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# Effectiveness of the WhyTry Curriculum with Adults Participating in a Vocational Training Program

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## Introduction

The purpose of this research project is to evaluate the effectiveness of the WhyTry curriculum with adults participating in a vocational training program specifically to develop retail skills. WhyTry is an interactive, multisensory program used to motivate participants to change patterns of indifference by using analogies, videos, and music to stimulate and inspire them to succeed. The curriculum has elements of Solution Focused Brief Therapy, Social and Emotional Intelligence, and multi-sensory learning (WhyTry, 2011).

## Research Questions

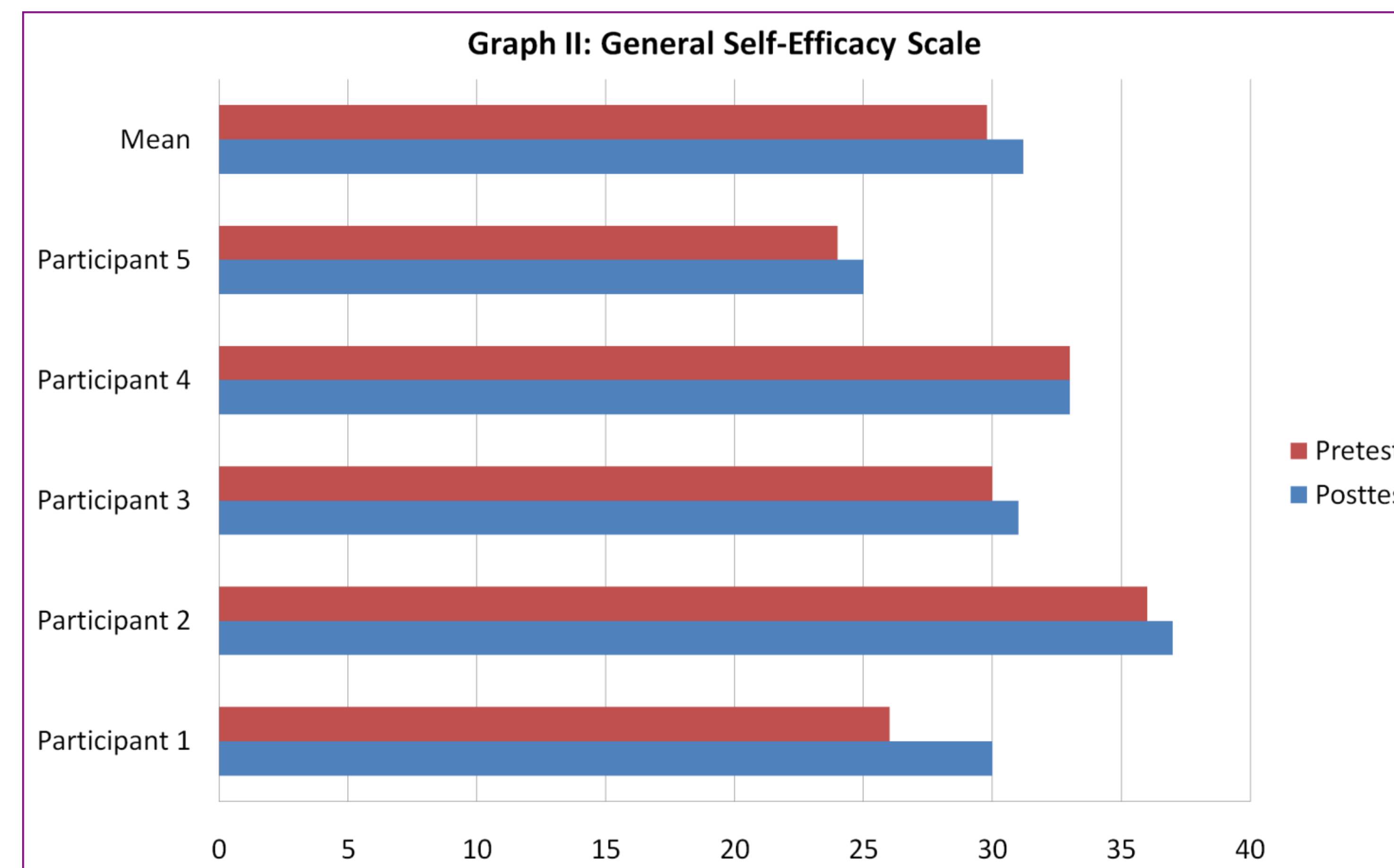
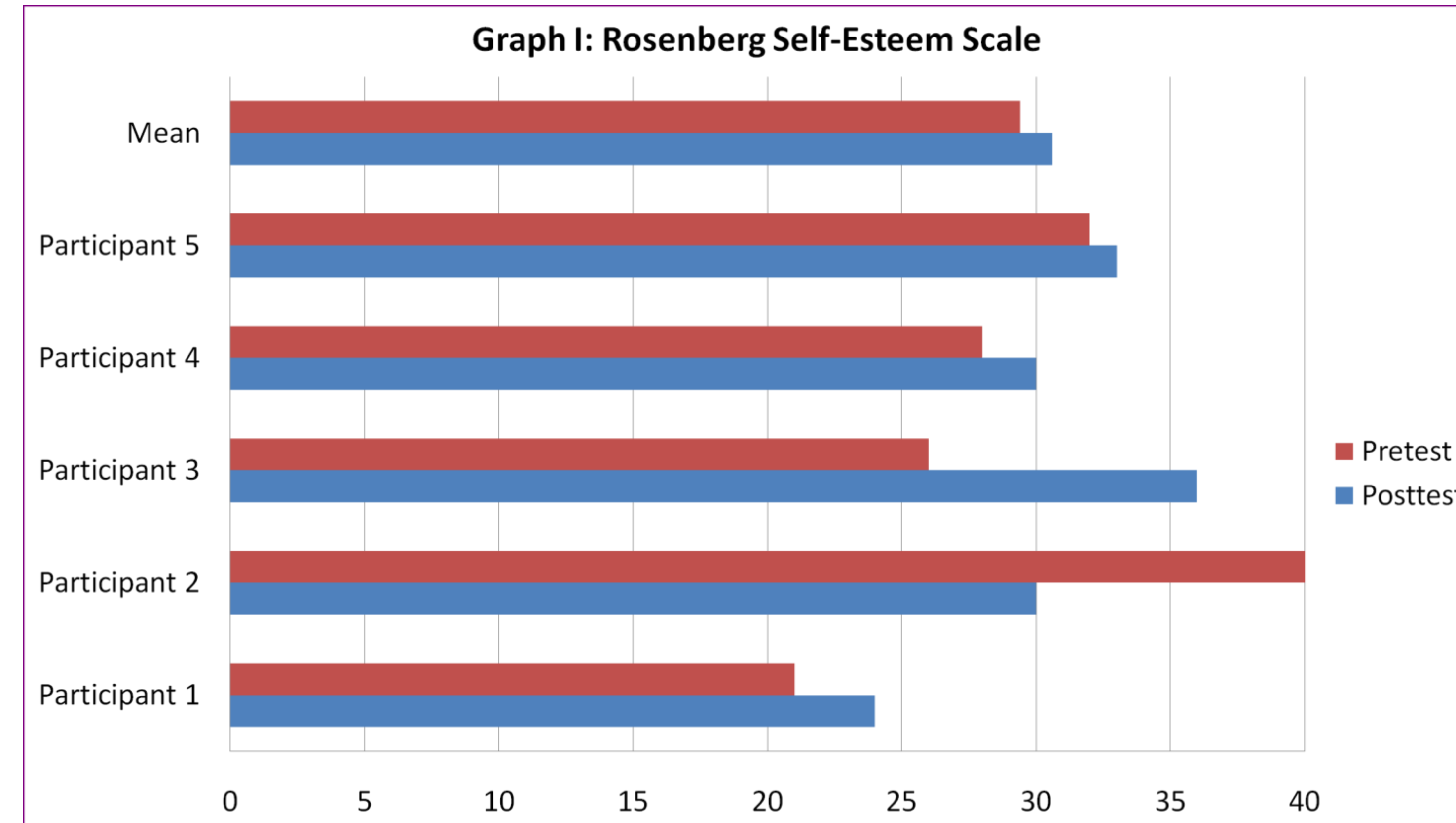
My research question is as follows: Is the WhyTry curriculum effective in increasing self-esteem and self-efficacy with adults who are participating in a vocational training program? My hypothesis is that the WhyTry program will increase self-esteem and self-efficacy with the participants.

## WhyTry Curriculum

WhyTry is a curriculum which was created to address issues such as truancy, behavior problems, substance abuse, low academic achievement, and motivation (WhyTry, 2011). One study in particular showed the effectiveness of WhyTry by demonstrating improved grade point average, fewer absences, and increased levels of graduation (Alvarez & Anderson-Ketchmark, 2009). Another study showed improvement in perceived self-efficacy of children in a residential setting after receiving the WhyTry intervention (WhyTry, 2011). It is used in over 450 school districts, mental health, and correctional facilities in all 50 states, Canada, and Australia (WhyTry, 2011). WhyTry primarily uses analogies with the support of music and videos to address abstract constructs to problem solve. Man et al. (2006) defined analogical problem solving as the transfer of previous knowledge onto another context or domain. In his study of participants with Traumatic Brain Injuries, the subjects' motivation to solve problems in real life situations was enhanced through education about abstract concepts using analogies.

## Literature Review

Unemployment has been shown to be associated with a decrease in psychological well being, depression, lower levels of confidence, and increased levels of psychological distress (Creed & Johnston, 2001). Employment provides benefits such as time structure, social contact, common goals, status, enforced activity, an income, and an increase in self-esteem and self-efficacy (Creed & Johnston, 2001; Wenzel, 1993). Additional benefits of employment to adults with disabilities include increased competence, informal social supports, and a decreased fear of working in an integrated work setting (Jahoda, Dagnan, Kerr & Williams., 2008). Adults with mental illness also benefit from employment because of its effect on decreasing hospitalizations, increasing quality of life, and facilitating an integration into the community (Nordt, Muller, Rossler & Lauber, 2007). Furthermore, adults with disabilities and mental illness have an unemployment rate of 16.4% while those without a disability have an unemployment rate of 9.5% in June of 2010 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). Positive outcomes such as increased self-esteem and self-efficacy have been found in adults with disabilities and/or mental illness who participate in a vocational training program (Hillier, Fish, Cloppert & Beversdorf, 2007; Milsom, Akos & Thompson, 2010; Tsang, Fung, Leung & Cheung., 2010; Beutel et al., 2005). Increased self-esteem and self-efficacy have been found to be positively associated with job seeking skills and job retention (Tsang, 2003; Wenzel, 1993; Sterrett, 1998). Because of the link between self-esteem, self-efficacy, and vocational training programs, this research study was performed to investigate the effects of the WhyTry curriculum on participants level of self-esteem and self-efficacy in the Fast Trac program.



## Methodology

This research project utilized a multiple case pretest-posttest design. The six participants in this study were recruited for the Fast Trac program by MRCI staff or county case managers. Upon IRB approval, consent forms were signed. Two participants had cognitive deficits and four participants had a mental illness. The outcome measures were the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE), which are both 10-item Likert scale questionnaires. The GSE measures a participants' "judgments of their abilities to organize and execute courses of action required for attaining designated types of performances" (Bandura, 1986). It provides a statement such as "I can usually handle whatever comes my way" and asks participants to answer "Not at all true", "Hardly true", "Moderately true", and "Exactly true". The answers were given numeric codes from 1 to 4 with 1 being "Not at all true". The coefficient alpha for the GSE when used with multicultural populations ranged from .86 to .94 (Luszczynska, 2005). The RSE provides a statement such as "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself" and asks participants to circle an answer from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The answers were given numeric codes from 1 to 4 with 1 being "strongly disagree". The coefficient alpha for the RSE when used with African American single mothers was .83 (Hather & Hall, 2009).

## Data/Results

Of the six participants who began the study, one withdrew resulting in five participants as the final sample size (n = 5). There was one male and four females that completed the intervention. The age range was 18-53 with a mean age of 29.2. Because of the small sample size and testing issues, meaningful statistical analysis could not be performed. Graph I shows the pre/posttest cumulative scores for each participant for the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Four out of the five participants saw an increase in their cumulative scores while one participant saw a decrease from a 40 to a 30. The mean cumulative score for the pretest was 29.4 while the mean cumulative score for the posttest was 30.6. Graph II shows the pre/posttest cumulative scores for the General Self-Efficacy Scale. All participants saw an increase in their cumulative scores. The mean cumulative score for the pretest was 29.8 while the mean cumulative score for the posttest was 31.2. These results indicate that it is uncertain if the WhyTry curriculum had an effect on the self-efficacy and self-esteem of the participants.

## Limitations

One of the limitations of this research study was the attrition of one member of the group. Because of the attrition of one member, the posttest data was affected. Another limitation to this study was the misunderstanding of the instruments. When the instruments were distributed, two members of the group had difficulty filling out the instrument. This was evident in the fact that these two members did not differentiate between the positive and negative statements present in the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Although standardized surveys have strengths in that each participant will be answering the same question, and that they have been proven reliable and valid, there are limitations as well. Eckhardt and Anastas (2007) suggest using multiple measurement tools with adults with disabilities to ensure the data collected is accurate. A final limitation of this study was that not all sessions of the WhyTry curriculum were completed. Because of the short amount of time researchers had with the group, and with concerns about the fidelity of each session, only five of ten sessions were completed.

## Conclusions & Recommendations

This research project had several merits in that it was a pilot research project exploring the relationship of self-efficacy and self-esteem with a vocational training group receiving the WhyTry curriculum. Fidelity for each session was maintained by ensuring that the various aspects of each analogy were used. One recommendation for future research is to complete all ten sessions of the intervention with the same population. It would also be essential to have a comparison group that receives the Fast Trac intervention as usual to make comparisons between the two groups. And finally it would be pertinent to triangulate the data collection process by using multiple forms of collection including but not limited to direct observation, qualitative interviews, or a self-constructed instrument that is understandable to the target population.

## Implications for Practice

Although this study did not provide conclusive results on whether the intervention increased self-esteem and self-efficacy in the participants, it is a pilot project that highlights the possibility that WhyTry can be incorporated into a vocational training program for adults.

## References

References and an executive summary are available from the author upon request.