# EXAMINING THE LINKS BETWEEN SELF-PERCEPTION AND ADULT LEARNING: HIGHLIGHTING THE PARALLELS FOR EDUCATORS AND LEARNERS

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***Abstract***

This exploratory study is about self-perception and its affects upon adult learners. It explores the question of why adults often believe it will be difficult for them to engage in formal learning, and in particular, the extent to which self-perception plays a vital role in this process. Research examining adult and workplace learning is plentiful; however, there is a paucity of conceptually sound and methodologically rigorous research that addresses the relationship between learner's self-perception and motivation to learn. For the purposes of this study, self-perception is defined as an adult learner's own interpretation and understanding of himself or herself as a learner. The major contribution of this thesis to knowledge and practice is to provide insights into the thinking undertaken by learners during the learning process, as well as the mechanisms they use to internalise their thoughts in ways that affect their future processes of, and attitudes towards, learning. The study employed a qualitative research paradigm in which the focus was on developing a 'rich' understanding, based on the experiences of participants, of why things happen and the meaning that participants themselves have ascribed to events. A multi-method design was used that involved semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and participant observation. The theoretical perspective employed for the study was 'Grounded Theory', so that an inductive rather than deductive approach was used with inferences being drawn from the data after rather than before it was collected. The sample for this exploratory study involved 66 participants (30 female, 36 male) undertaking the same year-long public training course with the same training provider. Data analysis involved interrogation of the full data sets (notes of interviews, questionnaire responses, and observation notes) in order to identify and report both the unique and common issues and themes provided by respondents. Five major conclusions are drawn that warrant further research. First, there is a mutually-interactive cycle involving self-perception (how we view ourselves and believe the world views us), our feelings (emotions, including motivation) and behaviour (including our engagement in learning). Second, there is a strong, overt and mutual relationship between self-perception as a learner and learning success. Third, for adults, self-perception as a learner is improved by previous acknowledged success. Fourth, the greater our self-perception as a learner, the more 'risk' we are prepared to take with respect to our learning, and as a consequence, the greater our willingness to engage in a variety of learning events and environments. Finally, reflection appears to be the most powerful way of influencing our self-perception as a learner.

***Certification***

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being currently submitted for any other degree or qualification. I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

Margaret Kling
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