds of challenges and described the mindsets necessary to overcome them. One challenge was academic setbacks such as grades and evaluations. The other had to do with time management issues such the pressure of dealing with deadlines and due dates.

Four of the candidates described challenges where a negative evaluation was received. One of these candidates described the thought he experienced when he found out that he did not do well for the first assignment in the quantitative research methods course, “I bombed it; it's terrible.” He and the other three candidates had feelings of self-doubt and defeat when they received what they considered a bad or failing evaluation. The candidate continued to talk about his reluctance to approach the instructor even though help was offered, “I felt I can't believe that I'm failing this class and I have to call him to say, "Okay, I don't understand A, B, C, D.” After he thought the situation through, however, the candidate realized this assignment, this course, and this program, was his “commitment.” “I need to be able to put in everything I need to understand.” It was only then that his mindset was receptive to help.

Three other candidates described their experiences with missing deadlines or due dates in the program. Working a fulltime job, raising a family, and being enrolled in a doctorate program presented scheduling challenges. At various times, the three candidates experienced issues with time management. One person related, “I was just busy. I had a lot going on at work that I was

responsible for. Then I had a health crisis.” Three of the candidates felt “despair” and “frustration” when they missed deadlines or due dates.

When candidates encountered academic setbacks or time management issues, all seven had the mindset to seek help. They found support from family, the employer in the workplace, through instructors, and other cohort members. After drawing support from her cohort, one of the seven said she developed the capacity to talk to reassure herself, “Not only support from others, but I've learned to talk to myself in encouraging ways, too.”

***Instructor growth-mindset.*** Five of the instructors described their reaction to challenges experienced in their respective programs. Struggles with writing was one type of challenge experienced by the instructors. Other challenges presented by this participant group described disconnect between the delivery of instruction and how it was interpreted by the learner. Both types of challenges necessitated a growth-mindset to understand the challenges faced were learning opportunities and not moments of failure.

Three of the instructors associated their experiences with writing challenges which required a growth-mindset to overcome. One described writing challenges experienced while applying to her doctorate program. She was rejected twice from the same university which was her first choice while applying to doctorate programs. Her experience is characterized in the following:

The initial rejection was just crushing. Yeah, I got the letter. I think, it was my parent's house. Maybe I got it by e-mail or whatever but I just remember feeling like this isn't ... Maybe this just isn't for me. Maybe this is God telling me, ‘Nice try. That's not where you're going.’ I was just going to completely give up.

Her previous attempts did not dissuade her though, it only empowered her to develop new writing materials and submit a third application, “I had to rewrite everything.” Because she viewed her second and third chances as opportunities to write something better, she overcame the challenge and was accepted into the program on the third try.

Two other candidates channeled their growth-mindset to overcome challenges in the classroom. One of them shared her experience with challenges early in one of her courses. “I couldn't get things done because I couldn't hear him. I would read but I wouldn't really know exactly what he's looking for, so the first two weeks I was failing.” She did not give up though. Her growth-mindset encouraged her to think about what she had to do to hear her instructor. “I asked two professors who were very hard to understand if I could tape them.” The instructors agreed to let her tape the classes. After class and later at night, she “would have to stay up three hours, transcribe, and rewind and rewind to hear what they were saying before I could do the assignment for next week.”

***Perseverance or grit summary.*** The participant groups similarly characterized the sub-attributes of perseverance and grit: deliberate practice and growth-mindset. Four of the candidates and three of the instructors described the intentional nature behind deliberate practice. With inquiry serving as the type of deliberate practice, one candidate and all three of the instructors believe inquiry and research was ambiguous. The feelings experienced from this group of participants included frustration, anger, and worry. All five participants believed the intentionality behind deliberate practice is what kept the learner focused to overcome uncertainty and find answers. With four candidates and three instructors providing descriptions about the intentional nature of deliberate practice, this sub-attribute is in my mind saturated.

Differences in deliberate practice were described between the candidates and the instructors. Three of the candidates believed deliberate practice, as seen with inquiry, encouraged them to develop habits which transferred to their respective professions. In this respect, the skills and knowledge learned in the program were used in a deliberate manner while at the workplace to better understand problems and solve them. The instructors did not describe a connection between their experience with deliberate practice and its application to the workplace.

Common challenges were experienced between the candidates and the instructors which necessitated a growth-mindset to overcome. Four candidates and three instructors described the challenges of receiving and working through what was considered a poor evaluation. The candidates described what it was like working through a poor grade given during course work. The instructors described a more specific kind of evaluation when they described challenges associated with writing. Seven rich descriptions of this sub-attribute were considered sufficiently saturated.

There were some differences between the two group experiences where a growth-mindset was discussed during the interviews. Three of the candidates talked about the challenges experienced while managing deadlines. This was different than what the other two instructors described. They described challenges experienced in the classroom. The differences between these two kinds of challenges were too great to classify singularly.

**Change or transformation.** The foundation of this attribute was critical reflection. Most participants believed critical reflection as explained by Mezirow (1991) was essential to understanding their change experience. According to Mezirow (1991), “Reflection is a process of critically assessing the content, process, or premises of our efforts to interpret and give

meaning to an experience” (p. 104). The following is an account of the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors experienced by the participants during times of reflection.

*Candidate critical reflection.* All eight of the candidates talked about reflection being used as a tool for understanding who they were and how they can improve or become better at something. Three of the eight candidates perceived reflection as a tool used for understanding how to impact work or their respective professions in a better or more productive manner. One of these candidates understood her reaction to her clientele at work through reflection in the following:

If I'm feeling angry at a repeat patient because they're seemingly sabotaging their health, their wellness, 'I've put all these things in place for you. You're not following through.' My emotional response is anger and so that I have to ask myself, 'Why am I getting so angry?' This has more to do with me than it has to do with the patient. That patient I know is mentally ill and doesn't have the same skillset that I have and maybe they need that little extra help. Maybe they need to come see me once a month or once a week to get back on track.' I'm constantly having to do those reflections: Is this about the patient or is this about me?

In this excerpt, the candidate explained how she uses reflection to better understand her feelings toward clients who keep repeating destructive behavior. She uses the information gained from the reflective moment to understand the best way to proceed or act on the problem. This account exemplifies how reflection is used as a tool for understanding an experience.

Two other candidates associated reflection with learning. One said, "I'm not sure that we can truly learn without it. Actually, I think in any improvement often comes from reflection." These two candidates suggested that learning cannot take place unless critical reflection is



involved. The second candidate pressed this point, “I think that's the essence of learning. I see it as a mirror.”

While the five candidates discussed so far viewed reflection as a tool for understanding, two other candidates perceived something different: transformation. One candidate talked about the difference between change and transformation. It is one thing to change by learning new skills, but transformation through critical reflection is deeper, richer, and more satisfying. “I think that's been more of a personal transformation for me, as I reflect on my time in the program, that it's okay to look outward, that it's okay to need the support of people.” This transformative experience assured the candidate that it was an advantage for her to open up and be willing to accept support.

For the last candidate, reflection grew to being an important way of building and maintaining relationships within the cohort. The eight candidates expressed this thought in the following:

I do think over time and getting used to the practice of reflecting and really taking that time to be able to understand where I'm coming from and to understand where other people are coming from, has been really beneficial.

She felt the reflection helped her make “deep connections” with many of her classmates. She went on discussing how reflection became a tool which was practiced with the kids in her classroom to help them think “about what it is that they're doing and how they're feeling, and understanding other people and other cultures as well.”

***Instructor critical reflection.*** All five of the instructors shared their perspectives on critical reflection. Four of them discussed the intentionality in reflection and described how it was something practiced. One of the four instructors described the conditions in place when she

practices reflection, “Every morning I have a one hour walk and I have taped meditation that leads me through.” For this person, reflection “is one of the core practices of my life.” Another one of the four explained the intentional nature behind how she managed emotions by “replaying my own thoughts and emotions as reactions to situations repeatedly in my head. Part of reflecting for me is telling myself to let go of those.”

When time is set aside and reflection is intentional, connections in learning were made with another one of the four instructors. “They come out when I am reflecting on them.” The time and space intentionally set aside to reflect helped the fifth instructor understand how to improve her craft as a classroom teacher. After a lesson was delivered, she routinely questioned, “What can I do to fix and then continue to build on?”

Transformation was a deeper and distinct kind of change for one of the instructors. She cautioned, “Transformation takes place very few times in your life.” She used changes in deeply embedded cultural beliefs as an example of the kind of deep change needed to warrant a transformative experience, “Those are the most transformational.” She was the only instructor to describe thoughts and feeling associated with transformation.

*Change or transformation summary.* There were common perspectives shared between the candidates and instructors which described reflection. One of the candidates and four of the instructors believed critical reflection needed to be intentional and practiced. A new understating of the experiences for this group were made when reflection took place for these five participants. Five candidates and two instructors perceived reflection as a way of learning or means of understanding how to make something better. In each of the seven accounts when time was set aside, connections in learning were made or problems were solved. The notion of

reflection being synonymous with learning was sufficiently saturated between the candidates and instructors.

Two candidates and one instructor described transformation during the interactive interviews. The descriptions given from the two groups differ in context, however. The two candidates talked about transformative moments they experienced in the program. These were deep reflective moments where perspectives were transformed and behaviors were changed. The instructor talked about transformation from a definitional perspective. She did not associate transformation with one of her own program experiences. Nevertheless, all of the descriptions help explain reflection's role in change or transformation.

#### **Chapter 4 Summary**

Many pieces came together to identify and give purpose to the data in my study. Descriptions of the candidate participant group gave background information on the individuals who are seeking the degree. The instructors who also had earned doctoral degrees were described in a way that sees them as stewards of program culture which influences the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of candidates who matriculate through the program. Common descriptions between the candidate and instructor participant experiences were identified through summative content analysis. This type of analysis extracted shared program experiences. The results will be used to help tell the story of my journey going through the doctoral program. Analyzing my experiences through an autoethnographic design offered me the opportunity to describe possible changes in me as a scholar, researcher, and person through critical reflection.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

The discussion of conclusions is a synthesis of the study attributes explained through the intersection of my story and the stories of the participants. It is at these intersections where I was able to draw meaning from my own experiences in the program. Drawing meaning from the experiences of my study participants and myself is a key aspect of narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2016). Together, these experiences helped me understand why I am earning this degree and described what it was like completing the program.

In addition to describing my journey, I wanted to understand how my experiences have made me a better scholar, researcher, and person. Autoethnography is a natural conduit for me to reflect on memorable moments which changed the way I think, feel, and behave and as a result have become better. The following is an account of what my program experiences were like and how they changed me.

### **My Story**

When I arrived to my final destination in Portland 10 years ago, my path to find change continued in terms of identifying a career. At the time, I only knew that I needed to go back to school. I told one of the participants that “Furthering my education in one field or another was going to open up opportunities for me, so I completed my Bachelor’s Degree.” I was not sure what that career would be, though. Family and friends who teach at various grades inspired me to apply at the university and earn a Masters of Art in Teaching. The decision to teach paved a path which eventually led me to a position with the university in the doctorate program. After the first couple of months of advising students, helping establish the curriculum, and working with other faculty who had already earned terminal degrees, I was soon faced with the temptation

to seek out a doctoral degree of my own. I didn't fully understand my motives until I made it to where I am now: writing my dissertation.

### **Motivation, Marie, and Me.**

I experienced a pivotal moment in my research while talking to Marie, one of the participants in my study, during our first interview together. We talked about what motivated us to pursue a doctoral degree. The connection I made while she was discussing her story moved me in a profound way. To this day, several months after the interview, I still think about that moment. I think about her story and why she is earning a doctoral degree. This connection helped me realize why I did what I did.

Marie and I met in a small, quiet conference room with a glass-sided door located on the top floor of the university library for our first interview. I arrived early, as I did with all interviews, to set up my computer and load Marie's Attribute Conversation Checklist so that I was able to keep track of our discussion. Tracking the conversations helped the participants and me know what attributes were discussed the last time we met and understand what attributes we needed to talk about the next time we met. I also double checked the battery life on the digital recorder and made sure I had backup batteries close by just in case we went long and ran out of charge. I kept going back and forth, double, and triple checking everything. I was eagerly anticipating talking to Marie. All my first interviews were nerve-wracking. Although I was nervous, I still believed I could conduct a quality interview. Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory suggested that I may not have even attempted the interview if my nervousness was too much to bear. However, I was motivated to follow through.

Marie knocked on the door and entered the room. After settling in, we quickly reviewed and signed the consent form together. The consent form was attached in a previous email so that participants would have an opportunity to read the consent on their own. I figured if the

participants took the time to read the consent form, then less time would be used during our actual interview time. My intention was to make the most of my time while interviewing participants because I understand everyone's time is valuable. I briefly reviewed the style of interactive interviewing to Marie. Previous communication describing the attribute topics and opened-ended nature of the discussions were communicated through email after the candidate initially agreed to participate in my study. The digital recorder was turned on.

I began the interview, as I have started all my interviews, by telling a story about my experience associated with a given attribute. And then we started talking about motivation. I told Marie why I applied to the program and wanted this degree, saying "To me it was a challenge." When I began working for the doctoral program, I did not think it would lead to me to actually becoming a doctoral candidate myself. However, after meeting prospective candidates who came into the office to ask questions before they themselves applied, I began asking myself, "Can I do something like this?" Can I do something no one else in my family has ever done and earn a doctoral degree?"

As I continued to explain my other reasons for applying, Marie's body language indicated that she was possibly thinking about her own reasons for enrolling. She readjusted her posture and sat back in her chair with a pensive facial expression. It seemed she was listening to my story but translating it to her own which was my hope.

I continued talking. One of my tasks as Assistant Director is to help review courses that were being developed for the program. Faculty members would sit in a room and engage in group editing sessions to review course content and activities. I related to Marie that at the time "I kept thinking about how I would approach some of the assignments." I was curious. I wondered if I could even do them. Being admitted to the doctoral program would be an even

bigger goal or challenge. “I needed to know if I could accomplish this goal.” Maslow (1943) indicated in his Theory of Human Motivation that the human need to know is “the motivation role of curiosity, learning, philosophizing, and experimenting” (p.12). I understood from this theory that I was motivated to learn something about myself. I came to understand that the doctoral program was the path I wanted to take to gain this knowledge.

I did not know it at the time, but challenge and curiosity weren't the only reasons I had for applying to the doctoral program. They were just the most meaningful. Also, from an extrinsic perspective, I told Marie that I wanted a doctorate because I believed “it would possibly help me with future employment opportunities.” I am motivated by external influences toward the goal of completing the degree, however, they are not as strong and do not have lasting influence like the internal drives of curiosity and rising to a challenge (Vallerand, 1997; Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Marie and I started talking about her experiences and reasons for earning a doctoral degree. Marie explained that she, “didn't need this degree” for the position she holds with a school district. Until Marie began telling me her motives for earning a doctoral degree, I thought I fully understood why I was doing it myself. She eased into the conversation by mentioning that, the same as me, that no one in her family had earned a doctoral degree. She added, “The fact that I've gone this far, I think most people are asking, ‘Well, why are you doing this?’” Marie said she is doing this because she “loves” learning. She also believes her doctoral experience “added the benefit of developing skills to be able to do more things to help colleagues, even the children in the classroom.” But there was another, more significant reason motivating Marie.

The conversation shifted to discussing her reason for switching from the Teacher Leadership specialization to the Transformational Leadership specialization, which focuses on themes related to organizational development. This switch explained a lot about Marie's motivation in the program.

“My switch over from teacher leadership to transformational was somewhat the hope that maybe some of the knowledge that I gained can eventually be used in some format towards helping with non-profits that are dealing with sex trafficking victims and not just working within the school system, but within other avenues.”

Marie shared that one of her daughters was coerced into sex trafficking by an older boyfriend. Her daughter was advertised on Craigslist ads which were known for supporting sex trade operations across several states. Even though Marie kept a calm demeanor while telling me her story, I sensed pain and fear.

I reacted to Marie's story in an unsettling way. As soon as I realized what happened to her daughter, I began feeling uncomfortable. My body became warm. I remember losing track of the attributes I was marking on the conversation checklist as my thoughts focused on the location of the counseling services I mentioned in my informed consent form. I didn't know if extra steps may be needed to comfort the participant. However, Marie's body language was still calm and steady so I continued my research. Thinking about the anxiety I felt in that moment, I realized it was not solely based on my worry for Marie. Marie held up just fine throughout the conversation. The anxiety experienced during that time came about because of past experiences of my own.

At that moment I understood that I had connected with her experience in a profound way. I know about the pain and fear associated with sexual abuse because of experiences I had as a



child. The pain and fear was destructive to my confidence. I felt held down for too much of my young adult life and it discouraged me from challenging myself. I believed I was only good enough to continue life like I always have at the same unrewarding job that I was doing for too long. Hearing Marie's story made me realize that my motives for earning this degree were in place a long time ago. My motivation was internal, strong, and real.

### **Practice, Practice, Practice**

Upon entering the doctoral program, I was exposed to experiences which influenced my sense of self-efficacy. All four types of experiences associated with Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory were encountered at some point in my program. Each influential moment resulted in some kind of behavior or action needed to move forward. The more poignant moments were discussed in interviews with the study participants.

I talked to Shelley, the first person I interviewed, about the deliberateness of practice. I described my experience by telling a story of what happened over the holiday season when I was writing my literature review. I explained to Shelley that developing the literature review was "the most challenging part of the dissertation." Shelley seemed to agree as she nodded her head up and down ever so slightly with a clenched mouth.

Shelley began talking about her experience writing Chapter 2. She began by comparing the literature review to other parts of her program, "Right, so of all of the pieces or all of the phases we've gone through that was definitely the longest days in which I had to persevere." Early in the development process she felt things were falling behind and told me, "Things were not progressing at the rate at which I would like them to." Frustration set in because she was unsure about the work she was producing. Shelley said, "There were a number of times early on that I would just look at it and be like, I should just throw the whole thing away and start again."

She had faith things were going to work out though. She mentioned, “I just had to trust that I was going to get through it, because I didn't see an end in sight for quite a long time.”

Along with her faith, Shelley believed the relationship with her dissertation mentor helped guide her through this challenging part of her experience. She mentioned how the mentor’s feedback kept her centered, “I was trusting that if it really were as bad as I thought that it was that Instructor would be telling me.” Ultimately, Shelley knew she was the only person who could really help herself. During these stressful times, Shelley kept reminding herself, “I had to keep in the back of my mind, I had to tell myself, you're going to get through this.” She did complete the chapter.

I had empathy for Shelley’s frustration associated with time. The holiday season signaled the end of the academic term for me. I was quickly closing in on a deadline for a part of my literature review. I explained to Shelley that “It seemed time was slipping away too fast.” To make matters more challenging, my mother, niece, and nephew were staying over for 7 days. At the time, all I saw ahead of me was Chapter 2 and loud house full of family. I turned my head down to look at the ground, shook my head, and said to Shelley, “I knew the next two weeks were going test my will to succeed.”

I found it difficult to find time to practice. With so many people roaming around the house and needing to be fed over the holiday season, “it seemed impossible to find the time to research and write.” I usually ended up in either the local coffee shop or the library in an effort to get away from the house and find a quiet space. It also meant leaving my family behind so that I could get the work in.

Leaving the house to complete the work came with consequences. Extra stress was placed on my wife to entertain people who came into town because I was there. At times during

those two weeks this did not sit well with the family dynamic. My wife's stress inevitably became my stress. Even though she helped me out by covering for me, there was still tension between us which was debilitating for me. I sensed my wife was fed up with my doctorate taking time away from her and my family. The stress placed on me at that moment to be both a family man and a novice researcher hindered my progress. Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory helped me understand I was reacting in a defeating way; "They debilitate their own efforts by self-doubting" (p. 10). I began having doubts that I was going to complete Chapter 2 before the end of the holiday break. Even though there were times when practice seemed to be in the way or be the one thing keeping me from getting a decent night's sleep, I still practiced. It was important to hold this line, because if I didn't, then it would be that much easier to cancel the next practice session. I did not want perseverance to become procrastination. Even though I felt I caught all sorts of grief for what I was doing, I kept doing it. I kept doing it while facing this grief day in and day out for the entire holiday season and then some. After talking to Shelley, I had a better idea of what deliberate practice meant. To me it meant pushing through the mental and emotional discomfort and delivering the materials before the next academic term began.

I continued to describe to Shelley the double edge sword connected to my experience with practice during that stressful time. On the one hand, I was happy to continue my work and feel like I was making progress. On the other hand, my work seemed burdensome to my family. I told Shelley that "I hated practice because there was too much crap connected to it." While I was gratified with what I was studying and putting together, my other family responsibilities in the background were constantly an obstacle causing unbearable grief." In reality, my family isn't an obstacle; it just felt like it at the time. It is just that the completing the doctorate won't

take forever. I just needed to make sure my focus was on completing this part of my journey. Once I complete this degree, my family would be my entire focus. I only needed to practice a little bit more to complete the goal of earning my degree.

The holiday season finally ended and I turned in my literature review before the start of the new term. I had persevered. The emotional, mental, and health-related toll received during the break made me realize deliberate practice and perseverance were not always neat and tidy. Kohn (2014) wrote about the negative outcomes associated with perseverance, “Moreover, persistence can be counterproductive and even unhealthy.” The pressure of getting the work done in time almost had the reverse effect on me: the more pressure I felt, the more I believed I was not able to finish. Even though I completed my Chapter 2, the effects on my family still lingered. It took time and many discussions with my wife to smooth things over and help her realize me being away was only short term until I complete this degree.

Practice was, from my perspective, integral to me becoming a better scholar and researcher. My interview with Maurice provided insight for understanding the importance of skepticism in research. Experiences with Marilyn, Dawn, and Jack defined the relational nature of providing feedback and why it was so significant to my growth in the program. As I continued to make connections with the participants in my study, I found that a greater sense of self-belief was drawn from experiences where the use of models and feedback guided my practice (Bandura, 1997).

I had a memorable conversation with Maurice concerning modeling. He described a social event experience with colleagues who he had never met before. Maurice was still settling in to his new position within the school district and felt nervous attending the social event. He was unsure how to act in his colleague’s professional presence. Feeling like an “outsider,”

Maurice said, “I felt like an idiot.” Being somewhat of an introvert, I understood Maurice’s concern.

To feel more like a part of the crowd, Maurice carefully observed others in the way they conducted themselves. Maurice’s account of what he observed is described in the following:

They were very at ease, so I went back at ease that way. Then they would ... Instead of having to know everything, you might say, ‘Well, how does that work in [city]?’ Or, ‘What do you think about the other side of that?’ They would answer questions with questions and none of them had the issues that I had.

His observation went beyond understanding what the conversations were like. Maurice wanted to know how they behaved. “I was watching how each one of them performed.” Maurice perceived his colleagues as models for understanding what to discuss and how to act. He wanted to mimic them.

Maurice continued to talk about the nerve racking social event. “I remember in another meeting, a colleague asked me a question that I should have known and I answered with a really stupid answer that no one would ever say.” The awkward feelings from the response ate at Maurice. “I was so embarrassed that I actually got up and left the table because my answer was so stupid. That just burned.” He reached a point where he felt he needed to take corrective action. After conferring with a friend at the event about the horrible experience, Maurice decided to approach the person he gave a stupid answer to and explain himself. However, the person “didn’t even remember it.”

Maurice acknowledged that he “was trying to be what they were instead of being himself.” When Maurice mentioned this, I thought about my writing and how at times I had trouble establishing my own writing voice. This is especially important in narrative research.

From the time I began writing the dissertation I had a tendency to use a voice not like my own but something more technical and sterile that I was seeing during my investigation of the studies which support my conceptual framework. These are two qualities damning to narrative writing because of the boredom it projects. It is not that I wanted to sound like Albert Bandura when defining self-efficacy. However, when explaining a given attribute, it seemed natural to carry over seminal author's tone into what I was defining. In order to spark interest in the reader, I knew I needed to keep simple and down to earth tone or something relatable. This was especially true while writing a story for the dissertation. So, I looked for models and references which spoke to the style of writing that I needed to accomplish in order to write narrative effectively. Robert Nash (2004) said, "Personal narrative writing is "true" when writers work hard to make personal meaning of the raw material of their day-to-day experiences in a way that readers believe it" (p. 27). Like Maurice, I just needed to be myself.

When I began this program, I was under the impression a study worthy of publication did not need to be scrutinized too much: after all they're published. My perception changed though. Maurice's story helped me understand models should not be considered whole cloth. Each time a model was considered, I needed to continually ask myself, "What is it that I am trying to get from this resource?" Or, "how is this going to help me?" These questions kept my needs connected to what I was trying to do thus focusing my practice. Continually running through these questions through my mind was a newly learned behavior established because of how my perception of being critical evolved (Mezirow, 1991).

My practice became empowered because of how I implement the use of models. I now understand research studies are not infallible. Embracing quality-inspired processes to identify good work also helped me realize the information I pulled from other research studies needed to

be germane to my needs as well as scrutinized for how their own hypothesis were proven. The results of a research study were only useful if the information was soundly proven and logical. This meant comprehending what other studies were trying to prove, realizing whether the methodology properly answered the research question, and knowing if the data was valid. Each study referenced in my dissertation was examined in this way. Running the resources through a process to ensure quality in my dissertation was a newly found behavior which forwarded my academics and research (Zimmerman, 1989). After reflecting with Maurice, I am more “confident” in how I apply the use of models in my learning.

Previously, I described the intersection between the doctoral experiences encountered by the study participants and me. I also made a connection between an experience with feedback early-on in my program, and a discussion with a candidate and two instructors. Marilyn was a candidate who talked about the value in peer feedback she experienced in her program. Dawn and Jack were two instructors who indicated effective feedback as dependent upon the relationships fostered with the candidates. All three of these perspectives describe collaborative relationships as a cultural belief supported by my doctorate program. Clandinin (2016) wrote about cultural understanding as a key aspect of narrative research, “Although narrative inquiry is about people’s experience, to understand each individual’s experience one must understand the social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives that shape, and are shaped by, the individual” (p. 33). Through my experiences with feedback and that of my study participants, a better understanding of the relationships built over the last three years and how they affect candidate success comes into view.

In my interview with Marilyn, I told her about a memorable experience with feedback after I turned in my first assignment as a doctoral candidate. Leading up to my initial submission

of this assignment, I explained to her how “I remembered feeling a great amount of anticipation.” After all, I spent quite a number of hours on that five page assignment. Because I wanted to impress the instructor and my cohort, I looked every big word in Google that I could find and apply to my assignment. My intention was to be read as intelligent, deep, and articulate. After turning in my assignment, I was anxious to hear back from the instructor.

After a couple of days passed, I received the evaluation of my assignment. I was stunned to see that I had not received a passing grade, by program standards. I was crushed. After spending what I thought was a considerable amount of time putting together that assignment, I had a hard time coming to terms with the outcome. Feelings of self-doubt and uncertainty crept into my mind. I began contemplating whether this degree was for me. The stress associated with my perception of the grade led me to contemplate withdrawing from the program. Bandura (1977) Self-Efficacy Theory suggests if I deemed the emotional stressor associated with the failing grade as too great to overcome, I likely would not have continued in the program. After all, it was the first class and not too much time or money was invested at that point in time. However, I had only looked at the grade and none of the feedback toward the bottom of the assignment.

When I continued to read the instructor’s feedback underneath the grade. The comments were well thought out and I was given detailed direction on where to go from here with an opportunity to revise. After reading it through, I explained to Marilyn that “I felt differently about my situation.” It was mentioned that it seemed I was trying too hard. I understood what the instructor meant and completely agreed. With all the build-up, it was quite possible that I pressed a bit too much. In addition to the written feedback, the instructor spoke with me on the side and mentioned that I should just write as if I were having a conversation. I told Marilyn, “I



needed to be myself.” The instructor’s advice was instructive to me. I used the feedback to focus my efforts on modifying the voice in the writing to be more like my own. This is an example of how feedback changed my practice of becoming a better writer. I received a much better grade after considering the feedback, revising the work, and resubmitting the paper. After talking to Marilyn, I began perceiving my experience with feedback differently.

The idea of using revision to apply new knowledge is an example of the iterative learning process endorsed by the college of education. Dweck (1986) indicated that as perseverance can be developed, “Growth mindset is the belief that abilities can be cultivated” (p. 50). From my perspective, the program and the instructor teaching the course were purposeful in their approach using the iterative learning process to support perseverance. I told Marilyn, that my experience with feedback, “gave me hope.”

After talking about my experience with feedback, I asked Marilyn if she would mind sharing her own experiences or thoughts. She described the significance of peer-feedback to her learning:

The other thing I thought about, and you may be asking about this later too, I don't know, but the opportunities that we had for peer feedback were really valuable for me in this program too. Sometimes even more so than the feedback from the professor.

Feedback from the instructors was valuable to her as well.

Marilyn mentioned that instructors who gave the best feedback usually inspired her work in some way. She characterized this point when she said, “There are a few that inspire and maybe it's because of the level of respect I have for them, whereas there might've been a few others that didn't have quite that impact.” Trust and respect have an effect on the interpersonal relationships between two people (Pullon, 2009). “Trust” and “respect” were the two qualities

indicated by Marilyn as needing to be firmly established before feedback can be appreciated or accepted. Whether the feedback came from her fellow candidates or instructors, it only meant something if the relationship between either one of them had solid ground. Marilyn's need for trust and respect in the relationship supporting feedback made a meaningful connection with the instructor perspective.

My interviews with Dawn and Jack further indicated need for feedback and the intent on the instructor's part to foster relationships with candidates so comments are interpreted constructively. Dawn's interview was treated differently than a candidate's interview because she was an instructor. For the instructors, I wanted to also know how they implemented feedback in their practice. Dawn explained that, "feedback is a way of creating social presence." To Dawn this meant knowing your students. Dawn went on to explain that as an instructor she needed to be intuitive to when her students should be given feedback. She said, "Because you're willing to give, it doesn't mean someone is open to take the feedback." Being sensitive to the student's needs from Dawn's perspective builds the type of "trust" Marilyn looked for in a relationship with someone giving her feedback in terms of having the emotional awareness to know when and how to engage a student for help. When I think back to my experience with feedback, the instructor knew I needed a conversation on the side to further reassure me that all was going to be well. The instructor approaching me made it easier on me to be in a good place to receive feedback.

Dawn's perspective highlighted emotional awareness as a quality which fosters trustworthy interpersonal relationships. Jack's interpretation of feedback, on the other hand, focused on the personality and disposition needed to develop interpersonal relationships with candidates. He reinforced this belief when he said, "I think some of it's related to personality

and your outlook toward human beings.” In our interview, he described the type of personality which values the relationship needed between students and teacher in way that encourages or increase the odds of student success. Jack explained, “My own approach to interactions with humans is one of care.” For Jack keeping a caring disposition helped him approach candidates effectively. My conversations with Dawn and Jack made me realize a great amount of thoughtfulness and care goes into providing feedback. This includes knowing when and how to give it.

After talking with Marilyn, Dan, and Jack, I understand the instructor who gave me instructive feedback was doing more than giving me guidance. The instructor was building a relationship with me. As I reflect on the moment in which the instructor had given me feedback, I now perceive that trust was being established. This was known through the delicate nature in which I was approached by the instructor. The instructor’s feedback was indicative of program’s belief in developing and maintaining productive relationships within and between its instructors and candidates.

The Doctorate Program’s support of interpersonal relationships between the instructors and the candidates was made known to me through the program’s identification with collaboration throughout the curriculum. Peer-feedback in the writing course for example prepared me for being able to put myself in a good place to receive feedback and use it effectively to focus my practice. Candidates likewise were asked to maintain relationships by establishing classroom norms, which guided the disposition between candidates as well as instructors. The program’s belief in collaboration allowed for feedback to be administered effectively and safely. The connection between the candidate, the instructor, and the intent of the

program points toward the notion that building relationships is an important part of the doctoral experience.

### **Limitations**

As much as I believe autoethnography was the best method to fit what I wanted to research, the design has its limits. A methodological limitation is notably evident in the type of population sample conducive to collecting information-rich data. In autoethnography it is important to choose participants who may have the same set of similar experiences as my own (Ellis, 2004). This is so because I needed participants who could speak to what I went through in the doctorate program.

To achieve this likeness, I invited other candidates who took the same courses as me, in the same mode of learning, with the same instructors. While this population did well in providing information-rich data, it also placed a limit on the different types of learners I was able to invite to participate in my study. I chose not to include online participants because I needed participants whose experience was in the same environment as mine. While this choice ensured that I would be able to pull information from a group of on-campus learners who shared my experiences, it left out the population of online learners. The online experiences may have expanded the view of what it is like earning a doctorate, they did not represent my experiences.

### **Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory**

During the investigation of my experiences in the doctorate program, I discovered that experiences associated with self-efficacy were driven by the relationships that I formed with my study participants and my dissertation committee. The relational aspect of experiences associated with self-efficacy was prevalent in the interviews with my study participants.

The instructors explained the timing and disposition needed to effectively manage their candidate-relationships with the intent to influence positive outcomes. Dawn drew my attention

toward the connection between relationships and experience with feedback when she mentioned this influential moment as opportunities to create “social presence” with her candidates. She continued to express maintaining these relationships “builds trust.” During an interview with Jack, he described his disposition toward the candidates he teaches as “one of care.” Supporting this approach from Jack’s perspective means being a “good student of human beings knowing who they are and where they are.” This instructor perspective presented by Dawn and Jack spoke to the approach used to make meaningful connections with candidates in their care.

My interview with Marilyn indicated “respect” and “trust” as the two values supporting relationships (Pullon, 2009). She said that it is difficult to accept feedback from someone that she does not think of highly. Marilyn indicated the need for respect in a relationship when she said, “The more I respected the professor, the more I value their feedback.” Later on in the discussion, Marilyn identified “trust” as an important value to be in place for these relationships to flourish and be productive.

The program helped foster the relationships between instructors and candidates through the need for collaborative work found throughout the curriculum. One of the program philosophies and guiding principles states, “We believe in creating transformative educators who collaborate purposely.” As a candidate who went through the program, I know that I experienced a collaborative component in every course I took. In my mind, a successful collaboration is a productive working relationship between two or more people.

While I believe the program’s curriculum has a positive effect on encouraging these relationships and seems to have integrated this notion in practice, the concept of building relationships is not directly stated or mandated. Providing direct information concerning the importance of establishing relationships between candidates and instructors may help people

from both parties prepare to be open and work with others. Such notifications of practice would work well with new candidates coming into the program as well as instructors who teach in it.

My journey to understanding the importance that relationships have on experiences associated with self-efficacy was not a seamless one. There were instances when I felt burnt out and needed time to get away from my study to clear my mind and just think about what it is I was doing or needed to do. Time kept moving though with or without me and deadlines needed to be met. From a policy perspective, it did not seem feasible for me to take a break even though one might have served me well during those tumultuous moments. Diane experienced challenging times during her program when health issues caused her to fall behind in her studies. Being behind was a new experience for Diane who said, "I've never turned in anything late in my life because I'm a very stubborn and determined person." She contemplated a break because she "didn't see how there was any way to finish."

The program does have a continuous enrollment policy which outlines the steps to go through in order to take a break. Shelley and I both talked about challenges in which we both contemplated taking breaks. I explained to her, "that it is harder to come back after taking time off." The process appears to be complicated and cumbersome and that may be to discourage candidates from taking a break. The policy does not allow for candidate who are on a break to continue receiving service from the dissertation committee or instructors. While I understand that enrollment helps pay for the bills incurred by the instructors who teach or committee members who serve, not having anyone to confide in during tough times does not help candidate development. If there were a way to keep candidates in touch with their study or committee while they take time off, they may be refreshed and better prepared to come back.

My study provided a human element to the theory of the role self-efficacy, motivation, and perseverance or grit plays in goal attainment. My personal journey was reflected in the experiences of professor guides and fellow travelers. These connections provided meaning that the quantitative theories in the literature could not. My story is real and has meaning. The studies that informed my conceptual framework were only able to tell me how the attributes were connected which provided a direction for my study. The studies were not able to describe experiences associated with self-efficacy, offer motives for earning a doctoral degree, and describe the persevering mindset needed to work through challenges and accomplish goals. Autoethnography worked well as a method because it offered the opportunity to describe these experiences and see the attributes in a personal way.

The findings of my study are not generalizable but they are transferable. Maxwell (2013) noted that the qualitative processes used, and the theories developed can be transferred from one site or source to another. Golafshani (2003) added that transferability provides a specific lens of evaluating the value and meaning of the experience. Since attributes like self-efficacy, motivation, and grit are universally understood, they cannot be universally applied because they are domain specific. The connections between my story and the experiences of my study participants are shared and transferred through the attributes. We all had motivation, just at different times and in different ways. We all believed in ourselves, but not all of us at the same time in the same way. We all had grit, sometimes more, sometimes less. These connections expand the theories to include personal experiences.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

My study sample excluded online learners who have gone through the same program as mine. This sample was purposeful because I needed to understand the doctoral experiences of those who closely resembled my own. Because I matriculated on-campus, I felt it necessary and

as a matter of convenience to only ask other on-campus candidates to participate in my study. This does not mean the experience of the online candidates does not have meaning. It just did not have meaning to my experience.

I do believe however there is value in describing what it was like to earn the doctoral degree online. Opening up the study to invite the online learners who have completed the same doctorate program as mine could result in a description of a much larger sample thus expanding the view of the program experience. Providing detail to the experiences of both on-campus and online candidates lends a more holistic perspective of what the program was like. It is my recommendation as the principal investigator of this study for other candidates to think about a more inclusive sample so that a different aspect of the program in terms of the online candidate experience can be understood.

My understanding of the connection between relationships and experiences associated with self-efficacy was a new discovery for me. The connection is too important to ignore. With that being said, it seems reasonable to conduct further research into this area to know how relationships between instructors and candidates play a part in experiencing these types of influential moments. More information in this area may help instructors and candidates alike think about what they need to do to prepare for making these types of experiences meaningful.

## **Conclusion**

I began this study to understand how my experiences have changed me to be a better scholar, researcher, and human being. Program experiences have changed me. These experiences have moved me from a place of not knowing and uncertainty commonly experienced by candidates to a place where I have the confidence to find answers and seek out solutions to complicated problems. Knowing that I have this ability is liberating. My study described what this journey was like so that other candidates might identify with it and know more about what it



is like to earn a doctoral degree. What I was not expecting but have come to embrace is the role relationships have played in my success. The relationships I built and maintained with other candidates and instructors during the last three years have been instrumental to my growth as a scholar, researcher, and person. I did not anticipate the importance of these relationships in the beginning as I was building my study, however, I now know without them my experience would be much different.

Through my experience connecting with the participants, I now know of different more meaningful reasons for doing what I did. I took on this challenge of earning this degree to prove to myself that I have control over my destiny. In this respect, I no longer feel held back by my past. As an active participant in my learning and in my life, I have grown to be more comfortable in my skin as I take on challenges. Earning this degree has instilled the confidence in me to look ahead to the next chapter in life and its challenges with optimism and anticipation. Completing the program does not signify the end to my journey only that a new exciting path is ahead of me.

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## Appendix A

### Candidate Study Attributes

Self-efficacy attributes of practice, feedback, modeling, and emotional experiences:

1. How did practice in the doctoral program change the way you think, feel, and behave?
2. How did instructor feedback change the way you think, feel, and behave?
3. How did candidate feedback change the way you think, feel, and behave?
4. How did the use of exemplars change the way you think, feel, and behave?
5. How did emotions experienced in the doctorate program change the way your think, feel, and behave?

Motivation attributes of human need, intrinsic, and extrinsic:

1. What goal am I satisfying by earning a doctoral degree?
2. What are the internal (intrinsic) reasons for earning a doctoral degree?
3. What are the external (extrinsic) reasons for earning a doctoral degree?

Perseverance or Grit attributes of deliberate practice and growth mindset perspective:

1. How has deliberate practice changed the way you think, feel, and behave toward goal achievement?
2. How do academic failures make me think, feel, and behave?
3. How have you dealt with academic failures?

Change or Transformation attributes of critical reflection and interpretation:

1. How have you used reflection to be a better candidate or professional?
2. How has reflection been used to challenge perspectives during program matriculation?
3. What perspectives have changed during program matriculation?

## **Appendix B**

### Instructor Study Attributes

Self-efficacy attributes of practice, feedback, modeling, and emotional experiences:

1. Describe how you use or influence candidate practice in your instruction.
2. Describe how you use or influence feedback in your instruction.
3. Describe how you use or influence modeling in your instruction.
4. Describe how you use or influence emotional involvement in your instruction.

Motivation attributes of human need, intrinsic, and extrinsic:

1. What goals are you satisfying by teaching in the doctorate program?
2. What are the internal (intrinsic) reasons for teaching in the doctorate program?
3. What are the external (extrinsic) reasons for teaching in the doctorate program?

Perseverance or Grit attributes of deliberate practice and growth mindset perspective:

1. Do you have candidates engage in deliberate practice?
2. Describe how you use deliberate practice in your instruction.
3. Describe how you use or influence feedback to explain academic failures to a candidate.

Change or Transformation attributes of critical reflection and interpretation:

1. Describe how you use or influence reflection in your instruction.
2. Do you challenge the perception of the candidates in your class?
3. Describe how you challenge the perception of the candidates in your class.

## Appendix C

### Study Participation Invitation

Dear (Candidate's Name),

I am inviting you to participate in my study. My hope is for us to give meaning to the story of doctoral candidates who put in the long hours and work hard toward achieving their goals and dreams. My field research will be investigating how experiences in the doctorate program have changed our personal efficacy. I want to know if our program experiences were similar. With your participation in a series of interviews, we will collaboratively develop cultural knowledge of a doctoral candidate's beliefs, practices, and values.

The culture of a doctoral candidate is defined through attributes developed in Chapters 1, 2, and 3 of my dissertation which I believe are at the heart of the doctoral experience. These attributes are self-efficacy, motivation, perseverance or grit, and transformation or change. I want to be able to describe how these elements shape the way a candidate thinks, feels, and behaves toward the goal of earning a doctorate.

If you choose to participate in the study, please reply with two tentative dates and times, in which you would be able to participate in the interviews. I would like to schedule our time together between the day you receive this invitation and 6/11/2016. Please let me know the location where you would feel most comfortable having a conversation. Additionally, I will send out information which will further describe the style of interviewing which will be conducted along with the consent form. Thank you for your time. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

John D'Aguanno, Doctoral Candidate

## Appendix D

### Response to Candidates Who Accept Study Participation

Dear (Candidate's name),

Thank you for your response. Your participation in this research study will help others understand what it is like to be engaged in a rigorous doctoral program. I plan to use interactive interviews to gather information about the culture of the doctoral program and how we experience it. Interactive interviews are conversations which Kvale (1996) characterizes: "Through conversations we get to know other people, get to learn about their experiences, feelings, and hopes and the world they live in... The research interview is based on the conversation of daily life and is a professional conversation" (p. 5). I will begin the conversation by sharing a story of my experience with the attributes. A sample of such a story is attached.

Previously, self-efficacy, motivation, perseverance or grit, and transformation or change were listed as my study attributes. The first two interviews will be conversations about our experiences with the study attributes before entering the Ed.D. Program. The last two interviews will be centered on our experiences with the attributes while matriculating through the program. An analysis between these two points in time may describe how experiences in the doctorate program have changed our sense of personal efficacy and the way we think, feel, and behave toward goal achievement.

Our conversations will be recorded on a digital recorder. The information will eventually be transferred onto my personal notebook computer of which only I have access. My computer is also password protected. Additionally, you will be given a pseudonym so that you cannot be identified from the research study. Attached is the consent form which further explains how your information will be protected. Please read it carefully. I will bring hard copies of the

consent letter for you to sign before we begin our first interview. Your participation is greatly appreciated. I look forward to our time together.

Gratefully,

John D'Aguanno, Doctoral Candidate

Reference

Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviewing: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.



## Appendix E

### Consent Form

**Research Study Title:** My doctorate: A candidate's experience with self-efficacy

**Principal Investigator:** John D'Aguzzo

**Research Institution:** Concordia University-Portland

**Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Jerry McGuire

#### **Purpose and what you will be doing**

You are participating in this study to help build cultural knowledge of a doctoral candidate's beliefs, values, and practices. This understanding will surface through interactive interview techniques. The interviews are conversations which Kvale (1996) characterizes: "Through conversations we get to know other people, get to learn about their experiences, feelings, and hopes and the world they live in... The research interview is based on the conversation of daily life and is a professional conversation" (p. 5). Interactive interviews offers the researcher an opportunity to work collaboratively with the candidates to share personal stories, feelings, and perspectives experienced during our time in the program (Chang, et al., 2013, p. 59). You will be asked to open up and share if and how your thoughts, feelings, and actions changed because of program experiences.

#### **Risks**

Your identity and the information you provide will be protected. Any name or identifying information you provide will be kept securely via electronic encryption or locked inside my pc notebook. The principal researcher will be the only one with the password. A pseudonym will be assigned to you to protect your identity. Your name or identifying information will not be attached to any data you provide to this study. You will not be identified in any publication or report. Your information will be destroyed after being secure for a period no longer than three years.

There is an emotional risk when opening up and sharing emotions felt during an experience. However, the risk is minimal. If the interview becomes emotionally overwhelming and you are in need of further professional therapy, please contact the professional counselling services at Concordia University at 503-493-6499. Counselling Services is located on campus at Centennial Hall offices 8, 9, 10, and 11.

#### **Benefits:**

The information you provide will help others understand the culture of doctoral candidates. The opportunity to share experiences, whether they were stressful, emotional, or not, can be *therapeutic* according to Jones et al. (2013). This is a personal benefit.

#### **Confidentiality:**

The experiences and stories shared during our time together will be recorded on a hand-held digital recording device. The interviews may be videotaped as another point of reference. Once the interviews have been recorded, the information will be translated into text using speech to text software, Dragon. Subsequently, the translated text will be stored in the coding software, Atlas Ti for a minimum of three years. The software and the data will be downloaded onto the

principal researcher's password protected personal computer of which no one else will have access. Further efforts to protect you include providing a pseudonym to protect your identity. Aside from the participants themselves, the principal researcher will be the only one who can identify who said what during the interviews.

This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is agreement would include any abuse or neglect reported that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

**Right to Withdraw:**

Your participation is greatly appreciated, but we acknowledge that the questions we are asking are personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating.

**Contact Information:**

You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principal investigator, John D'Aguzzo (email [jdaguanno@cu-portland.edu](mailto:jdaguanno@cu-portland.edu) or call 503-493-6264). If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the program director, Jerry McGuire (email [jmcguire@cu-portland.edu](mailto:jmcguire@cu-portland.edu) or call 503-493-6596), or director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email [obranche@cu-portland.edu](mailto:obranche@cu-portland.edu) or call 503-493-6390).

**Your Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

_____	_____
Participant Name	Date
_____	_____
Participant Signature	Date
_____	_____
Investigator Name	Date
_____	_____
Investigator Signature	Date



## References

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## Appendix F

**Interviewee:** \_\_\_\_\_

	<b>Self-efficacy (Experiences before program entry)</b>		<b>Self-efficacy (experiences after program entry)</b>
	Thoughts associated with practice		Thoughts associated with practice
	Feelings associated with practice		Feelings associated with practice
	Behavior associated with practice		Behavior associated with practice
	Affect practice has on confidence		Affect practice has on confidence
	Affect practice has on behavior		Affect practice has on behavior
	Affect practice has on skillset		Affect practice has on skillset
	Thoughts associated with feedback		Thoughts associated with feedback
	Feelings associated with feedback		Feelings associated with feedback
	Behavior associated with feedback		Behavior associated with feedback
	Affect feedback has on confidence		Affect feedback has on confidence
	Affect feedback has on behavior		Affect feedback has on behavior
	Affect feedback has on skillset		Affect feedback has on skillset
	Thoughts associated with modeling		Thoughts associated with modeling
	Feelings associated with modeling		Feelings associated with modeling
	Behavior associated with modeling		Behavior associated with modeling
	Affect modeling has on confidence		Affect modeling has on confidence
	Affect modeling has on behavior		Affect modeling has on behavior
	Affect modeling has on skillset		Affect modeling has on skillset
	Thoughts associated with an emotional experience		Thoughts associated with an emotional experience
	Feelings associated with an emotional experience		Feelings associated with an emotional experience
	Behavior associated with an emotional experience		Behavior associated with an emotional experience
	Affect emotional experience has on confidence		Affect emotional experience has on confidence
	Affect emotional experience has on behavior		Affect emotional experience has on behavior
	Affect an emotional experience has on skillset		Affect an emotional experience has on skillset

	<b>Change or Transformation</b>		<b>Perseverance or Grit</b>
	Thoughts associated with reflection		Thoughts associated with academic setbacks or failures
	Feelings associated with reflection		Feelings associated with academic setbacks or failures
	Behavior associate with reflection		Behaviors associated with academic setbacks or failures
	<b>Motivation</b>		Thoughts associated with inquiry-deliberate practice
	Extrinsic motives for pursuing a goal		Feelings associated with inquiry-deliberate practice
	Intrinsic motives for pursuing a goal		Behaviors associated with inquiry-deliberate practice

## Appendix G

### Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously- researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

#### **Statement of academic integrity.**

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

#### **Explanations:**

##### *What does “fraudulent” mean?*

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

##### *What is “unauthorized” assistance?*

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

## Statement of Original Work

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University- Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*

*John J. D'Aguanno*

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Digital Signature

John J. D'Aguanno

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Name (Typed)

07/28/2017

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Date