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EXPERIENCES OF ADULT STUDENTS

IN MULTI-GENERATIONAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE CLASSROOMS

A Dissertation in

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by

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study is a basic interpretative inquiry studying the experiences of fourteen adult students 45 years of age or older in a multi-generational community college classroom. The study is informed by social constructivism, social constructionism and andragogy. It focused on how students viewed their experiences in the multi-generational classroom and how the development of relationships among students of different ages affected the dynamics within a community college classroom. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews

Three major themes emerged from this study in light of the adult students' phases of adjustment to being in school. The first theme, dealing with their first impressions, highlighted the participants' anxiety not only about being in school but being in a multi-generational classroom as well. It also highlighted the perceived differences between the two generations. The second theme focuses on adapting and relationship building with the younger students over time: on developing understanding and tolerance towards them; on the mutual nurturing that developed; on the manifestations of teasing; and the role of instructor facilitation. The third theme focuses on adult students' lasting impressions of their experiences in a multi-generational classroom and highlights: the mutual learning experiences between adult students and traditional- age students; the advice to students in similar situations; and the belief that, in the end, in such situations age does not matter, but the experience of learning together does matter. The dissertation ends with a discussion in light of the adult education literature and suggestions for further research.

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Acknowledgements

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My mother, Bette Lukatch, would have been so proud of me. I dedicate this dissertation to her.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of a qualitative study that explores how adult students - specifically those who were 45 years of age or older - view their experiences in a multigenerational community college classroom where classroom interaction was encouraged by faculty and was intended to be part of the learning experience. Specifically, this study examined these learners' perceptions of how the development of relationships among students of different ages affects the dynamics within the community college classroom and how these dynamics affect their learning. The research also focused on how these interactions evolved and how they were influenced and encouraged by instructors and students. The experiences of the adult students and how they perceived and interpreted their experiences was central to the study. Therefore, a qualitative, basic interpretive design was utilized.

Background to the Problem

Community colleges are a vital part of both the education and economic system within the United States. A large majority of employment opportunities now require some type of college degree. Almost half the undergraduate students in this country have attended some type of postsecondary education at a community college. Community colleges enable many students to access a college education (McGlynn, 2007; American Council on Education, 2006, National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2006). As a faculty member in higher education at a community college for ten years, I have noticed that there are two distinct groups of students in my classroom: the traditional-age learner and the adult or non-traditional age leaner. A brief definition of an

adult learner is one who has at least a five year hiatus between his/her last academic setting and application to higher education (Kasworm, Polson, & Fishback, 2002). By contrast, traditional students are typically defined as undergraduate students ages $18 - 22$ who attend four-year institutions full-time, who live on campus, who do not work full time and who have had few, if any, family responsibilities (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998).

Within the last thirty years, there has been an influx of adult students returning to higher education to the point that, in 2001, adults age 25 years or older represented approximately 32% of the undergraduate student population in American higher education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). At the community college where I teach, 35.4% of the student population falls into the definition of an adult learner, and 6.8% are over the age of 45 (Enrollment Summary Report, October 15, 2008). These adult learners are taking both day and evening courses and, for the large majority, they are sharing the classroom, learning, and the environment with traditional- age learners.

Adult learners have different experiences and backgrounds when compared to traditional students in the higher education classroom. They have a more complex background, different educational histories, wide-ranging maturity levels, and different motivations for returning to school, limited time and finances, multi-level experiences with computers or on-line assignments and different family responsibilities (Brumagin, 1999; Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Kasworm, 1990; Kasworm, 2003). Traditional learners who are recent graduates of high school are more accustomed to the learning in a formal classroom atmosphere. They are generally more computer and electronic device savvy, and for many of them, their life experiences are limited due to their age. Although

some traditional students attend college as a means to advancement, others go to college (especially a community college) because their parents want them to attend; some do not know what else to do with their lives; and as related to me, going to a community college is cheaper than paying health insurance!

While both groups of students, traditional and adult, often find themselves in the same classes in the community college and other higher education settings, there is a limited literature base that refers to how to teach learners in a multigenerational classroom in higher education settings. Bishop-Clarke and Lynch (1992, 1998) and Lynch and Bishop-Clarke (1994) note that some of the challenges experienced in the heterogeneous age classroom were as follows: the students' discomfort with each other, different learning styles, and different orientations toward the professor such as some adult students felt they should be "pals" with the professor and some felt they were smarter than the professor as opposed to the traditional students who just positioned the professor as the teacher. The opportunities discussed were the use of different strategies for teaching and a discussion of differences and similarities

Brumagim (1999), in describing his own practice, specifically discusses how these age-diverse students felt about each other when the class ended and addressed the dynamic interactions that developed between the nontraditional and the traditional students doing a classroom assignment. He did not address how the students initially felt about each other, but only how the traditional students became increasingly appreciative of the skills and experiences levels of adult students. The article noted that "several traditional students actively sought out and learned from the more experienced students" (Brumagin, 1999, Reflections about the Exercise section, para. 2).

There is relatively little consideration in the literature about how these two groups of students relate to each other or how the instructors work to try to bridge the gap between the two groups in the classroom. Further, there is a general lack of data-based research on the dynamics of the relationships between students of different generations in higher education classrooms made up of students of different ages and little information on how to best facilitate learning within such contexts. This study hopes to make a contribution to that literature. With the growing number of adult students returning to the higher education classroom, this study makes a contribution to the understanding of how these intergenerational groups relate to and learn from each other in a community college context, thus adding to the literature base.

<center>Statement of Problem</center>

The influx of adults returning to higher education presents specific challenges to the institutions where they matriculate. Some of these challenges are related to diversity issues based on gender (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Gilligan, 1982), class (Sleeter, & Grant, 1999), race (Johnson-Bailey, & Cervers, 1996), and age (Bishop-Clarke, & Lynch, 1992; Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Kasworm, 1990; Lynch, & Bishop-Clark, 1994). While there is literature on gender, class, race, and inclusion in the classroom, there is a paucity of literature on age diversity in the classroom. Kasworm (2003) states that relationships between diverse age groups of students can create opportunities to a positive collegiate experience, but the intergenerational mix can also create some barriers. Age diversity usually equates to different life and educational experiences among these students. For example, these varied age cohorts may have different motivations for returning to school, meaning making, learning styles, and social

and family responsibilities (Kasworm, 2003; Maxwell, 2000) that can lead to a unique learning experience.

The research problem addressed in this study examines how the mix of traditional and non traditional students, or adult students, along with their instructors, view the dynamics of the classroom. Some of the dynamics to consider are the atmosphere of the classroom, the learning environment of the classroom and the relationships that form among these students in this type of classroom.

Purpose of the Study

This study explores how adult students, specifically those who are 45 years of age or older, viewed their experiences in a multigenerational community college classroom where classroom interaction is encouraged by faculty and is intended to be part of the learning experience. In particular, the study examines learners' perceptions of how the development of relationships among students of different ages affects these dynamics within the community college classroom and how these dynamics affected learning. The research focused on how these interactions evolved and how they were influenced and encouraged by faculty and students. The experiences of the adult students 45 years of age or older and how they perceived and interpreted experiences are central to the study.

This qualitative study adds to the limited literature about multigenerational classrooms through in-depth interviews with the participants. These interviews were designed to enable the participants to express in their own words experiences within this type of classroom. In addition, it enabled the participants to suggest events that took place in the classroom that either positively or negatively affected their learning among students of different ages.

Guiding Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

(1) How do instructors and students view the dynamics of an intergenerational higher education classroom and how does this affect student learning?

(2) When connections and relationships develop among students across generations, how do they evolve?

(3) From a social constructivist view, how do relationships affect the learning experiences within the classroom, either positively or negatively, for both students and faculty?

Conceptual Framework

Social constructivism was the primary lens used in this study as it relates to the social meaning-making process of learning in the classroom. Because the process of engaging adult learners in the structures of learning experience contributes to that social meaning-making process, andragogy is also used in conjunction with social constructivism.

Constructivism is a theory about "knowledge and learning; it describes both what "knowing is and how one comes to know" (Fosnot, 2005, p. ix). A constructivism stance "maintains that learning is a process of constructing meaning: it is how people make sense of their experience" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 261).

There are multiple ways the constructivist approach has been defined in adult education. In fact, it represents "more of a collection of similar approaches rather than one unified theory" (Stage, Miller, Kinzie, & Simmons, 1998, p.36). The similarities emphasize that learning is a process of the active construction of meaning; however, they

differ in the degree to which the participant participates in the learning activity and the nature and influence that the social environment has on learning. Stage et al. (1998) suggest that the spectrum of these approaches can range from the radical constructivism of von Glasersfeld, to social constructionism of Gergen, to sociocultural approaches of Brunner and social constructivism of Vygotsky. This study is informed by the theories of both Gergen and Vygotsky because of the focus on social construction of meaning and the study of language to understand meaning and interactions.

Social Constructivism

Social constructivism occurs within the individual (Patton, 2002). Constructivists "study the multiple realities constructed by people and the implications of those constructions for their lives and interactions with others" (p. 96).

Vygotsky proposes that language and social interaction are primary indicators of an individual's learning. He also believes that development depends on the sign systems such as language with which individuals are accustomed. These systems are the symbols that cultures create to help people think, communicate and solve problems (Slavin, 2006) and are used to help develop relationships.

From a social constructive perspective, learning is a shared activity between the educator and learner rather than an individual activity; an instructor's role in this environment is to stimulate the process of meaning and knowledge. According to social constructivism, learning cannot take place without interaction – interaction including discussion of experiences in relation to the course content with other members of the class. Merriman (2002) believes that constructivism underlies a basic interpretive qualitative study because meaning is constructed through engagement in the world that is

being interpreted (Crotty, 1998). The interaction in this study takes place in an intergenerational learning environment where groups from different ages relate to and learn from each other.

Social Constructionism

Constructionism implies that the learner, through direct interaction with the environment, actively constructs knowledge (Resnick, Säljö, & Pontecorvo, 1997). Social constructionism "refers to constructing knowledge about reality, not constructing reality itself" (Patton, 2002, p. 96).

Gergen emphasizes the social aspect of knowledge construction (Phillips & Early, 2000). He is focused on language and discussion to construct understanding. Knowledge is a constant construction and reconstruction of understanding through dialogue and interaction with the social community. People, materials and situations influence learning. Learners gain new understanding through the continual integration of new content and experiences with past knowledge and construct new meaning from the experiences.

Andragogy

One model of education that seems to be useful in this study is Malcolm Knowles's model of andragogy. Although Knowles (1980) initially defined andragogy as "the art and science of helping adults learn" he later refines this definition as "another model of assumptions about learners that seems to "fit" with particular situations" (p. 43). The assumptions of andragogy seem to work in conjunction with social constructivism in this study of the adult learners.

Knowles was a disciple and advocate of Eduard Lindeman. Knowles adapted Lindeman's basic assumptions about adult education into his concepts of andragogy (Stewart, 1987). The following is a brief explanation of Knowles theory of andragogy (Knowles, 1980; Merriam & Cafferella, 1999) and why is it being used in this study.

The first concept of this philosophy is that as a person matures his or her self-concept moves from that of a dependent personality toward one of a self-directing human being. The second concept of andragogy is that an adult accumulates a growing reservoir of experience, which is a rich resource for learning. This concept is that there is respect for an individual's uniqueness and experiences. This fits in well with social constructivism because learners gain new understanding through the continual integration of new content and experiences with past knowledge and create new meaning from the experiences and adapt to this new meaning. The readiness of an adult to learn is closely related to the developmental tasks of his or her social role is the third concept of andragogy. In other words, people construct more meaning to the things that they have learned from experience than those things that they have learned passively. Adults are more problem centered in their learning. This fourth perspective demonstrates that adults appreciate the immediacy of an application. The final concept of andragogy is that adults are motivated to learn by internal factors rather than external ones. Learning takes place when personal goals, interests, attitudes and beliefs come from within the learner. The learner becomes the self motivator or the internal teacher (Knowles, 1980, pp. 43 – 44).

Andragogy is a complex subject. Scholarly writing on the subject, although scant, discusses both the pros and cons of andragogy. Chapter Two presents a discussion of andragogy.

Social constructivist, social constructionism, basic interpretive theory and Knowles theory of andragogy complement each other as they inform this study, and these theories provide insight into the dynamics of the multi-generational classroom. A social constructivist concept is that knowledge is both self-constructed and constructed in the social context in which it occurs. According to social constructivism, learning cannot take place without interaction – interaction including discussion of experiences in relation to the course content with other members of the class. A social constructionist will look for perspectives and examine the implications of these perspectives. A basic interpretive research can interpret how a participant makes meaning of a situation. Andragogy refers to an adult accumulating a growing reservoir of experience which is a rich resource for learning and constructing meaning. One can assume that this learning occurs through social interaction. To enhance this learning, the educator can create conditions in the classroom to help learners acquire knowledge through social interaction while incorporating the learners' experiences.

Using the concepts of andragogy from a social constructivist/social constructionism lens and basic interpretive research informs this study and adds to our understanding of the ways adult students learn from, and interact with, younger students in the classroom.

Methodology

This study is a qualitative, basic interpretive study grounded in a social constructivist/social constructionist view of research (Schwandt, 1997). A basic interpretive research study is used when the "researcher is interested in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon; this meaning is mediated

through the researcher as instrument, the strategy is inductive and the outcome is descriptive" (Merriam, 2002, p.6).

Stage and Manning (2003) define qualitative research as:

an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena…Other terms often used interchangeably are naturalistic inquiry, interpretative research, field study, participant observation, inductive research, case study and ethnography (p. 6). Another definition of qualitative research by Denzin and Lincoln (2000) states: Research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self (p. 2).

The world in the case of this study is considered the learning classroom. It locates the researcher in the world of the classroom to observe and interpret how the learner makes meaning and studies in this classroom. The social constructive/andragogy perspective informs the researcher's understanding of the participants' experiences and how they make meaning from these experiences within the multi-generational classroom.

Qualitative research produces a rich, detailed description of information about a purposeful number of people and cases. It focuses less on the general and more on the detail and depth of understanding of these circumstances (Patton, 2002) and how people make meaning of them. Using a qualitative research paradigm for this study was critical because the purpose of the study was to gain understanding of the learners' perceptions

and interpretations of interactions in the community college classroom and how it affected learning. Information can come in the form of words, images, impressions and gestures that represent real events, and data are typically gathered through interviews, observations and analysis of descriptive documents natural to the situation. Social constructivism as a theoretical framework works especially well with a basic interpretive qualitative research methodology because it emphasizes the participants' individual meaning and understanding of experiences such as knowledge, understanding and feelings within a group context.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

Participants in qualitative research studies are chosen according to purposeful criteria. Participants in this study were (a) students at the college where I am employed who have taken or are taking courses with other students whose age difference is at least 25 years or more and (b) participants who are 45 years of age or older. These participants were asked a series of questions in a semi-structured interview format in order to obtain rich data about what they perceive facilitates intergenerational relationships in the multi-generational community college classroom setting.

Data Collection

In qualitative research, the primary sources of information and data are interviews, observations and documents. Interviewing allows the researcher "to enter into the other person's perspective" (Patton, 2002, p. 341). Interviewing is a vehicle by which a person can voice experiences. It allows another to tell a story. This study consisted of semi-structured interviews with students using the general interview guide approach (Patton, 2003). The students were identified as 45 years of age according to the

statistical demographic information from the college and referred by the guidance department. Documents such as syllabi, class assignments or other handouts from the identified instructors were additional secondary sources of data.

Key topics areas for the interviews included the adult students' descriptions of experiences in a classroom with classmates of diverse ages, adult students' perceptions of multi-generational relationships, how they perceived the relationships forming and evolving in the classroom setting; their preconceived notions of younger students and their perceptions of their learning experiences in the multi-generational classroom.

Data Analysis

The method of analysis used in this study was an inductive analysis. Inductive analysis involves "discovering patterns, themes and categories in one's data and then enabling the findings to emerge from the data through the researcher's interactions with the data" (Patton, 2002, p.453). This analysis is also the strategy suggested by Merriam (2002) when using basic interpretive research. Indicators from the data such as actions and events observed, recorded, or described in documents in the words of interviewees and respondents, were looked at for similarities and differences (Schwandt, 1997). From this process underlying uniformities emerged and an idea or concept was formed.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this qualitative study add to the limited adult education literature focusing on the interaction between adult students and traditional-age students in a multi-generational classroom. Because the numbers of age diverse students within college classrooms are continually rising, this study can be significant to students, instructors and administrators.

This study can be significant to instructors for informational purposes. Just by reading the study and findings, instructors might find significant information. The information from this study can also be used as a tool for instructors so that they may design programs and plan classroom activities conducive to learning in a multi-generational classroom. It may facilitate the development of cross-age pedagogy specifically for multi-generational classrooms.

By studying the dynamics in a multi-generational classroom it is my hope to show that students on a higher education campus find age-diverse classrooms beneficial not only to their learning, but also in building relationships and understanding among individuals of diverse ages.

The study also benefits higher education administrators who are concerned about retention rates on their campuses. A beneficial experience in an age-diverse classroom may contribute to higher retention rates on campus.

This topic is personally significant for me because in every class I teach there are students of different ages. I have observed in my practice that learners often take on roles and responsibilities that are congruent with their age or generation. For example, after a few weeks of school, an older student may evolve into the role of a patriarch or matriarch for a traditional student. My anecdotal data and experiences suggest to me that these rolls and interactions have both positive and negative impacts on individuals and learners.

The second significance is that I have been an adult student in a multi-generational classroom. When I was matriculating for my second master's degree in organizational management, some classes were evenly divided between traditional students and non-traditional students. I remember looking at the traditional students

thinking "what do they know?" Much to my surprise, they knew quite a bit about the subject we were studying. I am also guessing that the traditional students questioned some of my knowledge. The one thing that I found very strange was how they addressed me. In another classroom situation, I could easily have been their teacher and they would call me Mrs. Clemente. Yet, here they were calling me "Kate" just like I was one of them. And I was one of them!

Generational differences and the associated differences in values and experiences are present in the multi-generational classroom. As a result, there are a multitude of interpersonal interactions that are informed by age, but for some reason these differences are not addressed and often ignored. It is my hope that this study not only aids in the understanding of the interactions that occur within the multigenerational classroom, but also introduces a deeper dialogue about age differences in the field of adult education.

<div align="center">Verification</div>

Verification means truth value (Patton, 2002). Verification means attempting to prove to the reader the righteousness and ethics of doing the research. The criteria used to verify this study are credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability. Specific strategies to meet each criterion will be discussed in Chapter Three.

Another method to help ensure the credibility of a study is triangulation. Denzin (as cited in Merriam & Associates, 2002) identifies four types of triangulation: multiple investigators, multiple theories, multiple sources of data and multiple methods to confirm emerging findings. Multiple sources of data were used to collect information. Collection methods that were used are interviews and secondary sources such as a course syllabus and writings from the students.

Definitions of Terms

Adult Learner: When discussing the adult learner, a number of authors come to mind for their work with adults in higher education. One is Carol Kasworm. Before discussing the literature on the adult learner, a definition of the adult student is offered. This definition of an adult student is based on Kasworm (2003).

> The adult student is one who represents the status of age (typically
> defined as twenty-five years of age and older); the status of maturity and
> developmental complexity acquired through life responsibilities, perspectives,
> and financial independence and the status of responsible and often-competing
> sets of adult roles reflecting work, family, community and college students
> commitments (Definition section, para. 1).

Although life responsibilities add to the rich experiences of the adult student, these experiences may occur before age twenty-five. A more recent definition is that adult learners have at least a five-year hiatus between their last academic setting and their application to higher education (Kasworm, Polson, & Fishback, 2002). For the purpose of this study, the adult learner will be a person who is age 45 years or older.

Andragogy: An education model of assumptions about adult learners.

Baby Boomers: A name given to a demographic group of people between the ages of 48 – 62.

Community College: An educational institution that promotes educational opportunity and access to college; they offer lower, affordable tuition and provide varied curricula for students of all ages.

Multi-generational Classroom: For purposes of this study, a classroom where participants are both younger (age 18 – 24) and older than 25 years of age. It can also be called an intergenerational classroom.

Traditional Learner: Age seems to be the determining factor in this definition. Most of the literature identifies traditional learners as students between 18 years and 24 years of age (Kasworm, 2003). Another factor usually defines the traditional learner as one who attends college within five years of graduating from high school.

Assumptions

There are a number of assumptions that I made before this study began. They are as follows:

1. Students of different ages have a desire to interact with other students of different ages and may find value in such interactions.

2. Relationships that form in the classroom can be both positive and negative.

3. Participants in the study will welcome the opportunity to talk about their understanding of different age groups.

4. Descriptions of experiences in the classroom composed of students of different ages will be truthful.

5. As the researcher, I would be able to establish sufficient rapport and confidence to encourage participants to trust me and share their stories.

6. I would be able to clearly understand the lived experiences of participants and be able to report participants' stories in a manner that accurately reflects their experiences.

7. Knowing the experiences of these participants in a multi-generational classroom would be valuable in serving the needs of both instructors and students in this type of classroom.

Limitations

The limitations for this study are as follows:

1. Only students enrolled in a specific community college for a semester will be used for this study.

2. It may be difficult to separate my values from what I see in the research context. Relevant data might be overlooked in the data collection process compromising the true meaning of the account.

3. As the researcher, my beliefs about interactions in a multi-generational classroom are based upon and also biased by my experience as a teacher in a higher education setting and my experience as a graduate student in a multi-generational classroom.

4. In an effort to help the researcher obtain the "correct" data, participants may provide answers to slant the study.

Summary

This first chapter outlined in brief the background of the study as well as the basic premise of the study. The purpose statement, conceptual framework, methodology and research questions were articulated. Also discussed were assumptions and limitations of the study as well as a definition of key terms. Chapter 2 will provide a summary and analysis of the literature. Chapter 3 provides an explanation and rationale utilized for the methodology that was conducted for the study. Chapter 4 introduces the participants and

studies the emerging themes. Chapter 5 summarizes the findings in light of the

theoretical framework and the literature. It also includes the implications for practice and

future research. It ends with some final reflections.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework

"We don't accomplish anything in this world alone…and whatever happens

is the result of the whole tapestry of one's life and all the weavings of

individual threads from one to another that creates something."

Sandra Day O'Connor

(Lewis, 1995 – 2009)

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how adult students, specifically those 45

years of age or older viewed their experiences in multi-generational community college

classrooms where classroom interaction was encouraged by instructors and was intended

to be part of the learning experience. The study examined these learners' perceptions

regarding the development of relationships among students of different ages affected the

dynamics within the community college classroom and how these dynamics affected their

learning. The research also focused on how these interactions evolved and how these

interactions were influenced and encouraged by instructors and students. The

experiences of these adult students and how they perceived and interpreted their

experiences was central to this study.

In this chapter, I present the existing literature that informs this study. In the first

section, I discuss social constructivism which serves as my theoretical framework. The

next section presents a picture of today's college campuses and the challenges that the demographics of higher education produce for educators. The last section portrays the generations attending college and the challenges of having multi-generations in one classroom.

The conceptual framework of this study is grounded in the intersection of social constructivism, social constructionism and andragogy and their relationship to adult learning in the community college classroom. This foundation informs the study by explaining how adults construct knowledge and how they adapt to the classroom.

Social Constructivism

Social constructivism is the primary lens used in this study as it relates to the social meaning-making processes of learning that take place as people interact in the classroom. Social constructivism is a theory about "knowledge and learning; it describes both what "knowing' is and how one comes to know." (Fosnot, 2005, p. ix). It describes the individual human subject "engaging with objects in the world and making sense of them" (Crotty, 1998, p. 79). A constructivism stance "maintains that learning is a process of constructing meaning: it is how people make sense of their experience" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 261). It emphasizes the importance of culture and context in what is understood in society and constructing knowledge based on this understanding (McMahon, 1997).

There are multiple ways the constructivist approach is defined in adult education. In the adult education literature, constructivist approaches represent more of a collection of similar approaches rather than one unified theory (Stage, Miller, Kinzie, & Simmons, 1998). The various views of constructivism all emphasize that learning is a process of

the active construction of meaning; however, they differ in the degree to which the participant participates in the learning activity and the nature and influence that the social environment has on learning. According to Stage et al. (1998) the spectrum of these approaches can range from the radical constructivism of von Glasersfeld, to social constructivism of Gergen, to sociocultural approaches of Brunner and social constructivism of Vygotsky. This study is informed by the theories of both Vygotsky's notion of social constructivism and Gergen's view of social constructionism because of the focus on the study of language to understand meaning and interactions in the classroom and the social construction of meaning.

Lev Vygotsky (1978), a Russian social psychologist, proposes that language and social interaction are primary indicators of an individual's learning. He theorizes that human development depends on sign systems (such as language) with which individuals are accustomed. These systems are influenced by cultural history and social context (Vygotsky, 1978). They are the symbols that cultures create to help people think, communicate and solve problems (Slavin, 2006) and are used to help develop relationships. Vygotsky places heavy emphasis on the social context of learning. He believed that community plays a central role in the process of making meaning (Galloway, 2001). He theorizes that both teachers and older or more experienced children become mentors in learning.

Two of the main principles of Vygotsky's works are More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) (Galloway, 2001) and Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). The MKO refers to someone who has a greater knowledge or experience about a subject than the learner. Although this person can be an adult, it can also refer to one's peer

(Galloway, 2001). The theoretical basis for the Zone of Proximal Development is that "psychological development and instruction are socially embedded: to understand them one must analyze the surrounding society and its social relations" (Hedegaard, 2005, p. 227). The Zone of Proximal Development is the distance between the "actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). When a student is learning a particular task, providing the appropriate assistance or scaffolding will give the student the impetus to achieve success with the task. Once the student is comfortable with the task, the scaffolding can gradually be removed. The student can then complete the task successfully without assistance.

From a social constructivist perspective, learning is a shared activity between the educator and learner rather than an individual activity. A teacher's role in this environment is to stimulate the process of meaning and knowledge.   According to social constructivism, learning cannot take place without interaction. This interaction can take a variety of forms such as a discussion of experiences in relation to the course content with other members of the class. Since learning from a social constructivist perspective takes place in community, the interaction may take place in an intergenerational learning environment where groups from different ages relate to and learn from each other and the culture of the classroom.   Adults returning to higher education are simultaneously developing as students, learners and members of a learning community.

Social Constructionism

The phrase "social constructionism" was introduced into recent academic debate through Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966). Social constructionism addressed reality derived from the societal context and norm (Crotty, 1999) as opposed to individual making meaning (Vygotsky, 1978). Among the numerous conceptualizations of social constructionism in the academic literature "the assembling or arranging of parts, in discrete stages, into larger structures for a certain purpose and that such arranging is social in origin" (Hibberd, 2005, p. 2) seems to best inform the use of constructivism to frame this study.

Constructionism implies that the learner, through direct interaction with the environment, actively constructs knowledge (Resnick, Säljö, & Pontecorvo, 1997). The "mélange of cultures and sub-cultures into which we are born provides us with meanings" (Crotty, 1998, p. 79). These meanings shape thinking and behavior throughout our lives. Learners gain new understanding through the continual integration of new content and experiences with past knowledge and they construct new meaning from these experiences.

Gergen (2001) and Phillips and Early (2000) emphasize the social aspect of knowledge construction, focusing specifically on the use of language in the construction of understanding. The main assumptions of social constructionism from their point of view are as follows: knowledge is constructed by the learner; individuals learn through adaptation by creating their own meaning of a particular situation and then learn from that situation; and people, materials, and situations influence what they learn or what they adapt to.

This study is framed in both social constructivism and social constructionism. The former because it "points up the unique experience of each of us; it suggests that each one's way of making sense of the world is as valid and worthy of respect as any other" (Crotty, 1998, p. 58). The latter, social constructionism "emphasizes the hold our culture has on us; it shapes the way in which we see things and gives us a definite view of the world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 58).

Andragogy

Andragogy is a term that "belongs' to adult education (Merriam & Brockett, 1997, p. 135). It is a way of thinking about working with adult learners. It identifies significant characteristics of adult learners and suggests what educators can do to help adults to learn. Because andragogy seems to "fit" with adult learners and this study is primarily about adult learners, it is used as a framework for the study.

Andragogy also works well with the concepts of social constructivism and social constructionsim. Self direction and experience are characteristics of andragogy. Candy (1991) notes that the "constructivist view of learning is particularly compatible with the notion of self-direction since it emphasizes the combined characteristics of active inquiry, independence and individuality in a learning task" (p.278). Both constructivism and constructionism consider the learner's interaction with individual and cultural experience. Concepts such as situated cognition and cognitive apprenticeship are found in both adult learning theory and social constructivism (Merriam & Cafferella, 1999). These concepts will be discussed further following a discussion of andragogy.

While andragogy has a strong presence in the adult education literature, it has been criticized by many. This section will discuss the criticism of andragogy and why

andragogy is being used in conjunction with social constructivism and social constructionism to inform this study.

One model of education that seems to be useful in this study is Knowles' model of andragogy. Knowles introduced the term in the mid-sixties and originally defined it as "the art and science of helping adults learn" (Knowles, 1980, p.43.). He later refined this definition as "another model of assumptions about adult learners that seems to "fit" with particular situations" (Knowles, 1980, p. 43).

Malcolm Knowles was a disciple and advocate of Eduard Lindeman. Lindeman was an American educator and the author of the book, *The Meaning of Adult Education* (1926), which set the mainstream course generally followed by educators of adults (Stewart, 1986). Lindeman's four original assumptions about adult education were "1. That education is life – not a mere preparation for an unknown kind of future living; 2. Adult education revolves around nonvocational ideals; 3. The approach to adult education is through situations, not subjects; 4.The resources of highest value in adult education are the learner's experience" (Stewart, 1987, p. 103).

Knowles adapted Lindeman's basic assumptions about adult education into his conceptualization of andragogy (Stewart, 1987). Knowles argued that adult learners are uniquely different from children and the differences between how adults learn and how children learn need to be taken into account when working with adult learners.

The first concept of this philosophy regarding adult learners is that as a person matures his or her self-concept moves from that of a dependent personality toward one of a self-directing human being (Knowles, 1980). Students of all ages seem to grow and mature within the classroom and on campus. They become more comfortable with their

role as learners and take an active responsibility in managing both their in-class curriculum and major core and electives courses.

The second concept of andragogy is that an adult accumulates a growing reservoir of experience, which is a rich resource for learning. This concept is that there is respect for an individual's uniqueness and experiences. By nature of the non traditional student, the vast majority of adults bring some prior type of collegiate experiences into the classroom (Kasworm, 2003) which can add to the reservoir. This fits in well with social constructivism because learners gain new understanding through the continual integration of new content and experiences with past knowledge and create new meaning from the experiences and adapt to this new meaning.

The readiness of an adult to learn is closely related to the developmental tasks of his or her social role is the third concept of andragogy. This again reflects social constructivism, suggesting that people construct more meaning to the things that they have learned from experience than those things that they have learned passively.

The final concept of andragogy is that adults are motivated to learn by internal factors rather than external ones. Learning takes place when personal goals, interests, attitudes and beliefs come from within the learner. The learner becomes the self motivator or the internal teacher (Knowles, 1980).

Andragogy is not without controversy. Much of the controversy stems from the classification of andragogy. Scholars seem to wrestle with whether it is a theory, a method, a technique or set of assumptions (Davenport & Davenport, 1985; Brookfield, 1986). Another controversy is whether andragogy is a theory of learning (Knowles, 1980) or more of a theory of teaching (Cross, 1981). Cross believes that "andragogy is

probably closer to a theory of teaching rather than a theory of learning" (Cross, 1981, p. 227) because it guides teachers on how to help adults learn.

Another issue is that the practice of andragogy may not be exclusively an adult practice. Some of the concepts of andragogy can be also suited to childhood learning. A naturally curious child can be "very self-directed in school" (Merriam & Cafferella, 1999, p.275). Davenport and Davenport (1985) argue that the dichotomous perspective (teacher or learner focused) stems from one's philosophical orientation. The phenomena may be perceived in different ways by different people. Adult educators adhering to an integrated world-view will stress unity in education and reject andragogy. Those adhering to a differential world-view will accept andragogy and reject an all-inclusive orientation to education" (Davenport and Davenport, 1985, p. 157). Knowles himself acknowledged this when he changed his subtitle in his 1980 version of *The Modern Practice of Adult Education* to *From Pedagogy to Andragogy* as opposed to *Andragogy Versus Pedagogy* (Merriam & Cafferella, 1999).

Present empirical literature is also inconclusive as to the effects of andragogy in learning and teaching. Rachal (2002) noted that there are very few empirical studies on andragogy, and of those, many come from dissertation studies. Two of the dissertations indicated statistically significant differences between students who were taught pedagogically and andragogically (Stevens, 1985; Strawbridge, 1994). Conversely, three dissertations found that andragogy methods were found to have a small, but positive effect (Homor, 2001; Huntley, 1985; Madriz, 1987). Beder and Carrea (1988) also provided a guarded support that andragogical methods of instruction may have a positive

impact on student attendance. Their findings suggest that andragogy does work as a learning technology.

The limited empirical literature suggests that context has a strong impact upon the relevance of andragogy to teaching and learning. Beder and Carrea (1998) argued that andragogy is situational. Some of the situational variables might include the degree of voluntarism, the learner's experience with the content, type of assessments that will be used and the general course goals. Other variables include the demands made by the sponsoring agency, the existing state of the learner at any given time and the collaborative nature of the environment (Pratt, 1988). This situational aspect also focuses on the social contexts of participation and learning which can be rich with and complex with meaning (Johnson & Pratt, 1998).

Social Constructivism and Andragogy as a Theoretical Framework

Despite the criticism of andragogy found in the adult education literature, the basic tenant of Knowles' theory somewhat explains the context of this study for both the traditional and adult students who participate in the community college classroom. Andragogy can be related to the traditional learners in that there is a possibility that they may learn from the adults the assumptions of self-direction, experience, and the importance that they can immediately apply it to their life situation.

Social constructivist theory and andragogy have a number of concepts that complement each other. A social constructivist perspective suggests that knowledge is both self-constructed and constructed in the social context in which it occurs. According to social constructivism, learning cannot take place without interaction – interaction can include discussion of experiences in relation to the course content with other members of

the class. Crotty noted that knowledge is developed and transmitted through interactive human communities. Social institutions such as a community college can influence individual behavior and thinking through a "complex and social process of enculturation" (Crotty, 1998, p 79). Andragogy refers to an adult accumulating a growing reservoir of experience, which is a rich resource for learning and constructing meaning. Whether learners are dependent or autonomous, the educator must not do for learners what they can do for themselves and conversely, must do for learners what they cannot do for themselves (Pratt, 1988). Educators can create conditions in the classroom to help learners acquire knowledge through social interaction while incorporating the learners' experiences.

Using the concepts of andragogy from a social constructivist lens informs this study and adds to the understanding of the ways adults and non-traditional students learn from and interact with each other in the classroom.

<center>Teaching Multi-Generations in Community Colleges</center>

There are a variety of literature bases that are related to teaching multiple generations in the community colleges. First, because the study itself takes place in a community college setting, it is appropriate here to begin with a brief discussion of the history of community colleges in the United States. Next, in this section, I review the literature that is related to the changing age demographics in higher education overall. Finally, in the third section, I consider issues related to teaching adults in the multi-generational classroom.

A Brief History of Community Colleges

The seeds of the community college were planted during the Civil War when Congress passed the Morrill Act in 1862 (Phillippe & Gonzalez, 2005). This act originally granted land to each state to establish a university. Another seed of growth was the expanding public high school concept of basic education for all Americans. These two movements led the way for training for students in both a two year liberal art college with college level vocational instruction (Phillippe & Gonzalez, 2005).

The first community college was founded in Joliet, Illinois, nearly one hundred years ago (AACC, 2008). It was founded because of duel needs: one, to offer an education to students who were reluctant to leave home for a distant college and two, to allow high schools to better serve their communities with accessible higher education.

Today there are 1,195 community colleges with an enrollment of 11.5 million part time and full time students. Globalization and demographics are driving up the enrollment of community colleges because of the need for an educated and diverse workforce. The demographics of age are that 58% of these students are 22 years of age or older. (AACC, 2008). Fifty one percent of nontraditional undergraduates in this country attend community colleges (American Council on Education (2005).

Phillippe and Gonzalez (2005) cite significant challenges that community colleges are facing in the second one hundred years of their existence: limited funding in combination with substantial enrollment growth, increasing demand for accountability, growing diversity in the student body, renewed emphasis on workforce and teacher preparation, constantly changing technologies and impending turnover in community

college leadership. These challenges must be marked by greater flexibility, fewer boundaries and more varied structures.

Schindley (2002) and Phillippe and Gonzalez (2005) present the many diverse reasons that students choose a community college. Many students choose a community college because of the wide variety of offerings. Some choose community colleges because of the location of the campus. Others appreciate the competitive tuition structure, the broad array of support services and the open enrollment policies. Others choose community colleges because of the articulation agreements with other four-year colleges. Community colleges usually have a two-year course of study that offers an associate's degree. They also offer trade and vocational courses along with non-credit courses and continuing education courses. Community colleges are good places to learn and become familiar with the English language, so they are attractive to non English speaking citizens. They are also a good place to learn other languages, so they are attractive to English-only speaking citizens. Community colleges work closely with business and industry to provide for-credit and noncredit programs focused on workforce development. Some students enroll in community colleges simply for enrichment courses.

The perception of community colleges was not always so positive. In an early study Pascerella and Terenzini (1998) pointed out the myths surrounding a community college education. When compared to the "hallmark institutions" (p.5) defined as faculty with strong research or scholarly orientations, selective admissions policies and a residential undergraduate population, community colleges were "off the radar screen" (p.5) in terms of public recognition or concern. These researchers encourage higher

education practitioners and policy makers to not ignore the impact that these colleges make.

Because this study will take place at my place of employment, the following are some facts about the community college where I am employed.

According to the website, the community college was founded in 1966 and is a public two-year college offering associate degree, certificate and diploma programs. It is accredited by the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools. There are approximately 16,000 students taking credit and noncredit courses. Fifty one percent of the students attend full time; 60% of the students are female; 35.4% of the students are over 25 years of age (Luzerne County Community College, 2009).

As with my particular institution, there are a number of rapidly occurring changes that are affecting college campuses today. Some of these changes will be discussed in the next section.

Changing Age Demographics in Higher Education

In America today, over 4,000 colleges and universities enroll nearly 17 million students. A general overview of the apparent trends in students on campuses today is that about 65 of these students are considered to be "traditional" students who are between the ages of 18 to 25 years of age and are children at the tail end of the baby boomers. A jumbling of the stages of life (Sales, Drolet & Bonneau, 2001) has lead to 35% of the population as being considered "non traditional" and two thirds of this group are enrolled part-time (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2006). The American Council on Education (2005) presents similar statistics, estimating that "61% of students

are traditional and 39% are non-traditional" (p.6). These changing demographics present specific generational issues in the multi-generational classroom which are discussed in the first subsection. Given that in order to understand issues specifically for adult learners in the community college classroom, it is important to consider the characteristics and definitions of adult learners. This is discussed in the second subsection.

  Issues in the multi-generational classroom. Not only are the numbers of non-traditional students in college classrooms increasing, today's campuses are the largest and most diverse in the history of our country. About one third of all undergraduates are non-white (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2006). The majority of students are women, making up about 58% of the undergraduate population (American Council on Education, 2005).

  In addition, many students, predominately traditionally aged, are very computer savvy. This is evidenced in the growing demand for on-line courses which have increased in enrollment from 1.98 million in 2003 to 2.35 million in 2004 (Allen & Seaman, 2007). It is also in evidence by the use of personal blogs and the popularity among traditionally aged students of social media websites such as Facebook, MySpace and YouTube. (American Demographics, 2004).

  Another change in the atmosphere on college campuses is that the traditional four year track to a degree is becoming more difficult to achieve. Limited finances and family and employment responsibilities prevent many students from attending college full time. Thirty- eight percent of students are attending part time, more than ever before, and

therefore are taking longer to graduate (McGlynn, 2007; American Council on Education, 2006, National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2006).

The demographics for community colleges closely follow those of a four-year college trend. According to the American Association of Community Colleges (2009), the average age of a student attending a community college in this country is 29. Sixteen percent of students are older than 40 years of age. Thirty-nine percent are the first generation to attend college. Almost 50% of these students are receiving some type of financial aid and 83% of them are working at least part time.

The next sections will consider in more detail issues that pertain to defining traditional and non-traditional age students and their respective characteristics. Also discussed will be issues in the multi-generational higher education classroom.

Definitions and Characteristics of Traditional and Adult Students

There are discrepancies in the literature as to how to define traditional and non-traditional or adult students. In general, most researchers define traditional students as students who are between 18 and 25 years of age (Spitzer, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998; Giancola, Munz, & Trares, 2008; Kasworm, Polson, & Fishback, 2002; American Council on Education, 2005).

Some researchers focus on more specificity in their definitions. For example, Pascarella and Terenzini (1998) define a traditional student as one who attends four-year institutions full-time, who lives on campus, who does not work full time and who has few, if any, family responsibilities. Choy (2002) adds that they own a high school diploma, enroll full time immediately after high school, depend on parents for financial support and either work part-time or does not work at all and are able to direct most of

their energy towards their studies. Bye, Pushkar and Conway (2007) define traditional students as those aged 21 and younger who are likely to have followed "an unbroken linear path through the education system" (p141).

Some researchers delineate between traditional students whose parents attended college and first generation students (Inman & Mayes, 1999). This definition was used for students whose parents did not have a college degree or who were the first member of their family to attend college or to a student whose parent had no college experience (McConnell, 2000; Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007). The first generation literature is especially relevant to the community college setting because first generation college students often represent a large segment of the community college enrollment (Inman & Mayes, 1999; McConnell, 2000).

Today more than ever more adults are returning to higher education. In fact, adults age 25 years or older represent between one-third to almost one-half of the undergraduate population in American higher education (Kasworm, 2003). The literature is plentiful on the subject of adult or nontraditional students on campus. Topics range from their unique learning differences in the undergraduate classroom, the varied backgrounds and experiences of the adult learners, motivation for returning to college and resources available to them (Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Brumagim, 1999; Kasworm, 1990; Kasworm, 2003). Kasworm (2003) also refers to adult students as experiencing "interrupted enrollments" (p.7).

In general, some of the characteristics of an adult learner are as follows: adults become involved in a learning situation by choice; most adults have concrete immediate goals; adults may prefer to learn quickly and get on with their lives; adults enter a

learning situation with a variety of life experiences; past experience becomes increasingly important; adults with a positive self-concept will find learning easier; usually adults prefer to be self directed; adult learning tends to involve transforming knowledge rather than forming new knowledge; adults are reluctant to change their values, opinions or behaviors; and older adult learners have unique physical requirements. (Cranton, 2000)

The definition of the adult or non-traditional student has evolved as their presence becomes more and more noticeable on campus. Similar to the literature on the traditional students, there are numerous beliefs on what constitutes a non-traditional or adult student. One definition of an adult learner is one who has at least a five-year hiatus between his or her last academic setting and their application to higher education (Kasworm, Polson, & Fishback, 2002). Another definition from the U.S. Department of Education (2002) is that a non-traditional student is one who has any of the following characteristics: delays enrollment in postsecondary education, attends part time for some part of the semester, is considered a full time employee working at least 35 hours per week, is considered financially independent when applying for financial aid, has dependents – a significant other, children or others, may be a single parent and did not finish high school.

Some (Giancola, Munz, & Trares, 2008; Inman & Mayes, 1999; Terezini, 1996; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak & Terezini, 2004; Bui, 2002; Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007; McConnell, 2000) refer occasionally to these non-traditional or adult students as first generation students. Similar to what is seen in the literature regarding traditional students, some researchers focus on first-generation non-traditional students as well. This definition was used for students whose parents did not have a college degree or who were

the first member of their family to attend college or to a student whose parent had no college experience (McConnell, 2000).

Also, in the educational literature, the adult learner is often referred to as a non-traditional learner. Kim (2002) pointed out that at its inception the term non-traditional was based on a number of risks that would increase students' attrition. The risks were identified as: (1) not enrolling within the same year as completion of high school, (2) attending part-time, (3) being financially independent of parents, (4) working full-time, (5) having dependents other than a spouse, (6) being a single parent, and (7) not having a high school diploma. Three-fourths of students in two-year colleges have at least one factor (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). Scala (1996) refers to non-traditional or adult learners as *elders.* Although there is no reference in this article as to how the e*lders* feel about this nomenclature, it does have somewhat a negative connotation. Thus, for purposes of this study, the term non-traditional or adult students will be used interchangeably.

Using the identification criteria listed above, Choy (2002) and Kasworm (2003) believe that 75% of undergraduates have some characteristics of a non-traditional or adult student. Since non-traditional students have specific characteristics, they have specific needs in the classroom setting. As mentioned previously, the fabric of the higher education classroom in the United States is changing. Relative to the non-traditional student, the trends are as follows: more females than males are attending, the majority of adult students are over 30 years of age and older; about one third are 40 and older; a large majority have attended college at some time and many come from households whose total income is $50,000 a year or more (Aslanian & Giles, 2006). Other trends are that

non-traditional students are usually part-time students. They are usually employed and have dependents. Many are attending a two year college and many are first generation students, (Aslanian & Giles, 2006; Giancola, Munz, & Trares, 2008; Choy, 2002).

Due to their vast rich life histories, adult learners have different experiences and backgrounds when compared to traditional students in the higher education classroom. They have a wide range of maturity levels and have different motivations for returning to school such as employment opportunities and job advancement. Often they face limited resources such as time and finances. They have multi-level experiences with technology and are often pulled in many directions trying to manage family responsibilities, home life and work/career (Brumagin, 1999; Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Kasworm, 1990; Kasworm, 2003).

Non-traditional students also have different stressors directly applicable to their adult status. These stressors can include, but are not limited to the following: the extent of perceived demands within work, school and personal lives and the inter-role conflict between work, family and school (Giancola 2009). These stressors may negatively or positively affect their impact on the college experience (Giancola, 2009; Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Morris, Brooks & May, 2003).

Many adults return to college to obtain a degree, preferably a bachelor's degree. Yet, 67% adult students are enrolled in something other than a bachelor's degree (American Council on Education, 2005) such as career oriented purposes to enter a career, to advance a career or to change careers. They also study for professional certification or licensure or simply for their own satisfaction. "Business, health

professions, education and computers are the most popular areas of degree study,"
(Aslanian & Giles, 2006. p.5).

There is also a definition for non-traditional adult students labeled as "older adult students" (Martin, 2005, p.199). These older adult students are over age 65. They are usually white females with at least some college education. There are middle to high income and are in self-reported good health. They matriculate for such diverse reasons as intellectual stimulation, pursuit of an interest, learning something useful, love of learning and social contact (Martin, 2005).

Teaching Adult in the Multi-generational Classroom

In light of the above discussion, it is clear that traditional and adult students often approach the classroom environment differently. They come with different experiences and expectations which have implications of the multi-generational higher education classroom. In addition, the needs of the adult students in the multi-generational classroom along with the barriers and obstacles that adult students face have been recognized by scholars. In the subsections that follow, I discuss specific issues adults face in the multi-generational classroom and then the pedagogical implications.

Issues for adult students in the multi-generational classroom. While the participation literature does not specifically address the issues associated with the multi-generational classroom, it does give an in-depth picture of non-traditional students and why they chose to engage in educational endeavors. Howard and Henney (1998) studied higher education participation and concluded that a student's age plays a role in predicting student participation in a mixed-age college classroom. Their study also found

that class size was the largest significant predictor of student participation with their peers and teacher.

Another study focused on the consolidation of responsibility in the classroom (Howard & Baird, 2000). They were especially interested in two classroom dynamics; the roles of talkers and non-talkers in the classroom and how the classroom participants perceived their roles and the roles of the teacher in the classroom. The results of this research suggest that it is the non-traditional student who most readily accepts the responsibility for discussion. Their younger classmates choose to adopt a much more passive role in the classroom.

Kasworm (1990) notes how non-traditional students maximize the utility of the class time to achieve the most from their interactions with faculty and peers. She states that they tend to use the classroom as setting the stage for meaning making. She argues that the classroom experience may be perceived as vital to the non-traditional student because it is the only real quality time these students have to be on campus. Due to time management restrictions off campus such as family and job, adult students make the most of the class time they have with other students and faculty.

Supporting Kasworm's thesis, Donaldson and Graham (1999) posit that non-traditional students often believe that the classroom is the main stage for creation and negotiation of meaning. For many reasons, non-traditional students are not as involved in extracurricular activities as younger students and, when they are involved, they are highly selective about these involvements. Also, in contrast to the traditional student, their support system primarily comes from family, friends, and co-workers (Kasworm, April,

2003). Therefore, they view the classroom as the focal point for teacher and peer interaction, socialization and their learning experiences.

The classroom is also important for the socialization of the non-traditional student. The classroom became a major factor when discussing social integration. The classroom sets the tone for students to interact with each other around their courses and to interact with the faculty. One reason that the classroom is so important for the nontraditional student is that usually this is the only real quality time these students have to be on campus. Because of time management restrictions off campus, such as family and job, adult students make the most of the class time they have with other students and faculty (Donaldson & Graham, 1999).

In their research on non-traditional students, Darkenwald and Novak (1997) cite a study by Elder that was completed in 1967. Elder's work appears to be one of the earliest published research studies focused on cross-generational classrooms. Although the purpose of Elder's work was to learn about youth socialization, it can inform our understanding of the contemporary multi-generational higher-education classroom. Elder hypothesized that the presence of adults in the classroom (note that he did not call it a multi-generational classroom) would result in positive interpersonal, academic and vocational outcomes for adolescent students. He found that the larger the proportion of adults, the more favorable the attitudes and experiences of the adolescents. He found that the adolescents believed that the adults improved conditions for learning and provided greater motivation and a desire to do well. Because this study was centered on youth socialization, the reactions and comments of adults were limited. One outcome

mentioned by adults in this study was their improved interpersonal relationships with adolescents, both within and outside the classroom.

Darkenwald and Novak (1997) completed a similar study focusing specifically on multi-generational classrooms. Their research supported the proposition that academic performance in college is enhanced as the proportion of adults to traditional students increases in the humanities and social studies classrooms for both age groups.

A study by Kasworm (2005) states that adults in an intergenerational classroom attending a community college found that there is not a "monolithic adult student identity" (p. 16). They bring to the classroom different experiences, beliefs and actions contributing to their student identities. These adult students view their identity as interrelated "but not necessarily embedded within their age and maturity" (p16).

Another study by Kasworm (2009) that explored the socially and culturally mediated experiences of adult students in a contemporary research university setting noted that the adult student viewed the younger students from three different frames. The first frame was academic quality. The adult student believed that some of the younger students were not supportive of the academic quality of the institution. The second frame was based on the positive relationships the adults formed with the younger students. Conversely, the third frame referenced the negative relationships that occurred within the classroom.

The research of Bishop-Clark and Lynch (1995) focuses on faculty perceptions of the mixed-age college classroom. In their study, they focused on the implications of faculty attitudes toward a mixed-age college classroom. They found that faculty not only enjoyed and preferred teaching in a mixed-age classroom, but that they believed that it

has some benefits for the students such as the different perspectives that different age students introduce in the classroom.

In another study, Bishop-Clark and Lynch (1998) investigated similarities and differences in faculty attitudes toward age diversity in the multi-generational classroom. This study found that faculty attitudes toward teaching in the mixed-age classrooms were overwhelmingly positive.

Brumagin, (1999) studied the dynamic interactions that developed between the nontraditional and the traditional student doing a classroom assignment. The findings suggested that as time goes on and interaction increases, traditional students became increasingly appreciative of the skills and experiences levels of adult students. "The study resulted in several traditional students actively seeking out and learning from the more experienced students" (Brumagin, 1999, para 2).

Faculty need to be aware of the relationship between the motivation to learn and the positive affect levels for adult students. Bye et al. (2007) found that an emphasis of the intrinsic motivation in the intergenerational classroom "will lead to better coping, psychological resilience and persistence in academic goals" (p.154). This finding is consistent with the results of Justice and Dornan's (2001) study. When nontraditional students simply enjoy the process of learning, a correlation can be drawn to a higher positive affect for the older student.

Pedagogical implications. The previous discussion and some of the literature on teaching in higher education offers some pedagogical implications for teaching in the multi-generational classroom. This will be considered first in light of the implications for teaching adult students and then for teaching in the multi-generational classroom.

Teaching adult students. A number of authors have voiced their beliefs about what skills and methods one needs to possess when teaching adults. One suggested method of teaching adults is to teach by discussion. Brookfield and Preskill (1999) address dialogue and interaction as a way to create community or democracy in the classroom. This book deals with the power of discussion and creating a democratic society in the classroom. It addresses the learning style of sharing ideas through discussion. Some suggestions the authors make are that the seating arrangements can encourage students to participate in discussions. A circle or semi-circle arrangement is suggested for face to face communication with the instructors or other learners. Another suggestion is to adapt a critical incident questionnaire. This could be used by students to point out specific words or phrases spoken in the classroom that may be engaging, distancing, affirming or surprising and then could lead to discussion. The authors also suggest ways to continue discussion through listening, responding and creative grouping. This book is especially valuable for an individual who may be looking to fine-tune their pedagogy through curriculum and instruction. The book gives voice to creating community with discussion from both the teacher's viewpoint and the student's viewpoint.

Brookfield in his book *The Skillful Teacher* (2006) addresses the essence of a skillful teacher from an adult educational perspective in a constructivist manner by implying that the teacher is constantly researching students' responses to learning and making pedagogical decisions from those responses. In following this type of framework, he also notes current issues that have affected teaching in the 21st century

such as increasing diversity and on line education and how these issues have changed teaching techniques.

Baxter- Magolda (2000) also believes dialogue can perpetuate meaning and learning in a course. Listening carefully to students is critical in understanding how they make meaning of their experience. Hearing how students discuss the nature of knowledge and how they justify their beliefs can indicate reflective thinking. Asking students to discuss their feelings about controversial material can also lead to how students make meaning.

A theme of authenticity also presents itself when teaching in higher education. Becoming an authentic teacher means being true to oneself. Brookfield (2006) offers a number of ideas that can lead to authenticity. Autobiographical disclosure, congruence between words and actions and development of student trust are some of the behaviors that lead to authenticity. Cranton (2001) combines these ideas with the thought that teaching becomes who one is. We need to know ourselves – our personality, values, and beliefs – to become an authentic teacher. Authenticity is "self-awareness, awareness of others, relationships, context and critical reflection" (Cranton, 2006, p.113). Of the many characteristics it takes to be a good teacher, Cranton (2001) believes authenticity is the most important.

Pratt and Associates (1998) offer five qualitatively different perspectives on teaching adults. These perspectives were derived from extensive research and portrayed in both theoretical and practical terms. The perspectives are 1. transmission – the effective delivery of content; 2. apprenticeship – modeling ways of being;

3. developmental – cultivating ways of thinking; 4. nurturing – facilitating self efficacy;

and 5. social reform – seeking a better society (p. xiii).

Teaching in the multi-generational classroom. While there is literature dealing

with the adult learner on campus, there is very little on how to deal with the students of

different ages together in higher education classes, whether the classrooms are in a

community college or a traditional four year college. "And rarely is there an attempt to

take explicit advantage of the presence of older adults in the classroom" (Manheimer,

1997, as cited in Knapp & Stubblefield, 2000, p. 612.).

Because the rhythm of study has changed in the college classroom (Sales et al.,

2001), most suggestions on how to "deal" with an intergenerational classroom are simply

good pedagogical techniques. One early article by Bishop-Clarke and Lynch (1992) gave

some concrete advice for teaching in a mixed-age classroom. One was the use of good

spirited acceptable humor (Bye et al., 2007). Another was to be aware of potential

problems and learn some strategies to address them. This might be by a trial and error

method. One suggestion was to decrease the barriers between the groups by discussing

the differences including age, class, race, gender and sexual orientation between the two

groups, and then by conversing about each groups' similarities. Another tip was to

implement the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator exercise if possible and to encourage

discussion about differences if the need arises. The teacher should always try to

approach each age group similarly.

Patton (2000) believes that it is important to be flexible with assignment

deadlines, especially when dealing with adult students but also when dealing with

traditional students or high risk students. The deadline extensions have a number of

benefits. Retention rates are higher in classes, but especially intergenerational classes when deadlines are extended. Students who are given more time to complete their studies produce better results. They also develop lifelong healthy learning patterns.

Besides the impact of adults in a college classroom, some further suggestions that Bishop-Clarke and Lynch (1998) offer when teaching in a mixed-age classroom is to encourage students to appreciate the enhanced learning that can accrue to them in such an environment. Instructors may attempt to understand the stress the adult student may be experiencing and its impact on the adult learner (Giancola, 2009). Teachers are encouraged to share their knowledge about the benefits of classroom age diversity. Faculty can also encourage mixed-age group work. Faculty should also remember that it is the mixed-age classroom and not the older student that is responsible for the benefits that occur in these types of learning environments.

When writing about different perspectives of teaching adults, it should be noted that many of these ideas and suggestions are just good teaching practices and should be evaluated for use in any classroom. As Parker Palmer states in *The Courage to Teach* (1998), "Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher" (p.10).

Generational Issues

In thinking about generational issues in the classroom, it is important to glean some insight on the interacting generations by considering such interactions in the larger culture. The U.S. population stood at more than 295 million in 2005 and may reach 357 million by the year 2025 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). One of the most important demographic trends in the country and on college campuses is the changing age structure

of the population. Because this study investigates the dynamics of the multiple generational classroom, the literature presented in this section will define the generations and their characteristics; it will discuss the experiences of members of each generations and how these experiences may impact their learning and educational preferences. Finally the dynamics among the generations will be discussed.

Defining Generations.

The literature is not consistent on the dates of these specific generations but suggests that the dates are guidelines. There is approximately a three year differential from the stated beginning year of the generation and the ending year of the generation time period. It should also be noted that members of these generations should not be stereotyped. These categorizations are merely a method of identifying the majority of members of a specific time period.

Individuals born between 1901 –1924 were known as the *GI Generation*. There were numerous historical events experienced by members of this generation that affected their perspectives and belief systems. For example, they were hardened by economic circumstances such as the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl. This generation fought in World War II. They were products of far reaching veterans legislation such as low interest loans for homes, farms and for higher education. Because of this, they tend to be strong supporters of government. They experienced and tend to believe in good employer/employee loyalty. They hold strongly to their belief in the American Dream. Yet, they were slow to respond to racism and segregation (Strauss & Howe, 1991).

The Silent Generation. The S*ilent Generation* label was given to people born between 1925 and 1942. Like the generation before them, they too experienced

economic hardships with the Great Depression and The Dust Bowl. Some may have fought in World War II; many fought in the Korean War. They tend to be patriotic and conservative. Also, they are known for having a strong work ethic and believed in job security. They are the wealthiest generation in American history. Although they were slow to respond to racism and segregation, members of this generation were involved in the Civil Rights movement (Strauss & Howe, 1991; Fogg, 2008).

The Baby Boomers. The next generation is the *Baby Boomers*. The term "baby boomers" is used by marketers to identify the population which resulted from a huge increase in births between the years 1946 to 1964 (Pew Research Center, 2009) although some authors place the date at 1943 – 1960 (Strauss & Howe, 1991). At this writing, this group is between the ages of 48 – 62. They have become a formidable cohort simply because of their numbers. It is estimated that there were approximately 76 million babies born during these years (Straus & Howe, 1991, Pew Research Center, 2009; Fogg, 2008). This generation can be further broken down by early cohort – those born between 1946 to 1954, and a later cohort – those born between 1955 to 1964.

The baby boomers have been followed by the media like none other before. They have been classified by many names. In the 1980's they were called "yuppies" (young urban professionals), "bumpies" (black upwardly mobile professionals) and "dinks" (dual-income, no-kids). By 1990, their names had changed to reflect their lifestyle: "dewks" became dual-earners with kids, and "moby" were mother older, baby younger. More recently their nicknames reveal their age and attitude. "Woofs" are well-off older folks and "grumpies" are literally what the name suggests (Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2006).

This generation has experienced unprecedented prosperity and civic changes during their lifetime. Baby boomers have substantial disposable income. Some members of this generation fought in the Vietnam conflict. Individual rights became an issue. They worked for and passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and are very concerned about equality and social justice issues such as: women's rights, racial equity and gay rights. Unlike their parents, they had a strong distrust of government as can be noted in the many anti-war protests. Many members of this generation actively experimented with drugs and sexual expression. This generation experienced a different type of violence. As opposed to a war, they experienced the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy, his brother Robert F. Kennedy, Rev. Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and the Kent State University and Charles Manson killings (Straus & Howe, 1991, Pew Research Center, 2009; Fogg, 2008).

While some of these experiences may have left them with a healthy dose of cynicism, Ansoorian, Good and Samuelson (2003) argue that this generation is optimistic and positive. They support this by suggesting that this generation experienced leaders who were strong and confident as role models. Also, they state that this generation grew up when America was No. 1 and working hard and getting a college education was a sign of success.

Baby boomers entering or re-entering higher education are like a mosaic returning to college (Sander, 2008). They are old enough to feel the strains of the workplace, but too young to retire.

Baby boomers bring diverse backgrounds and experiences to the academy. They also experience a number of external and internal constraints that hinder their educational

experiences. Scholars argue that colleges need to fine-tune their programs and make them more accessible to adult learners. Students who are returning because of job retraining are usually under some type of time restraint. The lack of flexibility of the traditional six week semester may not work for them. They are looking for flexible class schedules, credit for prior learning or work experience and career counseling (Sander, 2008). Community colleges have more readily adapted to these students. They offer classes on weekends, in the evenings and in various convenient places in the community such as churches, shopping centers and public schools (Sander, 2008).

In addition to their time constraints and need for flexibility, baby boomers tend to have expectations of the classroom experience. For example, Cambiano, DeVore and Harvey (2001) found that baby boomers prefer a tactile learning style. They expressed a need for hands on learning using three-dimensional and manipulative materials. The study also noted that baby boomers want to learn in an environment that they feel is physically *warm.* (2001).

Finally, baby boomers in the workplace have been found to be team oriented, collaborative and focused on the group's goals more than individual goals. After all, baby boomers were the first Americans to grow up with "works well with others" on their report cards, tend to be team-oriented and collaborative (Ansoorian, Good & Samuelson, 2003). Work is very important to baby boomers, and they tend to live to work and define themselves by their occupation and level of success.

Generation X. Generation X, or the Thirteenth Generation, named this because they are the thirteenth generation since the founding of the United States, (Strass & Howe, 1999) is the name given to people born between the years 1965 to 1978. At this

writing, they are between the ages of 30 and 43. As with other generational cohorts, their sociological experiences have defined who they are. For example, they grew up in a culturally diverse society and are more accepting of diversity to the point that they often take it for granted. They played with electronic toys and computers and are computer savvy adults. Some have experienced warfare in the Gulf War. They were the first generation to state their concerns about the environment. They have lived in the age of AIDS, recession and corporate downsizing. Finally, they were the first generation to come home from school and not be greeted by an adult. They were the first generation to be known as latchkey kids.

As a result, their expectations and needs are different from other generational cohorts. For example, they tend to prize experience and are interested in job satisfaction. They are less interested in a team environment and more interested in being productive and accomplishing goals. They are perceived as pessimistic, have a negative outlook, and are cynical of government. They are the first of the latchkey kids (Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2006; Strass & Howe, 1999; Fogg, 2008; Ansoorian, Good & Samuelson, 2003).

Generation X individuals seem to prefer a structured environment. They tend to like to have carefully laid out plans of what is expected of them. They prefer a schedule of assignments, parameters of each lesson and sequential steps of each assignment. They want to leave nothing to interpretation. The prime learning time for Xers is in the evening (Cambiano, DeVore & Harvey, 2001). Ansoorian, Good and Samuelson (2003) write that Gen Xers "work to live" and seek balance in their lives. Because they were the first of the latchkey kids, they became very self-reliant and accustomed to being alone. Therefore, they may prefer working on assignments individually.

Generation Y. The last generation of adults in the United States is known as Generation Y. Other names are the echo boomers, little boomers, millennials or tweens (Strauss & Howe, 1991; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2006). These children of the baby boomers were born between the years 1977 to 1995 and are now between the ages of 13 to 29 and are currently the traditional college aged student. This group has access to a great amount of disposable cash. Many have been coddled by their parents who do not want to make the same mistake their parents made. Their parents are very protective of them and are concerned for their safety. They are also concerned with their schooling and their academic and extracurricular actives. Members of this generation identify with their parents' values and feel close to their parents. They have high economic clout. They have been exposed to school massacre violence and have become tolerant to seeing violence. As of this writing, they are young and untested (Oblinger, 2003).

Millennials tend to gravitate toward group activities and collaborative learning. The often see smart as "cool". They value experiential activities and structure. They are goal orientated and have a positive attitude. They are computer and internet savvy. They value teamwork and are very good at multitasking (Strauss & Howe, 1991; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2006; McGlynn, 2005). They are accustomed to watching occurrences in "real time" (Elam, Stratton & Gibson, 2007). To foster academic success with millennials, one must engage them with cooperative learning exercises, empower them to be decision makers in the course and allow them to analyze their own learning strategies (McGlynn, 2005).

The Multi-generational Society

Both the aging workforce and the aging population involved in education have society's attention. As the number of adults age 60 and older in America increases, public attention is being focused on the growing tension between the generations. This is due largely to the impending age boom and funds for health care and entitlement programs become more limited (Hanks & Icenogle, 2001). It is important to not let this tension turn into age oppression (Gadotti & Torres, 1999; Formosa, 2000).

Some proponents are lobbying for the need for aging education to begin as early as childhood (Klein, Council & McGuire, 2005). Issues such as the aging workforce have begun to capture the attention of many human resource directors. In the midst of this intergenerational conflict opportunities for positive exchanges between members of different generations are sorely needed (Knapp & Stubblefield, 2000).

But there are still some negative images regarding continuing education for older adults. This negativity may be caused by misconceptions that there are appropriate ages for education and that education is only for the young to get them started on their life path. Today these stereotypes do not reflect the reality of our society and the workplace. Older adults have many reasons for continuing education and education must adjust to their needs (Kline et al., 2005).

One program that discusses dealing with the intergenerational diversity is the Rosa Keller Campus Program in New Orleans (O'Hanlon, Camp and Osofsky, 1995). Named for a social activist who returned to college at the age of 65, Rosa Keller persuaded the chancellors and presidents of all the accredited institutions in New Orleans to band together to provide educational opportunities for people who believed in lifelong

learning. One of the strategies that this program instituted was to offer tidbits or slices of

courses at no cost to adults who are considering enrolling in the program. This program

serves as a magnet for adults to continue their education and to be introduced to an

intergenerational classroom at little or no risk to themselves.

Education of older people does not strictly refer to schooling that occurs within

the schools – high school, colleges or universities. It can take place in senior centers,

churches and congregate meal sites. Scala (1996) outlined six different types of

educational opportunities for older adults: (1) an education which assists in the transition

to retirement, (2) financial management in retirement, (3) how to deal with frail health as

one ages (4) dealing with terminal illness or dying, (5) applying for some type of

professional certification for the work place or returning to the work place, and (6)

educational programs dealing with personal development or enrichment (p.748).

O'Hanlon et al., (1995) add their own categories of adult educational programs: (1) sites

of a national educational program based in department stores, (2) interfaith educational

programs located in places of worship, (3) learning in retirement institutes based on

university affiliations, (4) community-college-based programs, and (5) multipurpose

senior centers with educational activities (p. 544).

When studying intergenerational programs, two distinct yet complimentary

educational concepts come together. Intergenerational programs involve planned,

ongoing interactions between younger and older adults and these programs should be

beneficial to both sets of students. In an attempt to research intergenerational interactions

in a classroom, an intergenerational service learning course was offered for the first time

at Southeastern Oklahoma State University during the 1998 – 1999 academic year

(Knapp & Stubblefield, 2000). Within the classroom, learning partner groups (LPGs) consisting of two to three traditional age students and one senior adult participant were established. There were two primary objectives for the course. The first one was to provide an opportunity to traditional age college students to engage in community service. The second objective was to witness examples of successful aging. The findings of the research suggest that the intergenerational service learning course had a positive influence on the students' awareness and perception of aging. The course increased their knowledge of the process of aging and improved their perceptions of the elderly. One reason for this outcome was attributed to the positive images of aging displayed by the senior adult class members.

Hanks and Icenogle (2001) introduced Project ALIGN - The Alabama Intergenerational Network for Service-Learning. The objective of this program was to examine similarities and differences in attitudes of student and mature worker participants before and after their participation in project activities. Measurements were performed on participants' attitudes about age diversity before and after the project. The project involved business and social service students doing a service learning project with mature workers. The authors readily admit that the results offer no sweeping solutions to generational conflicts. Instead it addresses a simpler issue – can educational experience make a difference in how older and younger workers interact? The study demonstrated that interaction in this service-learning project improved students' attitudes toward older workers. But the article did not discuss the attitudes of the mature workers towards the students.

The researchers in both of these studies cautioned readers to question the generalization of their results because, as in the case of the Southeastern Oklahoma project, the traditional aged students were required to take a prerequisite course in gerontology. Some members of the ALIGN students were gerontology majors. Also, both samples were very small. In both projects, the senior participants were not enrolled students, but rather volunteers for the research. Both articles used service learning as part of their program. Lacking in either article was any mention of specific instruction or teaching techniques.

It is important to understand why adults have returned to school. In one study Scala (1996) determined that the overwhelming reason adults returned to school was "enrichment/love of learning" (p. 764). Other reasons included interest in specific courses/subjects, exploring new options and learning new ideas. But these reasons for returning to school could prove to be both a positive and negative learning influence on an intergenerational classroom, depending on the personalities in the classroom.

Conclusion

The increasing number of adult students 45 years of age and older attending institutions of higher education makes it even more important to understand their experiences in the classroom. While the field of adult education addresses many issues concerning the adult learner such as the needs of the adult, the importance of the classroom and the helpfulness of the administration and faculty, there is very little empirical literature investigating how the multigenerational classroom experience is perceived by the non-traditional student and how the non-traditional student perceives the younger traditional student. This study hopes to show what that perception is and how it

changes through the adult's experiences in a multi-generational classroom. Because the goal of qualitative research is to understand the meaning of a phenomenon (Merriam, 2002), the unique experiences of adult students need to be examined from their own perspectives.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how adult students, specifically those 45 years of age or older, view their experiences in multi-generational community college classrooms where classroom interaction is encouraged by faculty and is intended to be part of the learning experience. The study examined these learners' perceptions of how the development of relationships between and/or among students of different ages affects the dynamics within the classroom and affects their learning.   The research focused on how these interactions evolve and how they are influenced and encouraged by faculty and students. The experience of these adult students and how they perceived and interpreted their experiences is central to this study. Therefore, a qualitative, basic interpretive design was utilized.

This chapter provides a description of the methodology used in the study, followed by a discussion of the assumptions of qualitative research, the rationale for choosing this type of design and how this methodology dovetails with the social constructivism framework. This is followed by the background of the researcher, the participant selection procedure, the data collection techniques and methods and the data analysis procedures. Finally, strategies for ensuring trustworthiness of the findings are discussed.

Overview of the Qualitative Research Paradigm

This study was a basic interpretive qualitative research design (Merriam, 2002) which encouraged dialogue with participants to share their experiences and their interpretations of those experiences. As in all basic interpretive research, throughout data

collection and analysis, the focus was on the subjective perspectives and accounts of the participants. This study sought to understand if and how students in a higher educational multi-generational classroom related to and learned from each other. It investigated the perceptions of their experiences and how they interpreted their experiences, which is a process of meaning making.

The Purpose and Process of Qualitative Research

The focus of qualitative research is an in-depth study of a particular experience or phenomenon. It studies the many realities of how people make meaning out of their experience. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) state that qualitative research is:

situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self (p. 2).

Because this research is qualitative in nature, the focus of this section relates to the attributes of qualitative research. Qualitative research generally consists of four phases (Denzin & Lincoln 2000). Phase one is determining the theoretical perspective which, for this study, is social constructivism because it focuses on the ways people interact and make meaning of experience in a social context. The focus of phase two is to develop a research design or strategy. The study was conducted using basic interpretive research methodology. This was chosen because of the study's focus was on illuminating the subjective experiences of the participants.

Once deciding on the research design for a qualitative study, the researcher must decide on a method of collection and analysis which consists of varying techniques such as: interviewing, observing, collecting documents or other artifacts, using textual analysis, and focus groups. Data collection is the third phase of a qualitative research study. Data for this study was collected in various forms. First, participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview format. Documents such as syllabi, assessments and assignments were also analyzed. I also taped the interviews and took field notes to assist with analysis.

The final phase in qualitative research is the process of analysis and presentation. When analyzing qualitative research, one must consider criteria for judging the adequacy of the research, the politics of interpretation of the findings, and the policy of the analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Qualitative research is subjective in nature – the researcher makes inferences from the data that is collected. These data may support a particular theme. Qualitative researchers uncover and interpret these themes. Triangulation was used to ensure the validity and reliability of the study. Triangulation is a means of checking the integrity of these inferences. Denzin (as cited in Merriam & Associates, 2002) identifies four types of triangulation: multiple investigators, multiple theories, multiple sources of data and multiple methods to confirm emerging findings. In this study, multiple sources of data were used to collect information. Collection methods that were used for this study were interviews, and collection of relevant documents such as a course syllabus or participant's writings.

Characteristics of a Qualitative Research Study

According to Merriam (2002), qualitative research has four characteristics. The first is that people strive to understand the meaning of their world and experience. The second is that the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. The third characteristic is that qualitative research is inductive and the fourth characteristic is that qualitative research is richly descriptive.

These characteristics informed the design of this study. In this study, I explored how adult learners, 45 years of age and older, make meaning of their experiences in a multi-generational higher educational classrooms. I was interested in learning about how they perceive their experiences and how these experiences inform their learning.

I was the primary instrument for data collection. This means that my beliefs and experiences, or better put, my filters and understandings became part of the co-construction of the understanding of the experience. Data collection for qualitative research is inductive in that I looked for themes and ideas from this research. To gather this information, I gathered rich descriptive data from my participants.

The characteristics described above are compatible with the culture and purpose of the field of adult education, thus qualifying it an appropriate paradigm for investigation in the field (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). In addition, the qualitative research paradigm is appropriate for this study because qualitative methods allow the researcher to uncover the meaning of a phenomenon. In this case, the phenomenon is multi-generational classroom. From a practical perspective, it is my hope that the information gathered from this study will be used to improve educational and adult educational practices.

The Basic Interpretive Qualitative Methodology

  The basic interpretive approach was used because this was an interactive process, with the focus on the perspectives of the participants in a classroom. The main purpose of this method is to "discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, the perspectives and worldview of the people involved" (Merriam, 2002, p.6). Merriam further defines basic interpretive research as:

> A study that exemplifies where the researcher is interested in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon, how this meaning is mediated through the researcher as instrument; the strategy is inductive, and the outcome is descriptive. One seeks to understand a phenomenon, a process, the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved, or a combination of these. Qualitative research using a basic interpretive study will be interested in three issues: "how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 38).

The overall purpose is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences.

  The manner in which this plays out in this study was as follows. First, the inductive interpretations of the participants' experiences in the classroom were explored through analyzing interviews, observations and class artifacts for themes and patterns that emerge from which I drew conclusions. Second, the meaning of these experiences was represented in the participants' words, interpretations and even symbols, all of which were collected by the researcher. This approach aids the researcher to understand and/or

make meaning of the phenomenon that is being studied because the researcher is intimately involved in the process, not just an outside observer. There is a mutual interaction between the researcher and the participants with this approach. This interaction results in high-quality data, findings and interpretations (Guba & Lincoln, 1990; Stage & Manning, 2003).

Participant Selection Procedures

For this basic interpretive study, I interviewed adults 45 years of age or older enrolled at a community college in Pennsylvania about their experiences and understanding of those experiences in the multi-generational classroom. The classroom instructor must facilitate dialogue and communication in the learning experience. Unlike previous traditional classrooms, age diversity is becoming more and more prevalent in higher education today (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). The participants were selected from the student population of the community college where I teach. The goal of the selection process was to obtain a purposeful, convenience sample. A purposeful sample is a sample of selected individuals specific to a study that can provide specific insights to the problem being studied. Purposeful sampling selects information rich cases that can then be studied more closely (Patton, 2002). These samplings can generate information about matters that are important to a study and give insight and understanding to the cases.

Patton (2002) cites several strategies for purposefully selecting information-rich cases. The one that I used was a qualitative purposeful homogeneous sampling. Purposeful sampling was used because "the focus will be on selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (p.230). Homogeneous

sampling was used because this "describes some particular subgroup in depth" (p. 235). I focused on experiences of non-traditional students who are 45 years of age or older matriculating in a multi-generational classroom and looking for emerging congruencies in their experiences.

Purposeful Sample

There are a number of processes I used to attain a purposeful sample. First, I worked closely with the counseling department. Many students enrolled at this community college are assigned a counselor once they are enrolled. This counselor is available to the student throughout the educational experience. With the approval of the Dean of the Counseling Department, an email letter will be sent to the counselors asking them to refer to me students who meet the criteria for this study. I received two responses from the counselors, so I proceeded to identify students who met the criteria through the enrollment status information from the college. The admissions department submitted to me a list of students who met the criteria for the study. I contacted a number of referred students through a letter of invitation sent through the mail. The final means of participant selection was asking specific instructors for referrals of students who meet the criteria. A number of participants were selected through this method.

Criteria for Participation

The sample size "depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what's at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources" (Patton, 1998, p. 244). Patton (2002) states that although there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry, the size should be

decided based on the purpose and rationale of the study and should be judged in context. I included 14 non-traditional students who were 45 years of age or older in this study.

Selection of participants was based on the following criteria: (a) adult students will be at least 45 years of age or older, (b) participants will be enrolled at the same community college and be seeking a specific degree or certification (c) participants will have experienced a minimum of one class that has students of a diverse age (a multi-generational classroom), (d) the participants must have completed at least one class where the instructor facilitated interaction among students, and (e) the classroom environment in which the participants are enrolled will be such that the instructor facilitates dialogue and communication in the learning experience. Because of my experience and tacit knowledge of the college and community college students in general, I thought that I would be able to determine instructors who teach in this manner. Tacit knowledge, or relevant knowledge, (Boyatzis, 1988) is "knowledge, not data or information, insofar as the term tends to be used to describe knowledge that is far more heavily based on personal understanding or experience" (Busch, 2008, p. 2). This criterion was more difficult to accomplish. The instructors that I thought would have references, in reality, had very few. My selection methods will be discussed in the next section.

Data Collection Procedures and Methods

In qualitative research, the sources of data are interviews, observations and documents. The primary source of data collection in this study was interview, which, as Patton (2002) says is to "allow us to enter into the other person's perspective" (p. 341). Interviewing allows participants to convey feelings, thoughts and intentions. It lends

importance to the meaningful perspectives of others. Finally, it allows the interviewee to tell their story.

In order to refine my skills as a researcher and to see if these questions generated the data I was hoping for, two pilot interviews were conducted. The pilot interviews gave me an opportunity to evaluate my interview questions and techniques. They also gave me an opportunity to gain confidence in my research abilities and experience as a researcher. This is very important for qualitative research since this method requires that I serve as the data collection instrument. I reviewed my pilot interviews with my committee chair prior to embarking on the research project. I slightly altered the interview guide as necessary before continuing with the interviews for the study.

A preview of my data collection procedures follows. I conducted a face to face interview with 14 participants. I contacted the participants by phone to identify myself and to ask them if they would be willing to be part of this study. Before the interview, I gave them a packet which contained the study process, a brief demographic survey and the consent form. I then proceeded with the interview. Each interview took about one to two hours to complete.

Interview Process

This study used a semi-structured approach to interviewing which outlines a set of issues to be explored. Semi-structured interviewing allowed me to ask each participant the same basic lines of inquiry, yet allow the freedom to build a conversation within a particular subject area, to word questions spontaneously and to establish a conversation style focusing on a particular predetermined subject. This style also allowed the option

of determining which information to pursue in greater depth, depending on the respondents' answers.

This interview process was aimed at facilitating an open and in-depth discussion with participants. The strength of using interviews in data collection is that large amounts of data can be obtained in a short period of time. Semi-structured interviewing provides opportunities for immediate clarification and follow-up and provides insight into the meaning people bring to everyday experiences.

To insure accuracy, all interviews were audio-taped. I transcribed them verbatim. By listening to the tape, I captured any statement or comment that might have been missed. I also took field notes during the interview and referred to my notes to add any comments that I may have missed when I transcribed. Finally, I had my advisor review the transcripts after they were transcribed.

Some of the limitations of interviewing are that the interviewer may affect the response in some unknown way, the interviewer may introduce personal bias, interviews may become time consuming and both the participants and the researcher may lose focus. Finally, there is some risk of recall error, meaning that the researcher may misinterpret an experience or information shared during the interview (Patton, 2002).

<center>Data Analysis</center>

The goal of data analysis is to have meaningful synthesis of the information that participants have provided and that bests interprets their experiences (Stage & Manning 2003). Recurring patterns were identified. Data analysis was done simultaneously with collection (Merriam, 2002). In a basic interpretive approach, analysis begins with "identifying recurring patterns (presented as categories, factors, variables, and themes)

that cut though the data" (Merriam, 2002, p.38). The method of analysis was thematic analysis. "Thematic analysis is a process for encoding qualitative information and may consist of themes, a complex model with themes, indicators and qualifications that are causally related or something in between these two forms" (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 4). Patton (2002) has termed this content analysis which is a process of identifying, coding and categorizing the data into various patterns. This method involves systematically examining and refining variations in emergent concepts (Patton, 2002). Indicators from the data such as actions and events observed, recorded, or described in documents in the words of interviewees and respondents, are looked at for similarities and differences (Schwandt, 1997). From this process underlying uniformities can emerge and an idea or concept can be formed. The overall interpretation of these findings is grounded in the researcher's understanding of the participants' experiences (Merriam, 2000).

<div align="center">Background of Researcher</div>

As the researcher, I have a particular interest in the topic based on my own experiences as a teacher in a community college setting and as a student in a university master's program with students of multiple ages. It was important that during this study, I recognized my beliefs and ideas in order to enhance the participants' effects on the results.

As for my background, I am a registered dietitian by education, a manager by employment history and a teacher by profession. I have been in the teaching profession for ten years. I am in this profession with no educational, instructional or curricular background. My twenty-five years of management experience had qualified me for this

faculty position in a hospitality curriculum, but I realize that I have much to learn about teaching, which is why I enrolled in the adult education doctorate program

Although I had many years of experience in the hospitality field, the first challenge I encountered when I began teaching was how to convey this experience to students in the classroom. Another challenge was how to manage a classroom of age diverse students. Every class I teach has at a mixture of adult and traditional students. Both sets of students bring a variety of challenges to the classroom; having them in the same classroom accentuates this challenge.

I introduced myself to the participants as both a teacher and a student in a multi-generational classroom. I hoped that by sharing the fact that I, too, was a student in a multi-generational classroom I displayed empathy towards their situation. This approach helped me understand and/or make meaning of the phenomenon that was being studied because I have experienced this process. I was not just an outside observer. There was a mutual interaction between the researcher and the participants with this approach. This interaction resulted in high-quality data, findings and interpretations (Guba & Lincoln, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stage & Manning, 2003).

By sharing the fact that I am a teacher will show them that I am interested in this so that I can be a better teacher and help others to do the same. By introducing myself this way, I hoped to "build trust and rapport at the entry stage" (Patton, 2000, p. 331) of the interview to establish a comfortable environment with which to answer the interview question. Because this is a basic interpretive research, throughout data collection and analysis, the focus was on the subjective perspectives and accounts of the participants therefore, I was as neutral as possible during the interview itself. I encouraged, but did

not express my favor or disfavor with regard to the responses (Patton, 2000). As the researcher, I kept detailed records of all my interactions with the participants and typed transcripts of all interviews. I kept a research journal to record my reflections, questions and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

<div align="center">Dependability Strategies</div>

Dependability of the research findings is a concern in all forms of research, including qualitative research. In this type of research, one has neither the luxury of statistical numbers or an established significance level to back up findings nor the luxury of relying on the consensus of others, for they may see the same data through a different lens (Worthen, 2002). So how is dependability ascertained? One shows that the findings are dependable through a trustworthy, accurate study. To ensure this, certain measures were implemented (Patton, 2002).

Triangulation

Triangulation is a strategy to ensure the dependability and confirmability of a study. Denzin (as cited in Merriam & Associates, 2002) identifies four types of triangulation: multiple investigators, multiple theories, multiple sources of data and multiple methods to confirm emerging findings. Multiple sources of data were used to collect information. Collection methods that were used were interviews and secondary sources such as a course syllabus. In addition, all data and analysis were reviewed by my dissertation chair.

Credibility

Greenwood and Levin (1998) state that there are two types of credibility: internal and external. The internal credibility results in the fact that participants recognize the

connection of the study to a local situation. Hopefully, the participants in this study were able to see the significance of relationships both constructive and destructive, in the multigenerational classroom. External credibility is the capability of convincing those outside of the study that the results are believable. In order for the reader of this study to determine its credibility, Patton's (2002) inquiry elements will be used. The rigorous research methods included the interview and field notes. The credibility of the researcher was the biggest challenge. I truly believe in the merit and value of the study. I disciplined myself in methods of research and writing and conducted the study to the highest professional standards. I also believe in the value of qualitative inquiry and hope that this belief was displayed in the study. Finally, I relied on my dissertation committee for feedback.

Dependability

"In qualitative research, the understanding of reality is really the researcher's interpretation of someone else's interpretation" (Merriam & Simpson, 1999, p. 101). Did the researcher correctly tell the story? Various approaches can be employed to reduce researcher bias and ensure an interpretation that is as close to reality as possible. Process validity includes the use of triangulation such as a taped interview and an audit trail composed of my notes and journal.

Transferability

Transferability occurs when the qualitative researcher provides thick description in great detail that cannot be replicated. But it enables someone interested in a similar topic to make judgments about applicability of certain observations for their own contexts. Qualitative research uses a "common sense view of generalizabiltiy…can

this be transferred to offer information about the same topic in similar situations" (Elliott, 2005, p. 26). Hopefully, another researcher will value this study enough to refer the findings to other settings.

Confirmability

Confirmability verifies data collection. One of the most popular ways to confirm data collection is by use of an audit trail which describes how data were collected, categorized and decisions were made. I kept detailed records of all my interactions with the participants and have typed transcripts of all interviews. I kept a research journal to record reflections, questions and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Chapter Summary

This study was intended to explore how non-traditional adult students 45 years of age and older view their experiences in intergenerational higher educational classrooms where classroom interaction is encouraged by faculty and was intended to be part of the learning experience. This chapter reviews the purpose of the study and the key research questions followed by an examination of the qualitative research paradigm and a social constructivist research perspective. Criteria selection and data collection analysis techniques are discussed. The definitions for verification of the findings were also presented in the hopes that this research study will add to what we know about adult students in a multi-generational community college classroom.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how adult students specifically those who were 45 years of age or older viewed their experiences in a multigenerational community college classroom where classroom interaction was encouraged by faculty and was intended to be part of the learning experience. Specifically, this study examined these learners' perceptions of how the development of relationships among students of different ages affected the dynamics within the community college classroom and how these dynamics affects their learning. The research also focused on how interactions evolved, and how they are influenced and encouraged by faculty and students. The experiences of the adult students and how they perceived and interpreted their experiences were central to the study. Therefore, a qualitative, basic interpretive design was utilized.

Semi structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 14 individual participants. All participants were either current students at Luzerne County Community College or recent graduates from the college within the two years. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed by the researcher. The transcripts and the researcher's reflective journal provided the data for the study.

This chapter contains the major findings that emerged from a systematic and detailed analysis of the interview data using the constant comparative method. Participants' experiences are discussed and supported by their own words. They have not been edited for grammar. Every effort to convey participants' emotions has been taken into account.

The themes of the findings are presented in three major sections in light of the phases of these adult students' involvement at the college and with students of other generations. The first theme revolves around the first impressions and the anxiety that the participants experienced when they returned to school as adult students. The second theme involves collegial relationship building over time. The third major section contains the thoughts of the participants on adapting to these relationships. These findings will be discussed after the participants in the study are introduced.

Introduction of Participants

Fourteen adult students agreed to participate in this research study. The participants, eight female and six male, are between the ages of forty-five and fifty-eight years of age. Three recently graduated from the college, while the others were students at the college at the time of the interview. They were in a variety of majors; some attended full-time while others attended part-time. Six of the participants worked full-time while attending school. One worked part-time. The remaining seven were not employed while attending school.

Truvy

Truvy is a 45- year old white female nursing student. She grew up on a farm but was more interested in the medical field than being a farmer's wife. She always wanted to go to college but her parents and then her husband were against it. She became a hair stylist and owns and operates her own beauty shop. But the nursing "bug" would never go away. With the encouragement of some friends, she enrolled in the nursing program at the community college. She saved the money from the beauty shop for tuition and

books; her children were in their teens, so she knew this was the right time to go. She expects to graduate in May 2010.

Angel

Angel is a 58- year old white woman who is a wife and mother of three who is in the nursing program. Her children have completed their college educations and Angel felt it was time to "fulfill her own promise to herself." She was an oncology massage therapist who received her certification in that field from Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. She volunteers to do massage therapy for cancer patients and their families twelve hours a week while going to school for her nursing degree. She is expected to graduate in May 2010.

Heather

Heather, a 50- year old white woman, graduated from the community college with a degree in human services this year. She is married, the mother of four and grandmother of three. During the graduation ceremony she received the "Outstanding Adult Learner Graduate Award." She is a full-time counselor for an MH/MR Drug and Alcohol Services organization. She worked at this facility full- time while attending school. Heather was diagnosed with a mental illness later in life and was hospitalized for her illness. She is still in counseling. Although she always wanted to attend college, it was not until she met a caseworker who encouraged her to go back to school that she returned.

Samantha

Samantha is a 50 -year old white woman and is recent graduate of the college. She is a non-traditional student in two different ways. Not only did she return to school

at the age of 50, but she received a degree in a mostly male-dominated major, an associate degree in electrical contract technology. She was the only female in her classes for three years and only the second female in the history of the college to graduate in this course. She was chosen to be the representative from the community college for a prestigious Alan Allen award at a state university. This was her third try at college.

Lois

Lois is a 50- year old white female journalism major. She has worked in the retail management most of her life. She is also a waitress. She was highly motivated to go to college. Always a good writer, she thought that maybe she could earn a living by writing. She expects to graduate in May, 2010.

Louise

Louise is a 51-year old African American woman employed full-time in a state institution for the mentally challenged. She was employed as a psychiatric nurse's aid. She had been an aid for over 30 years and was "just tired of it." She has experienced some physical and medical problems from lifting, toting and transferring patients and so she decided to return to school. She was a human services major at the time of this interview which was during the month of July. She hoped to graduate in December, 2009.

Bobby

Bobby is a 49- year old white male culinary arts major, who graduated in May, 2009. His return to school was involuntary. He returned because of a "downsizing of high paying employees" at his previous place of employment. He was offered a tuition package because of the layoff. Bobby was "always interested in cooking." He explained,

"Food was always in my nature." So, he figured, "Why not go for something that I actually wanted to do?" He is now employed in the hospitality industry.

Louis

This is Louis' third degree from the community college. He is a white male who has an associate's degree in business administration as well as one in humanities. He graduated 12 years ago with a master's degree in finance from a local college. He felt that his business degree had "gotten a little stale" and when he was 52 years of age he decided to pursue an associate's degree in education. At the time of this interview, he was also enrolled in a creative writing class at a local four year college. He works full-time and attends college part-time. He expects to graduate in the spring of 2010.

Annie

Annie, a 58- year old white woman, received her bachelor's degree in English from Penn State University at age 27. Before receiving her degree, she had traveled extensively to Central America, Australia, and Texas where she both toured and worked. She has worked at various jobs in the area but was unable to find a teaching job. She returned to the community college and is seeking a degree in journalism.

Donald

Donald is a 50-year old human services major expecting to graduate in the spring of 2010. He attended college in the early 80's but had to drop out because of an economic situation. He recently moved to this area from New York City. He is originally from the West Indies (Barbados and Trinidad). He is attending school full- time and volunteers with many organizations. He hopes to graduate in the spring. He has been accepted into

a bachelor's program at a local four year college and hopes to continue on for a master's degree in social work.

Tom

Tom, a 54- year old white man, was functionally illiterate until 17 years ago. Before that time, he was in a literacy program for 15 years. It was always his dream to "go to college and get a degree." A veteran of the Viet Nam war, he has been at the community college for three years and expects to graduate in May, 2010 with a degree in general studies. He works full-time on his family's farm.

Nick

Nick considered himself "atypical" because he is a 49-year old white male in a predominately female major, nursing. He has a bachelor's degree in music and was also a flight attendant working 96 hours per month. After his wife died, he decided to "change the world" and return to school and major in nursing. Nick hopes to graduate in the spring of 2010. He would like to pursue both a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in nursing. He shared: "Since I have a bachelor's degree, I can take a bridge program by taking four more courses and then go on to a master's pretty quickly. That's the plan."

Troy

Troy, a white male, is not in school voluntarily. He was separated from his last employment and was offered to be part of the federal Trade Adjustment Assistance Act program. The TAA program is a federal program that offers financial aid for school and income assistance to people who lost their employment due to their company relocating outside the United States.

At 59, Troy returned to what he thought was training in the field of CNC which is computerized numerical control, a specialty which is the machinery process of a computer. He was very disappointed and disillusioned by the program. He had hoped to receive a two year associate's degree in applied science in the CNC field, but instead found himself in a one year certificate program. He completed the program in the summer of 2009.

Mary

Mary is a 49-year old single white female returning to school for a degree in nursing. She has had previous college experience as a traditional student, but did not complete her degree. She worked in the medical field for a while. She had experienced a life altering event within her family and school became a passion. She had been attending part time for 3 years, but was considered full time at the time of this interview. She hoped to graduate in May of 2010.

Summary

Now that the 14 participants have been introduced, we can move on to a discussion of the findings of the study. As noted earlier, the findings are discussed in light of the phases of the adult students' experiences with the younger students. The findings are summarized in a data display on the next page in order to help the reader easily follow the discussion.

DATA DISPLAY

Phase I: First Impressions

Anxiety about Being in School
Recognizing Differences
       Technology
       Self-Presentation
       Language
       Attitudes about school

Phase II: Adapting and Relationship Building

Developing Tolerance and Understanding over Time
       Compassion and appreciation for the younger students
       Participant's children influence relationships
Nurturing
       Adult students nurturing the traditional students
       Traditional students nurture adult students
Teasing: Positive and Negative
Instructor Facilitation
       Teaching styles
       Instructor helpfulness

Phase III: Lasting Impressions

The Mutual Learning Experience
       Traditional students learning from adult students
       Adult students learning from traditional students
Advice
       Advice to adult students about traditional students
       Advice to traditional students about adult students
Age Doesn't Matter
Final Thoughts
       Metaphors
       Multigenerational Learning as a Positive Experience

Phase I: First Impressions

In order to understand how the adult students achieved a level of confidence in the classroom, it is important to consider their initial emotions when they first began classes in the community college. One of the central themes that the participants shared was an overwhelming feeling of anxiety. This anxiety consisted of first day jitters combined with an uncertainty associated with being "older" in a multi-generational classroom. They questioned their decision to return to college and their place in the classroom.

Anxiety about Being in School

Truvy, a Nursing major, was excited to be in school. But she also admitted to being terrified. She stated: "I was so excited to be there. I was so excited to have my little backpack and school supplies. And I was terrified because when I looked at the material, I thought I was way over my head." In fact, she admitted to crying the first day. She continued: "The first two classes I took I was crying. I cried the first day I went. I thought maybe I am too stupid to do this. Then I'm going to have to admit to them (her family) that they were right."

When asked what she was thinking the first day of school when she saw so many younger students in her classes, her gentle sense of humor came through. "I felt I had landed on the game show "Survivor." It was the "Them" tribe and the "We" tribe. Literally, oh God, don't sit by the old lady."

Heather, a human services major, also cried on her first day. She recalled:

I cried all the way home after my first general psych class. I felt like so out of my element. Like, none of those classes had any really older adults. Most of them were the kids and I thought "what am I really doing here?" "These kids are my

kids' age." But after the first two weeks school itself was, it was really awesome.
I loved it! I was pretty comfortable in the classroom. Then after the first few
tests I realized, "Oh, I can, I can do this. Like, I really can do this."

Lois, a journalism major, said that she was "terrified" going back to school. "I
was just hoping I could do it." Then, when she walked in to the classroom and sat down
she noticed: "I was surrounded by young children. There was no one in my first class
that was my age. I felt like their mother. It was just, I felt out of place. I felt
uncomfortable." She continued. "I thought what am I doing here?" She chuckled and
continued, "That was my first thought." Then I thought, "I don't care." I'm going to be
here. And I thought hopefully they'll be able to help me."

Annie, another journalism major, had a similar reaction. "The first class I went to
was mass communications. It was in a big lecture hall. I was the oldest person in the
class. They were really young kids. A lot of my classes were really young kids."

On reflection of the first week of classes, Annie said:

In most of my classes at that time, I was the only old student. There wasn't really
anybody there who was in their 30s or 40s. It was me and 18 and 19 year- olds.
So there was a really big gap there. So I thought, "man, what am I going to do
about this?"

Her apprehension continued:

I thought this was going to be really bad. This is going to be really bad. First of
all, people would think, "I really don't want my mother here." Or actually, to
some of those kids their grandmother. "I really don't want my grandmother

here." But they know that they really couldn't say that because everybody pays taxes, so they couldn't say that.

Donald, a human services major, also "felt scared to death" the first day. "I was a little intimidated." He said "I'm forty nine and I'm getting ready to go to school with a bunch of kids who were 18, 19, and 20. I was really afraid because I didn't know if I still knew how to learn. So I was a little bit intimidated. The people were great, um, the other students were great."

Louise, another human services major, also felt uncomfortable the first few days of class with the younger students. She said that she felt "humiliated." She went on to explain: "They knew things I didn't know. This text thing - they had more knowledge of things that I was never exposed to. So it was humiliating." But these feelings did not last. She said: "Now I don't have a problem approaching and asking any of them questions about things I don't know or understand. I've learned that they have learned from me too. I can give my experiences and they learn from that."

Bobby, the culinary graduate who returned to school because of downsizing, had similar expectations. He stated that he was "very nervous because he wasn't the best student when he was in high school." In his first class with younger students he shared:

> There were younger kids in the class. But there were non traditional students too. So that was better for me. To know I wasn't the only one in the boat. There was a lot of people who got laid off from their jobs. There was more younger people, but that didn't bother me. I got along good with them. But I wasn't worried about being their friend.

Troy, one of the two adult students who did not voluntary return to school, was more surprised about his emotions returning to school. He expressed: "I can't believe that I'm going to be a 'frigging' college freshman. It was culture shock. It wasn't what I planned. For any person my age, it's the natural progression of emotional things that happen."

When asked what it was like being in a classroom with younger students, Troy imparted:

Well, I thought it was pretty crazy because first of all it contradicted my whole concept of what this whole program was going to be about. I felt like I shouldn't be here. Are they looking at me and thinking 'What the hell is this old guy doing here?' I felt a little intimidated in the respect that they were going to be far ahead in class. I was going to be at the end of the class. Only because they are right out of high school. They're used to this stuff. I've had a 40 year gap.

Nick's first day of school was in summer school. Because he was a Nursing major, he was required to take an anatomy and physiology class. He described it like this:

It was kinda a little disorientating 'cause I started a summer class, a prerequisite class. I was retaking it cause I had taken it earlier and now it was outdated cause I had taken it too long age according to the nursing program. So, I went in knowing that I knew the information, but still had to do well to get in the program. So, walking in the classroom was kinda interesting. It was mostly younger kids. It was summertime, so I'm dressed in shorts and I was thinking, "I

hope I don't look like a geek." He starts laughing. "I hope I don't look strange."

But it was OK. They kinda look at you and say, "Ah, old Dude, it's OK."

Actually, they wanted to know, "Do you really understand this?" So they kinda

come to you as "The One." And I find that true in almost every course. "You're

the older guy; you probably really get this…help!" So the first three weeks were

fast and furious, 'cause it was a summer school course first. But after the first

class or two and you get to know people, you start to gel.

Nick felt this way almost every time he walked into his prerequisite classes. "Oh

man, I'm the oldest one here. Ah, we'll see how it goes. First of all, I'm male, I'm older,

and I'm in a nursing program which is totally atypical. So it was kinda uncomfortable."

Mary, another Nursing major, also used the word intimidating when asked to

describe her experiences on the first days of school with the younger students. She

explained:

Sure, especially taking the math classes that I had to have. They're fresh out of

high school and they got it. I had to drop the first algebra class and pick it up the

next semester. I had a teacher that I could communicate with the second time

around. There kids knew it and I did not, a little intimidating. Yeah. Oh yes. To

be the old lady, the old student, that lady I sit next to. Yes, intimidating.

Angel had a very different type of experience. When asked how it felt initially to

be in classes with folks of different generations, she answered "Well, I got a little story

about that one." She went on to disclose:

If you check my transcript, you'll see that I withdrew from Algebra. The reason I

withdrew, and I can laugh about it now, but I cried terribly then. I tested so low

in math. I needed to take 060 which you don't get credit. I ask questions in class. Kid in back of me would constantly mumble: "Oh, there's always one in the class." Everyone thought it was funny and they would laugh. I'd ask a question and the kid would shout out, "Grandma, bingo's at the Legion Tuesdays." Another question, then, "Did she get her senior citizen's discount to get in here?"

Angel talked to the instructor about the situation. The teacher told her "Well, sit up front, you don't have to sit next to him." So she moved. Angel then reiterated the counsel she received from her instructor.

"Angel, the reason why he's harassing you is because kids don't ask questions. They want to get in and out." He said, "If you ask a question, he feels the class is going to be longer." I said to the teacher, "I'm not going to ask anymore questions. Is there a time I could meet with you?" He said, "No problem." So I stopped asking questions. But that kid still was making fun of me. I'm telling you it just upset me so much. I would go to class shaking. This was my first experience with class.

Angel said that this continued for about three weeks. Then she thought "You know he's right, I don't belong here. So I left. I left for almost a year."

Asked what would she do if this happened after she had been in school for a while, Angel replied

Oh, it still happens. But you know what? Now, if someone says to me, "Hey grandma, bingo's on a Tuesday at the American Legion." Now I would say, "Oh, that's terrific, how long have you been the caller there!" See, I could have made a joke at myself. Instead, I internalized it. There is a W (withdrawal) on my

transcript. And this kid is the reason. And I have friends that I'm seeing it still happen to. I'm seeing kids who are different are being made fun of. But I'm a little more verbal and I'll speak up now.

In contrast, because this is his third degree, Louis' experience was not as severe. He was taking his education classes during the evening and thought that there would be more adult students in the class. Much to his surprise, there were more younger students than adults. Louis thought "Oh boy, this is going to be tough. They're modern. I'm a little antiquated. So I thought, "uh oh."

Truvy also noted the difference in the ages of the students in the day classes and the evening classes. She related why she liked the evening classes better than the evening classes:

> The day classes were the worst because I literally would be the only old person there. Um, they would be the ones that mostly all the young people were in. And sometimes I would be the only non traditional there. And I'd just stand out like a screaming neon sign yelling, "menopause happening back in the third row." She laughed here. It all did work out. You know.
>
> I liked the evenings better because I felt more comfortable. I know I stood out in the days because I was the minority in the room. But I have to say after a few weeks it would get better. The beginning of each semester I would just hate it. I felt like that zit on the end of your nose that everybody had to see. I hated it. But it would get better.

Tom, the general studies major, had a particular difficult time when he first returned to college. Tom was functionally illiterate until 1992. This made his adjustment to college classes challenging. He explained:

> It was very scary. I was very nervous. Um, I had to take the non elective classes, the development classes to get me up to par cause I wasn't quite there for my regular classes. I was worried about everything. Did I make the right decision? Was I really going to make it? These things are kinda high on my list when you know that a lot of young kids are in the same classroom around you. It's pretty scary. But once you get started and you get into a classroom and you look around and see 'em all, you just say OK, I'm here. I got an input. And I usually gave my input.

In contrast to the other participants in the study, Samantha, who hopes to be an electrician, was never intimated by the younger students, even on the first day. She said that being with the younger students never bothered her. "I adjust with everybody" is how she explained it. When asked if she was intimated by being the only female in the entire class, she answered, "No. No. I kinda liked it. I was very tomboyish growing up and I was always the only girl, so that was normal for me."

What is evident with these participants is that initially they felt uncomfortable, not only because it was the first day or the first few days of school, but because they were in classes with people so much younger than they. But they shared that their initial shock and their level of discomfort usually dissipated after a few weeks.

Recognizing Differences

The participants commented on some of the specific differences between non-traditional students and traditional students. Some of the comments dealt with the superiority of the technical knowledge that the younger students possessed, the clothes that the younger students wore, their use of grammar and language and their attitudes towards school.

Technology. Most of the participants mentioned the use of technology as the number one issue that they thought differentiated them from the younger students.

Heather noted how this was a difference from her generation. She stated:

I've learned a lot about the differences in how my generation was raised as opposed to theirs. Like their technology. Their texting. They have a whole way of communicating that's very different to what I was used to. We always picked up a phone to call somebody. They text. I think it's a good thing and a bad thing. But it doesn't really matter what I think…it just is…its part of their generation the whole Facebook. It's interesting to go into computer lab before class and I'm working on a project and they're on Facebook. They're doing their social networking through the computer.

Nick also commented on the texting in class and believed it was a distraction for the younger students. He said: "Texting is just amazing. Thumbs are flying and I'm thinking 'How do you grasp any of this stuff?' And sometimes they don't grasp it." Nick was also amazed at their computer skills and was always more than willing to "Let the younger students help me with the technology. I'll learn from them."

Angel said that the younger students were "amazed that I knew how to text." She would tell them "my kids taught me how to text." She shared:

The students will ask me to call them with the assignment. And I'll answer, "Would you like me to text you?" And I'll hear, "you know how to text?" "Well, sure." I show them my phone. It's the Voyager…it's designed for texting. And I say, "I text all the time."

Oh, oh, here's something funny. One of the kids asked me (she laughs here) what my FaceBook was. And I said "I think FaceBook is just for the kids." He wanted me to help give him some notes and he said, "Could you just put it on your FaceBook?" He said, "If you put it on your FaceBook, we could all get it together." I said "Oh, my own kids told me that I don't belong on FaceBook." He said "Well, you do, you're a student! It's for students!"

Tom feels that his lack of technological knowledge may have helped to develop some relationships. He related:

I've locked a few of these computers up. I can remember the first semester, didn't know how to type, didn't know how to get on it. I had to type my first project in English. I'm sitting in front of the computer, have it on, have it on Word. Now what do I do? The younger kids saw that I was in deep trouble. They saw the hand written essay and all the stuff I had in front of me and I'm lost. What do I do? They came over and helped me get started. They were willing to help.

Louis also questioned his computer skills and agrees with Tom in that the younger students are willing to help with technology. He says that the younger students "Are

more confident about the technology and are more than willing to give some points on the computers."

Truvy credits technology with helping her so much with her studies. "Computers, they're amazing. I can access any information I need. The younger students have also helped me access the information on my cell phone. I come home from school and say "look what I can do with my cell phone." "It's wonderful."

Troy marveled at the younger students' computer skills. He lamented:

(Their skills are) better than mine. Their computer skills were very, very good. It was scary. All my skills were self taught. But they were just amazing. It's part of the culture. I wasn't intimidated by it, but it's just like part of their growing up experience. They're on computers at age of six. They know a lot more about that than I do, that's for sure.

Taking technology one step further, Mary was in a group that had to do a PowerPoint presentation. At the time, PowerPoint was totally foreign to her.

What I found slightly intimidating is that these kids know the computer thing. They had those little drive things that they keep on their key chain and they're popping these things in and they're doing the PowerPoints. I don't know how to do this. So I said, "I'll bring in whatever we need for the visual, but I'm sorry if you guys would go ahead and do the PowerPoint. I'd appreciate it."

But she states that she is progressing:

I didn't know what a PowerPoint was. But, I've done one since. So, I've progressed a little bit. But the technology is something else. In doing quizzes and

tests and sending papers to the instructors on line. Now, people do that every day. Brand new to me. I'm well pleased that I learned it. I learned it by trial and error. Trial and error. A lot of teachers will just bullet it right down the list. This is what you do, this is what you click. If you want to see your grades or scores, whatever. And then of course, asking the younger students, who were very helpful.

Heather also remarked about the younger students' ability to understand and use technology.

They have a whole way of communicating that's very different to what I was used to. Like their technology. Their texting.   We always picked up a phone to call somebody. They text. I think it's a good thing and a bad thing. But it doesn't really matter what I think…it just is…its part of their generation. The whole FaceBook. It's interesting to go into computer lab before class and I'm working on a project and they're on FaceBook. They're doing their social networking through the computer.

Self-presentation. The participants recognized differences and commented on the style of dress that the younger students favored and their overall self-presentation in relation to issues such as smoking, tattoos and piercings.

Some were surprised at the way the younger students dressed but seemed to be tolerant of the fashion. Angel was initially surprised at the "pajamas" that some of the younger students wore to school. But she became accustomed to it. Other issues, like piercings and tattoos, she wasn't so comfortable with. She shared:

"I think I was surprised to see kids, they look like they're wearing their pajamas." And I thought, "Well, you're comfy. OK." Then there were the tattoos. "Oh, I better be careful, you might have one." She chuckled here. She also commented on piercings and smoking.

> The piercings. It took me a while. But after you listen clearly because you have to listen carefully because it was hard for me to listen to somebody with a piercing on their tongue because sometimes they are difficult to understand (here talks very slowly, like someone with a piercing). But after a while, you do. And you think, hey, that's their art. That's their expression. But it took a little getting used to. When I was 16, what the heck did we do…we wore shaker sweaters. The tee shirts…like AC…that kind of stuff.

> The smoking is a big thing. I think that's the biggest thing for me to get used to. Even in the nursing program, I can't believe when the teacher gives a break, how many kids are running for their smokes. And then they come back and they smell like a smokehouse. I think the biggest thing even beside the dress and the piercings is the cigarette smoking. I didn't realize how prevalent it is on college campuses.

Anne was also "fascinated" at the one journalism student "who had all these tattoos." She confesses that she thought "Well, I've never seen anybody in a newspaper office with tattoos. But, you know more than I do."

Although Heather was comfortable with the student's style of dress because of her own children, she did comment on the tattoos and piercings. She admitted: "I sometimes

looked at their piercings or tattoos and I think, wow, that's interesting." "I wondered why they would do that. But just out of curiosity, not to judge anybody."

Like Angel, Louise also commented on the style of clothes that the younger students wore. Louise said that they would come to class in their pajamas in the evening classes. She would say to them, "You mean you've been up all day and you didn't put nothing on?" "I thought that was terrible. I thought it was probably me." She laughs heartily here.

Nick also admitted to sometimes asking questions of himself when observing the younger students' attire. He questions:

> "What on earth are you wearing?" "What is that group you are wearing on your shirt?" "Is that like a death wish?" "Are you putting a hex on someone?" The other side of that is "have you gotten out of the Disney world section yet?" And, um, "I didn't know that they still made Strawberry Shortcake tee shirts." Or, "that's gotta hurt, that piercing you have there." It's just a totally different concept of life.

Samantha also commented about the younger students' dress. "As far as how they dressed, ah, some were alright. I still can't get into them pants that the boxers hang out. I always tell them to get their belt on. I don't feel like seeing your boxers."

Language. Some of the participants admitted that they could understand the "slang" that the younger generation used. Samantha, George, and Lois attributed that to having "kids" of their own.

Nick, who did not have children, had a particularly difficult time understanding the language and grammar that some of the younger students used. After his initial

experience in the classroom, sometimes the age perspective with the younger students was "kinda shocking." It's like. "What are you talking about?" These phrases, I have no clue what that means. "What are you talking about?" It's pretty wild. "Where did they come from?" He laughed here. Not everyone, but some of them.

Heather too was stunned with some of the vocabulary that some of the younger students used. She shared this story:

They have expressions that they use that I hadn't heard. Like, one was to "bounce." And I hadn't heard that before. I'm watching the person thinking, "What are they going to do?" It means to leave. I'm going to bounce. I had to ask somebody, cause I hadn't heard it before. It meant to leave.

Other times, Nick had a difficult time understanding why the students "killed" the English language. "Speak English. Come on. I understand slang, but at least don't kill the language. Did you not learn anything in high school? Sometimes their language skills are…what on earth? Grammatically it is terrible."

In contrast, Donald felt very comfortable with the "lingo" of the younger students. Although like Nick, he had no children, he attributed this understanding to the similarities of his native West Indian language and the speaking habits of the younger students. "I do understand what the kids are talking about, sometimes more than their parents" he shared.

Although not technically grammar related, both Truvy and Angel discussed issues related to language, but their issues were in regard to how the younger students would address them. Truvy talked about the "What do they call me?" syndrome.

I've already have had instructors call me "Mam" that have been younger than me. And I hate that. And I've had to say in front of the other students I so totally

appreciate the respect, like thank you so much, but how about Truvy because it makes me more comfortable.

Angel discussed this as well, and explained that although she would introduce herself with her first and last name, very few of the younger students would address her by her first name. They always called her "Mrs.", or as she affectionately said, they called her "Mom."

These issues of differences only added to the anxiety the participants felt when first returning to school. While initially surprised at these differences, the participants eventually accepted these issues as "just a part of the younger generation."

Attitudes about School. Many of the participants expressed surprise and disappointment at the way some of the students managed their studies.

Both Donald and Angel used the word "annoy" when discussing students who are unprepared for school.

Donald shared that he sees some students who don't take their education seriously. "I think the students who have Mom and Dad to pay for it don't mind dropping a class or failing a class. They're not as serious. Some students miss five or six classes. He laughed. It annoys me. It means they're not taking their future seriously."

Angel shared these thoughts, and also indicated that at times she finds herself annoyed by some students' attitudes:

Some kids, I don't even know why they're here. Sometimes they make it clear that they're getting government benefits. That annoys me. I sometimes want to say. "Do you know what you're missing?" Some of the kids have a slogan. They call it Last Chance College. (Luzerne Community College -LCC-is sometimes,

unfortunately, referred to as Last Chance College). I tell them "no no." "It's your

first chance." This is a great opportunity. Some of the kids don't appreciate it.

Tom also addressed the attitude he sees in some of the younger students and

expressed his displeasure of it.

There's different attitude from the way they were brought up. I was brought up

that you didn't talk back, you didn't swear, there was a place for that. And you

respected what wasn't yours. You didn't destroy it. If you did, you paid dearly

for it. Their attitude is "oh well." I see a lot of that here at the college that really

bothers me.

Tom also felt that the younger students are "shortchanging themselves." "They

don't seem to take school seriously. They skip class because maybe they don't feel good

or are hung over."

Louise thought that some of the students had an "I don't want to be here" attitude.

Like Angel, she said that some of the students would refer to the school as "Last Chance

College." She said, "They didn't see it as higher learning; they saw it as a chore." She

said that she didn't care for that attitude.

When asked how she felt about the younger students coming to school

unprepared, Truvy answered:

If they're willing to take the responsibility for not being prepared, I'm fine with it.

But if they're crying that they're failing out of the program and it's because

they've been unprepared all semester, I don't have time to deal with it. I just

distance myself from it. If they can make it work and they accept responsibility

"I've really screwed up this semester; I've not been on the ball and whatever, I've

got to kick it in gear," then I'm OK with that. But if they're coming in crying at the final exam and looking for a Savior to pull them on to the ship, I don't get on their case about it cause I'm not their Mom, but I'm not going to go crazy trying to save them because they should have been there all along. So I kinda keep that opinion to myself, but I don't let myself get sucked in too tight.

When the younger students were unprepared in the classroom, the older students would comment on how this would affect the classroom and their learning.

Bobby, the culinary graduate, commented on the disposition of some of the younger students. "Some of them were really immature. You could see how they would act. They were loud. You know what I mean. But it didn't bother me." When asked about the younger students' study habits, Bobby replied:

Some of them were so grade thirteen. They weren't making the jump to college. But it didn't bother me. Cause like I said, each kid has to learn for themselves. Some kids are ready to take that next jump and some kids just want to be in grade thirteen. They just don't want to accept college. It's kinda, the kids are complaining about stuff. "What are you crying about?" They have the work, the directions and they're still crying about it. "Well, if you don't do the work, I'm not going to babysit you."

Bobby continued:

It made me feel like they weren't ready for college. They were immature. They're going to college because all their friends were going to college, or their parents wanted them to go to college. I don't think some of them even want to be in college.

Nick also commented on the attitude of some of the younger students. While he did not say the students were immature, he felt that some of the younger students were unfocused. He said: "I hate to use this word, but sometimes they are scattered brained." He imparted this example:

As nursing majors, we have to do care plans. Nursing diagnosis is the first thing you do. And you have to tell what is wrong with the patient and then develop a plan. There are specific guidelines to go by. But you see the younger students um, will open the book and say "this is hard." And they'll be looking up everything under the sun from pink toe nails to gray hair. And really the person's got emphysema! Then finally they come around and see that some of that stuff doesn't relate. Then they'll say, "Oh, well, you're right." Nick believes that the ability to focus "is a measure of a person's experience as far as that goes."

He also felt that some of the younger students lack time management skills. He credited his life experiences in life with enabling him to manage his time and believed that, with experience, they will learn this skill. He explained:

Another thing is planning how your day is going with a certain client. You do this, this, this and this. They (the younger students) say "that's not important." Then later on, their time management is shot because they can't get anything done. So we come back to time management. That's something you learn as you have more things involved in your life.

Samantha had different observations about the younger students in her electrical technology classes noting that some of them were "goofing around and that they gave the

professor a hard time." When asked how she reacted to some of the younger students, Samantha answered:

> Lot of 'em goofed around. They talked in class. I was in one physics class. There was a bunch of clowns in the back. They were yakking. I just turned around in the middle of class and said, "Will you shut up, I'm trying to learn. You don't want to learn, there's the door!" They were quiet after that.

Like Samantha, Bobby expressed his feelings when the younger students were being disruptive.

> One student was always getting in trouble. He would just curse a lot. I said something to him because he would curse in front of the two older ladies. I would tell him to shut up. He was very immature. I'm not sure if he was right in the head. He was not a mature college age. It was difficult not to say something to him when he was misbehaving in front of the older students.

Truvy said that even the students who care about their grades and try to do well in school, have a different work ethic.

> If I know an assignment is due on Friday, the Friday before, it's well underway. I've formed my ideas; I've got the outline, maybe even the first draft by Tuesday. I might refine it as the rest of the week goes on. Where, on Tuesday, they're starting to think about it. On Wednesday they're saying "Hey, we need to work on this tomorrow."

But that was not a problem for Truvy. When her grade is dependent on an assignment she would remind them about the assignment and try to motivate them to begin. She said:

I'll start pulling stuff out and say "OK this is coming up; this is what I'm thinking." "What are you thinking about this?" Or, "I'm thinking about going in this direction." One time I had to just suck it up and go "my grade's dependent on this too." They're kinda dropping the ball, but I didn't want my grade to fail because I'm making a point that I did my half and they didn't do theirs. But that was in more general classes. But I ended up doing most of the assignment anyway.

Annie also talked about students who were not prepared with an assignment and how she handled the situation. She shared:

I was just fascinated by the whole thing. Things that they would say, things they would do. The way they would do things last minute. I was just completely fascinated by their life style. I always have my work done. They would come in and say "jeez, I didn't even start any of this stuff." Then I'd say "did you look at it this way or that way."

Truvy shared a story about some of the younger students and their work ethic in her prerequisite classes and how their attitudes toward the older students (and hers toward them) changed a bit with time.

I think one of the big moments for me in this process was my second semester. There was a group of young kids who sat behind my girlfriend and me. They would make fun of us because we had flash cards and we had chapter outlines. This was in general psychology. There were a lot of terms to learn. I remember hearing this one young kid go: "look at those old girls; they're taking this so serious."

Well, at mid term, these kids were sinking and they were looking for help. Two of them, the one that made the comment and his friend that laughed about it came to us and asked: "What do we have to do to get through this midterm." I said, "I would recommend you do this, this and this."

Truvy stated that "they started treating us completely different then."

When asked about the younger students' study habits, Samantha shared that she initiated a study group. It was opened to anyone who wanted to attend. She said that only the serious students attended. "The ones that always complained that they didn't do well, they never showed up."

It should be noted that the differences in technology skills, dress, and language between the participants and the younger students, although surprising at first, was generally accepted by the participants. But some of the younger students' lackadaisical attitude about school was not ever accepted by the participants nor never really understood by them.

In summary, Phase l: Initial Impressions introduces the initial anxiety the participants felt upon returning to higher education and points out the concerns that they believed differentiated them from the younger students. Phase ll: Adapting and Relationship Building will discuss how the participants negotiated these differences and demonstrate how relationships begin to evolve.

Phase II: Adapting and Relationship Building

The participants in this study reported on the evolution of relationships with younger students in the multi-generational classroom and how their comfort with and tolerance for the younger students developed over time. Some talked about how they

tolerated the study ethics of the younger students and how their own children influenced

that occurrence. Some spoke of the nurturing aspect of the multi-generational classroom.

Others talked about the influence or non influence of the instructor in developing

relationships.

Developing Tolerance and Understanding over Time

Many of the participants were eager to share that they were tolerant and

understanding of the younger student. This seemed to take place over a period of time.

Many of them developed a sense of compassion and empathy, and some related their

understanding of the younger students to their own children's influence. and how their

comfort with and tolerance for the younger students developed over time.   Some talked

about how they tolerated the study ethics of the younger students and how their own

children influenced that occurrence. Some spoke of the nurturing aspect of the multi-

generational classroom. Others talked about the influence or non-influence of the

instructor in developing relationships. They shared that they had similar issues when

they were at that stage of their lives.

Compassion and appreciation for the younger students. Their sense of

compassion and in some instances, appreciation for the younger students was evident in

the interviews. Some shared that they had similar issues when they were at that stage of

their lives. Troy, for example, shared that he was very tolerant about the self expression

of the younger students. He said that he is a "Very opened minded person." So the

manner in which the younger students spoke, acted or dressed did not disturb him.

Troy's son is in a heavy metal band. He said, "I see things like these kids every day. I

understand them. Nothing shocks me. In all the time I've been here I haven't seen

anything that shocks me. I grew up in the 50s and 60s. Who were wilder than we were?"
He continued:

> I'm a very open minded person too. Look at me. I have long hair. I'm a hold off
> from the 60s. I understand self expression. I'm very opened minded. Whatever
> the kids want to do, as long as they're not creating crime or hurting anybody, I
> understand it. That's fine with me. I'm not shocked by anything.

Angel freely discussed how embarrassed she felt at her lack of awareness of "how
hard some kids have it, indicating a sense of compassion."

> I'm a volunteer. I volunteer at the soup kitchen and all that. But on a day to day
> basis, I didn't really know how hard some kids have it. But, some of these kids
> you could cry. Young mothers, they're taking about that they don't know if they
> have enough money for formula.

> But I don't know what I appreciated when I was 17 years old. I can't tell you. I'd
> have to think about that. Some of these kids didn't even open the book. I get
> annoyed. But then I have to think, what was going on, were their kids crying and
> maybe they had to rock a baby to bed? Maybe they had to work a double shift.
> Some of them you look at them and their head is down. That's because they
> worked the all night shift and they're sleeping.

Angel resumed her thoughts:

> I can't judge anybody. Some of them I just think to myself. "You're lost souls.
> Nobody picked you up. When you went to school, you probably weren't the
> brightest, nobody gave you the attention, nobody told you can do it." And
> sometimes if nobody tells a person they can do something, they don't know they

can. Some of them, it's too difficult. It is too difficult for them. Some of them, they just don't know where to start. And then they get so lost. You could tell they gave up.

Nick believed that when you start talking to the younger students that "people are people." He imparted:

But, the initial shock, sometimes they do it for the initial shock. Especially when they see an older person. They're kinda wary sometimes. "Oh, they're going to tell me what to do." Blah, blah, blah. But they finally realize that older students are just here to learn too. But it's kinda culture shock. But then you get back down to the study part and realize we're all students.

Donald, who is not originally from this area, was amazed at how many of the "kids" have a political conscience on campus and how he admired that. He shared:

They're involved in a lot of social stuff in the community which is fantastic. I wasn't expecting that. When I first went to the campus, I was working for a campaign and I was doing voter registration on campus. So many of the students had opinions and were intelligent. I was very impressed and moved to see how many young kids were involved in this.

Bobby exhibited compassion when talking about the younger students in his classes who were learning culinary skills. He stated:

Their minds are still growing. You can't expect them to be as mature, expect them to have the knowledge. I think it's a generational flaw. My generation had to fend for themselves. But I think there's a time frame where parents felt guilty,

they were both working. So they supplied so many things to their kids. So you

assume that these kids know how to do something and they don't.

Although some of the participants were uncomfortable with the work/study ethic

of the younger students, they still exhibited compassion and were empathetic toward

them and at times were genially concerned about them.

Lois for example, in discussing when students came to class unprepared, noted:

Well, sometimes, when I'm very tired, I envy them. I envy that attitude. But

most of the time, I feel concerned for them. Because, being my age, I know the

consequences of not being prepared and how it could affect your life as you get

older. Maybe they're not prepared because of partying. Maybe jobs. Basically,

hanging out with friends. Very social. Social life is a big factor for them.

Almost a part of being eighteen or nineteen

Donald comments on the students' lack of study ethics yet indicated that he

empathizes with them. He shared:

Sometimes, when you're 18 or19 you can afford to not take your future seriously.

I really can't complain about a student who has taken a few days off here or there.

I just hate to see them mess up and take it for granted. They have it really good

now and a lot of them don't realize it.

Heather also empathizes with the younger students. She believes that she does

not judge them. She disclosed:

I remember being that age. A lot of them haven't figured out where they're

heading. It's hard when you don't have a direction. You don't really put your all

on it cause you don't really know what you're doing. You're not focused yet.

I've BEEN there, so that part of it was OK.

In summary, this section begins to lay the ground work for relationship development between the participants and the younger students. After an initial introduction period, the adult students begin to display a sense of compassion, concern, and empathy which lead to a general sense of tolerance and understanding towards the younger students.

Participants' children influence relationships. Many of the participants said that the influence of their own children made it easier to build relationships and understand the younger students. Mary, for example, shared:

I kinda had a one up on some of the adult students who had small children or adult students who don't have any children at all. My kids, being in college when I went back, was a huge help. They're extremely supportive of me. So I know what that age is like.

Troy stated that he believed that having his own sons helped him in accepting and understanding the younger students.

You know what? They dressed and they talked just like my kids. My kids are 24 and 28. It's not only my kids, but being exposed to their friends.   I'm used to it. If you're looking for me to say something bad about them, my son is in a heavy metal band…I see things like these kids every day. I understand them. Nothing shocks me. In all the time I've been here I haven't seen anything that shocks me. I grew up in the 50s and 60s. Who were wilder than we were?

Troy believed that his parenting instinct will always be with him, whether it is in the classroom or in the working environment.

I'm a parent. So coming to school was like being a parent. The way I talk to these kids is the same way I talk to my kids and visa versa. If you want some advice, I'll be happy to share it. If you can teach me something, I'm willing to learn.

Louis talked about his relationships with the younger students and explained. "I come from a point of understanding since I have a daughter who just turned twenty seven today. So, I understand them though my daughter. So that's pretty much how I could relate to them and understand their language."

Heather believed her own children made it easy to accept some of the younger students' mannerisms. She states:

My sons are 21 and 22 and I actually did a semester with both of my kids in the same school. So, I didn't look at them any different. You know, sometimes, ya know, I look at their piercings or tattoos and I think wow, that's interesting. I wonder why they would do that. But more out of curiosity, not to judge anybody.

Both Bobby and Lois believed that their reactions to the younger students were tempered by their own sons, whose ages range from nineteen to twenty four. Lois shared: "anything my fellow classmate would say or do would not shock me, because with my own sons, I've seen quite a bit."

In contrast, Truvy, who has two sons, credited her experience in the beauty shop for not being in "culture shock" when it came to initial reactions with the younger

students. But when they came to school unprepared, she did say that she would treat

them like she would treat then the same way she would treat one of her sons.

> I don't get on their case about it cause I'm not their Mom, but I'm not going to go
>
> crazy trying to save them because they should have been there all along. Kinda
>
> what I'd do with my son. "You know this deadline was coming up; you're not
>
> prepared, now you have to face the music of your actions."

Donald does not have children; he has "lot of nieces and nephews." So he felt

because of this he "understands young lingo." He also felt that his West Indian accent is

similar to some of the language of the younger students. He gives an example.

> A few times, if I get excited or if I get angry, I have a West Indian accent because
>
> my family traditionally is from Barbados and Trinidad. So occasionally it is
>
> amazingly similar to their "slang". Laughing, he continues, but I do understand
>
> what the kids are talking about, sometimes more than their parents.

Because Angel had three daughters, she was accustomed to some of the ways of

the younger students. But her girls attended an exclusive prep school and followed with

exclusive colleges. This difference was apparent when she would compare her

daughters' manner of dress with the manner of dress that her younger classmates used.

So, she was "surprised to see kids, they look like they're wearing their pajamas." But she

thought "Well, you're comfy. So OK."

Nurturing

The majority of participants referred to some type of nurturing when discussing

their experiences with traditional age students. This nurturing theme did not manifest

itself immediately but rather seemed to happen over time. For some or even most of the

participants, nurturing almost became a natural reaction after the students, both adult and traditional, became comfortable with each other. For others, it was not a desired situation. Nurturing usually occurred about four to five weeks into a semester.

Two types of nurturing emerged. The first was adult students nurturing traditional students. A second theme was traditional students nurturing adult students.

Adult Students Nurturing the Traditional Students. Many of the adult students spoke of nurturing the younger students. Some of them said that this occurred because they were "natural nurturers". Others did not want to be placed in that role, but it occurred anyway. Some of the participants stated that nurturing occurred because there was an expressed "need" from the younger students.

Annie, journalism major with an English degree, did not believe in waiting to nurture students. She started the first day of school. She explained:

My initial way of getting into the fold was that first thing I did in that class was that I saw two students who were special needs students. I could see that they were going to need help. So right away I went up to them and said to them that I'd be glad to help them with their English. So we used to have a little tutoring session before or after the class.

Many of the participants shared that the younger students would seek them out for particular advice.

Lois, journalism major, said that younger students would seek her advice when they were stressed. This type of nurturing was not of a personal nature. It was advice on school, internships, class, deadlines and interviews. She counseled them to stay in school. She explained: "I think they see me as a peer. I think they take it (the advice)

better than they would from a parent or an authority figure. I'm just being very honest and I don't hold anything back when I talk to them."

 Louise and Heather, who are human services majors, stated that some of the students would seek then out for personal counseling. Both said that they were happy to be able to help the students because, as human services majors "That is what we do." Louise shared:

> They would talk about relationship issues, drug issues and battered women syndrome issues. Because I've always shared my experiences since I started school, so different kids come to me at different times at different times and talk to me about those kinds of things. Do I know where they can go? Do I know anybody in that field? Do I know that they could talk to? Where should they go? That type of thing.

When asked how she felt about the younger students approaching her and asking these questions, Louise answered: "I love it. Cause that's what I want to do, help people."

Heather had a similar experience counseling a younger student. She noted that many of the younger girls would come up to her with their problems. Some of the younger girls would talk to her about their children, some were going through divorces. One student wanted to talk about the violence she was experiencing with her spouse. Heather said that it was not really in depth, but just in conversation. She said, "Maybe between classes." She mentioned having a conversation with a traditional age student who was struggling with an eating disorder.

Um, one of the girls, Amy was going through a rough time. I forget what the class was where we were talking about eating disorders. And, I brought up something, you know, that it happened in my own life at a lot younger age. She really identified with that and then talked with me afterwards about it and some of her own struggles. Some of the things she was going through.

Another girl, Liz, I don't know, we just connected. We talked about a lot of things. We talked about drinking in college and how that gets out hand. That kind of thing. She kinda questioned does she have a problem with alcohol. So just being able to say "Well, you know I can't say, I don't know, do you?"

Heather felt that because of her mental illness and working in the mental health field, the students were comfortable with her, although this sense of comfort did not manifest itself immediately. She explained: "It took a little while because of my own path of a person with a mental illness. I didn't share that right away. It took me a couple of years before I was willing to be open about that."

Heather felt good to be able to work in the mental health field and give some of these students direction and help, because, as she said, "That's what I want to do!"

Another non traditional student, Donald, a single black man originally from Trinidad and then from New York City, started a health awareness club in the college. He talked about why:

 Most of the traditional students look up to me as, um like an uncle. I'm the guy they can come and talk to. I'm not only the guy who registers you to vote, but I'm the guy who stands between the bookstore and the cafeteria with a table and

is handing out condoms. I'm the guy who, if they can't go to their parents or church or teacher or one of the counselors, I'm the one they come to.

In one particular instance, a young student whom Donald did not know approached him about a sensitive subject. Donald was working a health awareness table in the student center. Part of this activity was handing out condoms to students. He explained:

> I had a young man just walk up to me and said "Can I ask you a question?" I said "Sure." He said "Not here." We took a walk down the hall and he asked me a few intimate questions and I answered them for him and I told him what I thought. I thought that he should know this answer. I was able to answer it for him. It was a very positive and rewarding experience for me. I was honored that he trusted me because he really didn't know me that well. He just needed this question answered and he asked me.

In contrast with Donald, who liked feeing like an "uncle", Truvy, a nursing student, did not want to be their mom and stated a number of times that she was "not their mom." But contrary to this statement, she was quite nurturing to a number of students. One incident involved a young girl in one of her general education classes. When she told this story, twice her voice choked and she filled up with tears:

> There was a young girl in my earlier classes. I think she went in elementary education. I would see her and I always knew she was going through a hard time. I think it was the second or third class we had together. She had come in one day and was having a bad day. She was crying. She was talking to a girl that she always sat next to. The girl didn't know how to help her. I didn't mean to

eavesdrop. I had heard her saying that her mom died that year of lung cancer (Truvy became weepy here). She was working full time and trying to go to school. Her grades weren't that good. Dad wasn't paying the bills. This girl was suffering. I went up to her and I hugged her. I looked at her and said "I know you don't know me but we've had several classes together." "I just need you to know that if you were my daughter, I would want someone to hug you today." (Truvy continued to quietly cry). That was the first time I ever did something like that. I said "I'm a mom and I would want someone to hug my child. And I'm just going to hug you for a couple minutes."

Truvy continued to say that she still sees this student:

I think that girl stands out most in my mind. She's going forward with her life and doing fine. I gave her my address and phone number. I told her if you ever need somewhere to go or need someone to talk to, my doors open to you.

Truvy then went on and told another story about another young woman she net in another class:

I had another young girl that I had in classes. We didn't connect at first. We ended up having microbiology together. She was struggling. She's from my home town. She recognized me on Main campus. She approached me and said: "Look, I've got to get through this and it's not going well." She ended up switching seats and lab tables and became my lab partner. We worked together quite a bit. She's working pretty hard; she was just having a hard time with it. Unfortunately, she did not make it through the first semester. She's coming back in the fall. So I've been gathering first semester things for her.

Similarly, Angel, another nursing student who was also an oncology masseuse, started gathering items for some of the younger students. She explained that she:

Kinda felt motherly to all these kids. One kid couldn't afford a chemistry book. I bought a used book. Gave it to a kid. There are a lot of kids here who can't afford books. So I loan out a lot of my books to some of these kids. You try to help them out. Like you would as a mother.

In another instance, a student could not afford the gas to come to school three times a week. Angel started picking her up for school. She explained:

I started picking up a student who couldn't afford the gas. She started taking the bus, but the bus didn't come that early. And she was constantly late for anatomy and physiology. The teacher told her that she was going to have to leave. Real bright student. Her sister died just a few weeks before class. She was crying. Very, very upset. She was from Jamaica. She said she had no other way to get here. So I picked her up and drove her to school to make sure she got here on time.

Angel shared another story of nurturance where she advocated for one of the younger students:

There was a kid that the other kids kinda threw to the wolves. He kinda wasn't doing his homework and they kinda kicked him out of the group. I asked if he could be put back in. So they told me that I was his stepmom, affectionately. I said, "come on, let me adopt the kid." So, since then, we got to be a little family. I was the mom, he was the step son 'cause nobody else wanted him in the group

Unlike the female students, Nick attempted to keep his distance since he was the only male nursing student interviewed. He stated that sometimes he felt like a mentor to the younger students; other times he felt like a life coach. While he stated to the students "I'm not your Mom or Dad, I don't care what you do," sometimes his relationships with them became very nurturing. He shared:

It's kinda funny, some of the surprisingly intimate things they want to tell you. He chuckles. It's like whoa! I guess they see mentorship comes into it. Even though you're a student too they still get you and say "Ah, you've been through this what do I do?" That's an interesting kind of thing. It's kinda of OK. I don't mind sharing. But sometimes I say WHOA. I didn't need to know that. It's like TMI (too much information).

The younger students had many conversations and included Nick in many of them. Nick seemed both amazed and amused at some of the conversations that his fellow traditional students would engage him in. He shared:

Sometimes with them, it would be a light relationship and then next time they're asking you something really serious. And really want to know. They'd ask something and I'd think "Where did that come from?" But I try to give an honest answer I'd say "You're being stupid" or "That's a good idea, it sounds OK." Just life issues. It's funny. They'll turn from superficial like, kinda fun stuff to WHAM…you're into some deep conversations. I wonder "Where did that come from?"

Nick also expressed the same feelings that Louis and Troy felt. He wanted to advise the students. He explained:

It's purely observational. It's recognizing that something's not right. They're just not handling something right. You can't put your thumb on it but you just know I wish I could talk to them. Or I wish somebody could talk to them and tell them they're doomed if they keep doing what they're doing

Samantha explained that she "was like a mother figure to them. I'd say now don't be doing this and don't be doing that. And they'd be calling me up for the assignments and everything." She also organized a study group which the traditional students found helpful.

Samantha's nurturing experience was not as extensive or intense as some of the other participants'. When asked if the traditional students ever asked her advice or confided in her, she replied "no, not really." She alluded this to the fact that in her major, electrical technology, she was the only female for three years in the majority of her classes. She speculated: "I'm sure if I was in a class of nursing students, they would have been mostly woman. So it's easier for women to confide in an older woman. It's like a son going to the mother. Usually the son goes to the father. So maybe that's why." One thing Samantha did stress to the younger students was to "take school seriously, you don't want to be coming back to school in your 40's getting your education."

Because of his experience in the industry, Troy, who received his certificate in CNC (computerized numerical control), found himself mentoring as both an academic advisor and a parental influence. Academically, because he had been in the industry for forty years, the younger students (and some older students) "looked to me for clarification. I would suggest other ways to do some of the problems. It was just based on the experience that I had on my job. Rather than let them struggle, I just showed them

a variety of ways to do some measurements." As an example, there was a young girl in Troy's manufacturing class. He believed that she looked like she was perplexed. So he helped her with some of the problems. "I figured, well, what the heck." In labs, I kinda assumed a leadership role, not to say I know everything, but, "You look like you're struggling, can I help ya?" He continued:

> When I talk to these kids, I always felt it was on a mentoring level. I'm very good at soliciting free advice to anybody who wants to listen. I would tell some of these kids when we were in conversation, "Stay in school, stay focused. You don't realize what it's going to mean later on." I go off on a tangent and tell them about my experience.

When asked how the younger students would accept this advice his reply was: "I think it might mean something from somebody who can talk the talk and walk the walk. Been there, done that."

Troy explained that the conversations would usually be very casual. They might occur in the men's room while he was standing washing his hands. Somebody would be complaining about a specific class. He would say, "You know what, stay in school or you'll be in my position." And he would end the conversation by saying, "I wish I had somebody that would have told me that. So take it for what it's worth, it's free advice." I think they already know, but I tell them anyway.

When giving this advice, Troy felt, "It's like having a secret and you want to tell everybody and you can't wait to tell everybody. Don't make the same mistake. I think it's selfish to say you're on your own. Learn from my experience."

When asked if the younger students ever confided in him, Louis answered, "Yeah,

a few times. Sometimes it's surprising what they tell you."

Asked how this would manifest itself, Louis said, "Well, I guess they get comfortable with me and felt they could do this. I guess I'm easy going or whatever and seem OK. So, sometimes, some of the things I didn't want to hear." He laughed here. Louis said that when this happened he felt "Accepted into their confidence."

Not all the participants had such strong nurturing experiences. Because of his challenges with reading and comprehension, Tom was not as sought out as some of the other participants. A few of his experiences of nurturing centered on particular topics rather than personal experiences in class. He explained:

I think they would kinda ask me some things before or after class. "What do you think about this question?" And I would give them my input about of how I thought. I didn't know it was right, but that's how I felt from what my life experience was in that type of situation.

Unlike some of the other participants, Mary, another nursing major, did not experience the nurturing of the younger student on the level that some of the other participants did. The only incident she referenced was: "If we're in a group just tossing around stuff, we're all chatting. Topics come up like the social stuff that's out there. Drinking, sex, drugs. The terms are there, but of course, we're learning about it in school too."

In summary, the participants originally came to school with an identity of a student. By sharing these stories, they have shown how their identities evolved to nurturing mothers, fathers, uncles and friends. For some of the participants, this sense of nurturing enriched their relationships with their younger peers.

Traditional students nurturing adult students. While many of the participants related incidences of how they nurtured the traditional student, they also told incidences of how the traditional student nurtured them.

"When I needed help, I would never hesitate to ask a younger student. There's no laughing or rolling of the eyes. Extremely helpful" said Mary, a nursing major.

She also talked about an almost protective attitude that one of the students had towards her. She disclosed:

> I wear glasses for reading. I came in and I had new contacts. I told Paul, the traditional student next to me, that I just got contacts. "I can see OK when I'm reading but I can't see the board. It's a little bit fuzzy. So give me a heads up". So the professor is writing madly on the board. And Paul looks at me with all kinds of concern and says "You doing OK? You see it OK?" I said "Yeah, thanks." You know, how cute. He was serious! Real cute.

Mary stated that there were times when she would have some trouble with the math for different courses. She said that the younger students were "right there to help you." She shared:

> We have studied together which was extremely helpful. And if there is something I don't get, like the math, they're right there. This one girl, we met at Barnes & Noble before a test. And where I was not doing so well on the previous test, she was helping me do some of the calculations for the medication doses. She was extremely helpful.

She also recounted an incident where she didn't do so well on a test and how supportive one of the younger students was.

Um, this one girl that I'm talking about in particular. We're in the same clinical group. This one young student who I met last fall, very first part of the nursing program. I had done well on my first two tests. You need 75% or better to pass the test. The next test I got a 73% which of course is not passing. We got our papers passed back. I was upset, she knew it. Everybody is, "How'd you do?" We're interested, we support each other, we help each other. We had a break and I left the classroom. We were getting drinks and I was walking around the halls. She was concerned. My heart was just so full. (Mary was very weepy as she talked about this) She said "We're going to get through this." And I said, "Yah, yah." She said, "You know when one of my friends is struggling, I'm struggling too." She didn't care how old I was. She's been a delight.

Another nursing student had similar experiences of reverse nurturing. Angel talked about an accident she had and how a younger student rallied to her aid. She revealed:

I got burned in a fire. You can see my hair just growing back in. One of the little girls, she knew I was afraid of fire, so she would start the Bunsen burner for me. She said "Mrs. Angel, you don't even have to use yours, we could use mine." I thought that was special. These kids really got me through it with their support.

In another instance, Angel thought that the younger students felt very protective towards her. She resumed:

Once, one of the chemistry instructors said something to me. I took it as a joke. I asked a question, and his answer could have been interpreted as a little condescending. Three kids came up to me and said: "Mrs. Angel, if anybody

spoke to my grandmother like that I would not have it. If you want, we'll talk to him for you." I said, "Hey, he was only kidding...I thought it was only a joke." But they felt protective towards me.

Truvy recounts a similar experience where a younger student tended to nurture her. She took pride in sharing this:

The one time I had really bad bronchitis and laryngitis and I was as sick as a dog and I went to class. One young girl turned around and said: "You're so sick, you need to go home." I said "I can't miss the notes." And she goes, "Look, you've helped me out...I'll take the notes for you."

Donald and Louise, both human services majors, discussed continuing their education after completing their degree at the community college. Both said the younger students are always encouraging them to continue. Louise said one younger student in particular "Was always encouraging me to continue school after I graduate. She would like to see me succeed with a bachelor's degree. She was always very encouraging to me."

Donald also believed that the younger students at this community college are one of the most wonderful things at the school. When he was having some problems with a math class he said that "The students that were in there were very helpful. They're really willing to help. They looked at me as a person that if I need help, they're willing to help. They want to help other people. They're fantastic."

Heather and Louise, both human services majors, also voiced willingness to receive help from the younger students. Heather said:

You know the younger people can be a huge resource. When I took Algebra 1, that was the hardest class for me cause I hadn't done it in 30 years. And even when I did it 30 years ago, I wasn't any good at it (laugh). So you know, just talking to other students if I didn't understand something. A lot of them are just out of high school and do get it. And are more than willing to help.

Louise said that she has built up a relationship with the younger students. Because of this relationship she stated: "I can always go to them comfortably and say, "listen, I didn't quite understand this or that. Could you explain it to me?" And they were always willing to explain it, no matter what the subject."

Troy, the CNC major, related a story about being in a three hour lab in fundamentals of electricity. He was very uncomfortable with the content of the lab. He was partnered with two "guys." One was older and one was much younger, about 20. Troy explained: "The younger guy seemed to have the knowledge. I learned some things from both of them." When asked how his relationship with the younger student was, Troy replied:

He was very good. He seemed to take the lead among the three of us. If there was something I would ask him, he was more than willing to share the information. Sometimes we would have to transfer measurements into a lab book; we would correct each other's if there were errors. There was no wall because I was older and he was younger. It was a free exchange of information. We were there as classmates. We were extremely equal.

In another incident Troy talked of a younger student willing to help him. "In a manufacturing class, the kid that sat next to me did for a living what we were doing in

class. This kid would show me how the instructor would do problems. He's show me a shortcut." Troy felt that sometimes "the kids might even be impressed that somebody older is asking for advice." He said that "maybe that's why they were so willing to help."

Lois related a story about a younger journalism major that she befriended. She said that they would "de-stress" together. She admitted that this togetherness was very helpful. Asked if this was typical of younger students, she replied "I think eighteen, nineteen and twenty year olds like to help!"

This reverse nurturing surprised many of the participants. Once these adult students realized this nurturing was occurring, they generously accepted and were grateful for this type of behavior from the younger students.

Teasing: Positive and Negative

There were a number of participants who said that there was some friendly and sometimes some not so friendly teasing and bantering between the older and younger students. Nevertheless, this teasing seemed to be a part of the kind of relationship building that comes with greater familiarity, despite some of the negativity.

Truvy, whose initial reaction to the multi-generational classroom was laden with concern, shared that because she was always prepared for anything, the younger students knew that they could depend on her. She would be the one who always had an extra evaluation slip, a Tylenol or some food product if the younger students needed it. Because of this, the students would tease her and call her "Mary Poppins".

Angel was also called an affectionate, yet teasing name. In a microbiology lab, she and her lab partners really "bonded." The students called her "Step mom" because she befriended a student who was initially ostracized from the lab group.

Nick's name was "The old Dude." He felt that the younger students related this name to knowledge. So, they would assume that "The old Dude" probably "really understands some of this stuff."

Angel also had an unfortunate experience with teasing which was recounted above where the younger students would say "Grandma, bingo's at the Legion on Tuesdays." Because of this incident, she dropped out of school for almost a year. She said unfortunately, the teasing still continues occasionally, but she is much more self confident now.

Because of this experience, Angel has empathy for other "different" students. "This is what happens to a kid who is different. This is what happens to a kid who has a different ethnic background. I was different. I was older. But I wasn't stupid."

Another example of unfriendly teasing is how Angel handled one student who took the teasing aspect a little too far. She explains:

> I did tell one kid, another kid who was kind of mean. "I want you to do me a big
> favor. I want you to talk to your mother and grandmother tonight and tell them
> everything you've been saying about me and to me. Then, over the weekend,
> discuss how much fun you've been having making fun of me. When we're in
> class on Monday, I want you to tell me what they said." Monday he said: "Mrs.
> Angel, I owe you quite an apology. My mom wants your phone number because
> she wants to know how you start going to school." So, I kinda like nipped it in
> the bud.

Louise had a problem seeing the blackboard, so she sits up front. "So, in different classes, some of the younger students starting calling me 'pet' and saying that I'm going to get an A because I sit up front. It doesn't bother me."

In conclusion, the anxiety that the participants experienced at the beginning of their collegiate career dissipated once they had the opportunity to interact with the younger students. The tolerance, nurturing, and teasing became a part of the learning and growing together experience.

Instructor Facilitation

The participants were asked if their instructors were instrumental in helping them build relationships with the younger students. Most participants agreed that the instructors did not purposefully attempt to build relationships but their teaching styles helped relationships with the younger students evolve.

Teaching styles. Most of the participants believed that although the instructor did not purposefully encourage relationship-building, their style of teaching had a great influence towards the development of relationships. Teaching styles that promoted group learning, conversation, discussion and study groups seemed to help develop these relationships.

Nick believes that facilitation of relationships was "accidental", but agrees that some relationships depended on the teaching style of the instructor. Some teaching styles necessitated a study group. "So this kinda facilitated the interactions between the older and younger students."

Likewise, some of Angel's instructors had students work in groups. Some of the groups were random; others were determined by the instructor. Angel liked working in groups because "we found out each of us had a different strength, a different asset."

Although Annie's general education classes did not promote much discussion or group work, her experience in her major classes like journalism, speech and theater were different because there was more group work. She imparted:

> In speech class, we had groups. It seemed like people weren't responding in the class. Then she (the instructor) started to put people in groups. Then we started to get to know each other in groups. But the danger of that is that is if you are going to set up your own groups, you have to be careful you don't just set yourself up with adult learners. So you have to seek out the young people too. 'Cause the young people set themselves up that way too.

Louis also believed that group work helped facilitate relationships between the different age students. "A lot of classes develop group work. So you end up getting in a certain group and nobody wants to slack off. Everybody is trying to do their part. And it works out. Everybody moves ahead. Group work definitely facilitates relationships."

While many of her instructors implemented group study, Truvy "never got the impression that a teacher really fostered the development of relationships in class." She explained:

> When groups were formed, you got to choose who was in your group. And usually the older students would team up. But group members were determined by the timeline within the semester. If it (the group) formed in the beginning of the semester, it would be the younger group and the older group. Mid semester,

then I've already had young kids grab hold of me and say "I want her cause she's smart." I've had that happen a lot.

Lois believed that when instructors promote interaction in class with conversation and discussion groups relationships naturally evolve. Relationships formed in Lois' journalism classes through conversation. Her instructors encouraged conversation and the age of the participants "makes no difference." She said: "That's not even a factor." She continued:

We would have conversation before class, before lectures, before writing labs. We would talk about current events. So in that way, as people reveal their thoughts, you get to know them. Then you could identify with those that you have common perspectives with. So I think that helped. It broke the ice.

Her instructors in the journalism major also encouraged students to partner up and have someone edit their work. She seemed to always partner with a particular traditional age student and that seemed to work out fine. She shared: "I got a different perspective from her of what I would write."

Troy tells of a similar experience. He explained that when an assignment was completed in his manufacturing class, the results were shared with the class. This helped "open the doors to other people" regardless of age. There was an open dialogue among class participants. The focus was on problem solving and trying to understand so it was easy to ask "Where did you get that answer or how did you find this or how did you do that?"

Two of the participants, Louise and Donald, believed that some of their instructors encouraged relationship building with the younger students. Louise said that

she got to know "a lot of the younger students because some of the instructors allowed her to talk about her experiences. They seemed very interested in how things were done in the 70's." She stated: "I feel very comfortable in a classroom where the teacher uses an interactive teaching style. Some of my teachers even encouraged us to interact with the younger ones."

Donald felt that some of his instructors did facilitate building relationships with the younger students by assigning students to particular groups. He shared his thoughts:

I would normally go toward certain students that we would have in common with like our major or our age. I would usually gravitate towards them. But, with the teacher assigning groups, I was forced to work with all different types of students. And it was a very positive experience. I learned things about them and their lives. I'm not only being non traditional as far as being older, but I'm also non traditional as far as really not being from this area.

Mary feels that some of the instructors might appreciate the adult students. She speculated that "Maybe instructors put some of the older students with some of the younger students. They might appreciate a mix as well. Helping students along." She said:

Well, the teachers don't care how old you are. I think sometimes the instructors even maybe appreciate the adult students. Now, nobody's ever said that. But maybe because of the type of work we turn in. In my psychology one and two, I'd hear some of the conversations about the way some of these younger students were going to do their research papers and maybe some of the grades they got. But I think some of the teachers might appreciate somebody a little more

experienced, a little older because we might put a little different spin on something and put a little more effort into it.

Instructor helpfulness.   A few participants relayed that they had instructors who were helpful, not only with academics, but with establishing a level of comfort with the younger students.

Tom said that the instructor was helpful when he first entered a multi-generational classroom. As he was looking around his classroom for the first time, Tom said that he was feeling apprehensive. The instructor walked in and asked me, "Do you feel old?" and I said, "yes." He said "don't feel bad, your knowledge and experience can relate to some the topics we'll be discussing in class."

Donald believed that "the teachers teach in a level of clarity that sorta brings everybody into the same focal point to be able to pick it up. The younger age students and people like me are able to pick it up." Donald also believed that occasionally he became the interpreter for the class. He shared: "A lot of times a particular teacher would say things in class that were just absolutely over the kids' heads. They did not understand what he was talking about. Occasionally he would mention somebody…Walter Cronkite…and I would have to turn around and give them the definition."

As discussed earlier, Angel had a difficult time with a student in a math class. The instructor, whom she liked as a teacher, tried to intercede and encourage her to manage the teasing that occurred in class. This teacher had the best intentions and was very helpful in trying to help Angel manage the teasing. Unfortunately, the teasing continued and Angel dropped the class though she did eventually return to school.

Samantha shared that she believed that her instructor was helpful in that he knew who she wanted to be paired with for assignments in class. Age had no bearing on this. "There were a couple of class clowns. My instructor would never pair me with them. He knew that I didn't want any who goofed around."

Unfortunately, Bobby had an experience in a multigenerational classroom where the professor was not so "helpful." Bobby shared:

I was the oldest student in this design class. The teacher and I had a major difference of opinion. The kids jumped right on it. The kids all agreed with the teacher. I just felt negative. They didn't even want to accept my idea. A couple of the younger students worked the teacher and played up to him. They were less likely to challenge him. They just didn't want to accept my idea.

In conclusion, relationships with the younger students evolved over time from attempting to understand the younger students and then a degree of tolerance towards them. This occurred because of the experience that the adults had with their own children, and by both nurturing and reverse nurturing. Instructors' teaching style and helpfulness also helped.

Phase III: Lasting Impressions

A number of themes emerged when the participants expressed their final thoughts about attending classes with traditional students. The participants then talked about the learning experience that occurred with or because of a younger student in a multigenerational classroom. They shared advice they would give to other older students about the younger students; stated advice they would give to younger students about older students. They talked about age differences and how that affected the atmosphere

of the classroom. They reinforced the positive aspects of participating in a multigenerational classroom. In the final part of the data gathering interviews, participants shared a metaphor to describe their experiences of being with or learning from traditional age students in the community college classroom.

The Mutual Learning Experience

Participants were asked what if anything they learned anything from the younger students and if they thought the younger students learned anything from them.

Traditional students learning from adult students. Nick hoped some of the younger students learned his time management skills. "You can't just put things off to the last minute. I pace myself." Another thing that he hopes the younger students learned is patience. "Patience keeps coming back to my mind. This is not a flash in the pan kind of thing. If you don't get it at first, try to step back and reanalyze what you're not getting." Another thing he hopes that they learned from his is critical thinking. He said: "Looking at situations at different angles until you get one that makes sense. Don't just think that your first opinion is the right opinion." Annie also highlighted the critical thinking idea and hoped the younger students realize that "There's always another way of looking at things."

Tom hoped that the younger students learned from him "good study habits." Truvy believed that the younger students have learned "responsibility and accountability" from her. She said: "I take it very seriously if I'm responsible for something. I own my mistakes. If I screw up, I own it." Finally, Louis hoped the younger students learned from him to be "passionate about their life's ambitions."

Louise hoped the younger students learned from her that "your experiences are some of your greatest assets. It's through those experiences that you learn things, whether the experiences are good or bad."

Donald shared: "For some of these kids, I'm the first black person they they've ever met. So I hope they learned from me that I'm pretty much just like them even though in some ways, I'm so much different from them. Hopefully that will help them in the real world."

Louise thinks that the younger students have learned from her "to be assertive. Put your hand up and say something whether you're right or wrong."

Most of the participants hoped that the younger students learned the importance of education and that education never stops. Mary shared the sentiments of many of the participants when she said: "Well, I hoped they learned that they can continue to learn at any age. I would hope that they would know that they can always learn. Um, that there's still progress happening when you reach a certain age."

Adult students learning from traditional students. The participants shared what they learned from the younger students. Nick responded, "Well, I kinda knew this on my own, but they reinforce this…don't take life too seriously. You have to have some fun." Lois agreed with Nick. She feels that the thing that the younger students have taught her was "how to lighten up a little. Um, that it's not the end of the world if you don't get an A."

Some of the participants said that what they learned from the younger students will help them when they are employed. Annie believed that her experience with the

younger students will help her to be more open minded and tolerant especially when she is employed. She said:

> Well I think I will be even more open minded, more tolerant. I think I will be better for it. Well, because by being with them in class and talking to them here and there, I think because I've been exposed to current trends, um, with maybe like their music, their style of dress, their ideas. I think I'll be more versatile as far as viewing people. If I see someone dressed in all black or with a million of piercings and lots of tattoos, I'm not going to be standoffish. Because I know most of them are OK. And you can not judge a book by its cover. I really, really learned that. So I think that will help me when I have a job.

Both Tom and Louis agree. Tom said: "This younger generation has given me a good balance for when I go to work. I can mix old ideas with new ideas." Louis felt that being in a classroom with the younger students will help him when he gets a job.

> The thing is I think that if I were to get a job, it's a mixed market out there now. And there's a lot more young people in charge of different positions. I think I know how to communicate with them. That's the big thing I learned.

Angel's take away from the traditional age students at a community college was very self-enlightening. She shared:

> I've learned that I was in an ivory tower for a good many number of years. When you go into the book store here and you hear these kids, they don't have money for the books. When you're sitting in the classroom and somebody will say to you: "Angel, will you please give me notes. I don't have money for gas. I can't take this class three times a week. I try to make it only two times a week."

There's a lot that I didn't know what was going on. And I'm kinda embarrassed. I'm a volunteer. I volunteer at the soup kitchen and all that. But on a day to day basis, I didn't really know how hard some kids have it. But, some of these kids you could cry for. So, I'd have to say that I learned that I was living in an ivory tower.

Samantha's learning experience was more personal. She felt that because some of the younger students did not take school seriously it helped her to realize that her own children might not do well in school initially. Interesting to note here, Tom hoped that the younger students may have a "better understanding of their parents' way of thinking" because there were in a multi-generational classroom.

Donald believed that he learned from the students that "experience does count a lot." Along with this experience, he learned that "it's good to be optimistic. I've learned a lot of good study habits from them, too."

Mary seemed to summarize the thoughts of the adult learners about what they learned from the traditional students. She said: "Everybody's got a story." She continued:

Everybody is doing this on their own terms. Everybody's got something. A lot of these kids are working a lot of hours. They're not just sliding through here and coming to school and going home. Everybody's got something. I know it's difficult for them, whether they're living at home with their family. They've got homework, they've got tests, they've got a job that they have to keep up. So they're juggling, they're juggling a lot.

Advice

The participants were asked what advice they would share with other adult learners who were returning to school for the first time about younger students. They were then asked what advice they would give to the younger students about attending class with older students.

Advice to adult students about traditional students. One of the main pieces of advice the non-traditional students shared was to not be intimated by the younger students. They are different and they are a different generation. Their actions, dress, mannerism are not what an adult student may be accustomed to. With this in mind, Troy said that his number one piece of advice to older students about the younger students is "don't be intimidated." Heather concurs and stated: "Don't be afraid of them." Lois shared: "I would tell the adults um, not to be alarmed by what they may look or sound like." Tom would tell adult students to not be "shocked at some of the things that the younger students do. Don't let it bother you. Try to remember what you did at that age. Just laugh it off."

After this initial piece of advice was shared, many of the participants expressed other pieces of advice. Both Mary and Lois shared: "Enjoy the company of the younger students. Listen to them. They are very intelligent. They have fresh ideas that are helpful to adults. Learn from them. There is a lot to learn from them."

Donald agrees that you can learn from the younger students and would give this advice to the older students.

> You can learn a lot from them. These are the people who are going to be out in
> the real world with you. Have a sense of humor. Remember that they are young

and you were young once too. So don't take anything too seriously. You can do it. It's a really positive experience.

Nick shared this advice about relationships: "Just relax. Let it happen. Don't try to force relationships with the younger students. Let it happen, 'cause it will." Annie concurs and offered this piece of advice:

Just basically, be yourself. Be the person who you really are. Um, basically, just go with the flow. Don't try to work your way into their group and try to be one with them. Let them kinda come to you on their own terms. Don't push yourself on them at all. They will come to you.

The participants counseled other adult students to not be "judgmental." Nick shared: "Don't be judgmental about the younger students. They live in a different world. Yeah, we're in the same world, but they have different environments." Mary shared Nick's advice about not judging people. She continued: "Observe and don't judge. I think some people judge very rapidly. But in this environment with younger students, observe first. Judging shouldn't happen anyhow." Louis shared: "Appreciate the young people. Don't worry what they look like. They're going through a phase and have to find their way."

Some advice centered more on the notion of how relationships evolve over time. Bobby, for example, said: "Don't try to blend too fast. Don't go in there and think they're all your friends. They do realize that you're older. Some of them don't want to talk to you because you're older. There is a gap."

Truvy agreed and stated: "Don't be afraid of them. Give 'um time. Let the water come to temperature. Just get in there and let it settle. Cause it all comes out in the wash. Just get in there and let it settle. You will form friendships with them."

Samantha's advice to adult students about relationships with younger students was: "Just study hard, don't let the clowns bother you or distract you. Go ahead and get educated. Don't let the young ones bother you. The majority of them are nice."

Tom and Louis highlighted the notion of the importance of offering your own experience. Tom, for example, said: "Be patient with the younger kids. This generation does things different that you're not used to. Try to help them out with the knowledge that you have about things. About life." Similarly, Louis said: "Do not be afraid to share your experience with them. Your life experience is so important. Your lived experience is so important to share."

Louise's advice seemed to agree and even sum up the participants advice to the older students returning to school about the younger students.

> Don't be afraid to approach them. They're not aliens. It's easier to succeed when you relate to them rather than to try to ignore them. Listen to them. They're very funny you know. Know the younger people can be a huge resource. And are more than willing to help."

Advice to traditional students about adult students. Some of the topics of advice that the adult students would share with the younger students concerned patience, age, experience. Angel, Tom, Truvy and Troy emphasized the notion of the importance of patience on the part of the younger students about the older students returning to school. Angel related: "Be patient. Be patient with us. Know that we do have something to

offer too. It might not manifest it in the beginning, but it's there." Tom also stressed

patience. This is the same advice that he gave to the older students about the younger

students. He said: "Be patient!" He said that older students "can't do things as fast as

you can." "You need to help us to understand what you know." He continued:

> Older students have a different priority. Number one, they're here because they
>
> need to re educate themselves for a new job or they need to advance for a bigger
>
> job and they don't have the experience and the degree to take that job. And they
>
> want it badly, so they have to come back and take classes. In the long run, you
>
> might learn something from them…they've been there, they've done it, they've
>
> seen it.

Troy also emphasized patience. He stated: "Being patient with the older

student." He equated patience with his parents. "It's like my parents. They ask the

same question like five times. You start to get mad. We're all going to be there at some

point, so have patience."

Truvy's advice combined the issue of patience and age. She would tell the

younger students to "not be afraid of the older students. They're not all your parents."

Also, "they've really waited a long time to be here, so be patient with them."

Samantha and Annie addressed the issue of age. Samantha stated: "I would tell

the younger students to treat the older students just like a regular person. Don't mind

their age. They're there to learn. Not to look down at them because they're older. Don't

think that they can't do it, 'cause they could." Similarly, Annie's advice to younger

students about the older students was: "I would tell them to not write off old students

right away. Try to give them a chance. It's easy to write them off, but give them a chance as a person. You'll see how close you get to that person."

Some of the participants mentioned the importance of listening to the life experiences of adult students. Heather suggested that younger students "listen to the life experiences of the older student, 'cause you can learn from them. You can learn from their mistakes if you're willing to listen."

Bobby mentioned life experiences and insecurities that adult students may have that the younger students may not be aware of. He shared: "Well, first of all, they have more life experiences. You can learn off them. Life's a great teacher. They could teach you a lot."

Donald combined the notion of experience, age and wisdom and said he would suggest to the younger students about the older students: "You're going to be in the real world with all different types of people, so draw from their age and wisdom. They've been around the block whereas you haven't."

Nick mentioned both patience and age when asked what advice he would impart to the younger student. He said:

Don't stereotype. I may not be your mother or father. I may not be the same. Don't assume that I think you're terrible. And, let's see. Even though I'm older, I've lived through a lot. But I'm still a student. I'm still learning the same thing you're learning.

The themes of respect and helpfulness are present in Lois's counsel to the younger students about older students. He counseled: "Be yourself when you're talking

to them. For some, maybe they would want to be a little bit respected. And try to help them if they need help.

Louise would share this piece of advice with the younger students about the older students returning to school. "Be kind. Be kind. You know. Interact with us. We have a lot to offer. Help us when you see that you can. Don't be afraid of us. We're all students here."

The participants agreed that these pieces of advice can help to form and solidify relationships between traditional and non-traditional students. It would also help to make the journey to relationships easier for both sets of students.

Age Doesn't Matter

A number of students alluded to the fact that within the multi-generational classroom, in the end, age simply doesn't matter. Mary said: "I've always felt very respected as just another student. Like I said, perhaps they might have waited a bit, maybe not have sat next to me because of what I look like, but that's all right. I don't take offense to that."

Mary also talked about a student who was as old as her 22 year old daughter. They were close enough that they would text each other to see how each was doing or more importantly, "did you watch Grey's last night?" When registering, they would look for each other and register for the same classes.

Again, it doesn't matter how old somebody is. You want that person in your

clinical group because you enjoy their company. I am totally flattered because

they enjoy my company. We laugh, we joke. Um, I'm not such an old fart. (She

laughed here). Flattered, sure, I'll admit that. I'm accepted. That's what it is, I'm accepted.

Heather addressed the age factor through her instructors. She says that her instructors never treated her, or any other adult student, differently because they were older. She related:

I never felt different cause I was older or that they were treated differently because they were younger. I kinda feel that we were treated all the same. But as far as them developing relationships among us, I think they just tried to get their classrooms to gel and I think they did a good job at that.

Once the younger students figured out that the older students are just there to learn, Heather said that "you level the playing field. You're not the authority. You're just another student, which is kinda interesting."

Troy had a positive experience when partnered with a younger student in a lab situation. There was an equal sharing of information. He said: "There was no wall because I was older and he was younger. It was a free exchange of information. We were there as classmates. We were extremely equal."

Truvy shared an interesting story about how her age conflicted with her experience. She notes how her age is "against me in my profession (hair dressing) and works for me as a student nurse."

I find in the hospital clinical setting, people look at me as the authority 'cause I'm the old one. Sometimes we'll giggle about it and I say I'm going to let them think that. Patients will say "I want the older one cause she knows what she's doing." In my profession now, my age is against me. Because I'm aging out of being "hip

and cool" in the beauty industry. So I'm losing credibility with the younger generation where I am now. But I find it hysterical that I'm gaining it. In the field that I know flat out what's going on, they think I don't know anything. And in the field where I am such a baby and infant, they think that my age means that I know everything. And that just kills me. I think that's hysterical. They think I'm experienced. It just cracks me up. I think it's so funny.

Final Thoughts

Participants were asked to paint a picture of their experiences of what being with or learning from traditional age students in the community college classroom was like while also coming up with some final thoughts, which they described as an overall positive experience.

Integration of the journey; the picture. Participants were asked to describe, using a metaphor, a picture of what their journey was like in a multigenerational classroom. Some participants had a difficult time with this request. Others answered immediately and were very graphic. Nick, for example, said: "I would say like the first week…a fish out of water. But after that, um, you jump back in the water and you become part of the school of fish. I'm not sure why I'm thinking about fish right now, but I am."

Mary's thought was a family reunion. "Being an adult in a multigenerational classroom has been an easy, comfortable journey. A little like attending a family reunion…although everyone is not on the same level of experience, we have a connection, a sense of belonging."

Angel's idea was a tree. She shared what she felt a multi-generational classroom was like:

Um, when the tree is first growing it's just a little twig. And then how beautifully it gets. Then we get fooled when we have the beautiful summer leaves. In the fall, we get sad because the leaves are gone. And in the spring the tree is bigger. The tree grew more. The tree "knows" more. It becomes more full. That's what I think is happening to us. We see these little twigs blossom into a full tree.

Annie shared this metaphor. "I'm a bridge to the baby boomer generation."

Louis, who was also taking a creative writing class at a local university, shared his idea:

To me education is a journey of discovery. We all travel together and make a better experience. We may be of different ages, but we all have the same central goal to learn and make a living. The paths may be a little different in our ship (classroom) of education; we all embark, in separate boats (desks). Some of us will row actively and be responsible; other will be more lax and drift along. Sometimes the mix is just so that we get a swell that prompts us to put up our sails, weaving with the waves of learning where our different courses (methods) converge to make that wonderful learning experience. Sometimes we will have waterspouts, maybe a hurricane, or Tsunami. It all depends on the gravitational effects of our mix. All it takes is the will to surf and the enthusiasm to learn. A multigenerational classroom creates undercurrents that could reach gales of tempest proportion in our combined learning efforts.

Truvy described students differently in her general studies (prerequisite) classes and her nursing cohort:

I want to say the first year is like vegetable soup. There's all different kinds of things in there. I'm going for education, I'm going for political science, I'm going for this or that. And we all look different and we all sound different and we all are different. But together it's good. Vegetable soup!

In the nursing program, I'd say its like um, colored pasta. We're all pasta. We're all a little different. Um, but we're all doing the same thing. We are the nursing program and it's pretty cohesive.

Troy's, Louise's and Donald's descriptions of their journey were short and to the point. Troy said: "This experience was like a May-December romance." Louise shared that her experience of being with or learning from traditional age students in the community college classroom was "a rocky road to a smooth street." Donald said that is was like "culture shock, but not one you can't get used to."

Multi-generational learning as a positive experience. The participants were asked to share their final thoughts. The overwhelming majority of the participants stated that their experiences in a multi-generational classroom were very positive. As Samantha noted: "I never had a bad experience. Age never mattered in the classroom. It was always a positive experience. Mary also highlighted that "It's been a positive experience." She shared:

From personal experience, it's been an extremely positive experience. It's been a really good ride. I'd do it all over again. It's almost the norm, 'cause I've never been in a classroom with just all adults. I don't know anything else. It was a very positive experience.

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Bobby also said that his experience in a multi-generational classroom was normal. He shared: "I don't see any difference. To have this mix, it's normal. I don't know what it's like to be in a one-age classroom." Annie characterized the multigenerational classroom as "the best way to teach." She stated:

I would tell you it is probably the best possible way to teach and to learn in a class. It's not a homogenous group. People are coming from all different places. You're going to come TO common ground, not just start out with common ground It expands your horizon about the world.

Angel shared some humor when she commented on attending class in a multi-generational classroom was:

I would say it's great. I would say I'm glad I'm in with multi- generations because we could teach each other. I would say that I don't want all people in their fifties and sixties in one class. And it's so nice not to hear about bursitis and did you get your colonoscopy this month? Or did you get your breast exam? It's so nice to be with people who have a lot of energy. I think it keeps us active.

One of Louis' lasting impressions actually seemed to surprise him. Because he is working on his third degree, he has a history with the younger students and a new appreciation for them. He shared:

I sorta appreciate the younger people. The ones who want to do the work. The majority do. That's a change over some time ago. More of the younger people are more interested in learning than I've seen in the past. That's a big change.

He went on to describe that a multi-generational classroom is more indicative of the way is society today. He said:

I would probably tell you that it's a good idea to have a mix of people in a classroom. Mixing people rather than keeping everybody segregated…If they're segregated, it doesn't paint the picture of our society today. Everybody has to learn to get along. The young, the old, the middle. So having a mix promotes a good mix for everybody. Makes understanding.

Donald agrees with Louis. He stated: "It was a very positive experience. The multigenerational classroom is the best thing because the real world is multigenerational. And the classroom is supposed to prepare you for the real world."

Lois also shared that her educational experience with the younger students was a "great experience" and addressed how a multi-generational classroom can mirror society and that she learned a lot from the students. She shared:

And you learn a lot. Not just academically, but personally and just about life. Trends in society. Um, these18, and 19 year olds are our future and you can get a glimpse of it if you could just look at them and listen to them.

Similarly, Troy's lasting impression was also positive. He centered on learning from the younger students.

I think you will find that there is no generation gap. I think that you could also learn a lot from such a cross section of people. Questions can be answered so many ways. I think that having this type of classroom is a pretty good idea 'cause you can learn a lot from both. These kids are great. And smart!

In her final thoughts, Truvy discussed an important issue. She said that she is very empathetic towards the younger students. She thinks that higher education is "a little harder for them than me." She shared:

In a way I feel that's it a little harder for them than me. They have a social pressure that I don't have. They're looking for those friendships because their high school friendships have fallen aside. They're looking for that new best friend. I can be their friend, but I don't have the pressure of having to morph to be that cohesive best friend because I know I'm past that. I'm not looking for my soul mate. I have that at home already. They have different pressure that I don't and I'm glad that I don't. It's the psychological pressure that they have. Everybody wants to be liked and everyone wants to have friends and everybody wants to fit in. But I think at forty five, I kinda just accept my warts and wrinkles and I laugh at myself more than anything else. Where, at 19, 20 and 21, you are just trying so hard to get it right and figure out who the heck you are. And I don't want to go back to that. So I think their pressures are a little harder.

In summary, drawing on both their metaphors and their closing comments, it is clear that overall, the participants saw their experience in the multi-generational classroom in a positive light. While they had struggles along the way, the process of their learning and their relationships with these younger students developed over time and seemed to be an important part of their overall learning in the community college.

Summary

To summarize the chapter, the themes of findings were discussed in light of the phases of these adult students' experiences with the younger students. This chapter then contains a time-line of impressions of older students' entrance into a multi-generational classroom. It contains discussions of their initial anxiety about being in school and in a multi-generational classroom along with recognizing their differences with the younger

students. It continues with how they adapted and build relationships and concluded with their lasting impressions.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how adult students specifically those who are forty five years of age or older view their experiences in a multigenerational community college classroom where classroom interaction is encouraged by faculty and is intended to be part of the learning experience. Specifically, this study sought to examine these learners' perceptions of how the development of relationships among students of different ages affected the dynamics within the community college classroom and how these dynamics affected their learning. The research also focused on how these interactions evolved, and how they were influenced and encouraged by faculty and students. The experiences of the older adult students and how they perceived and interpreted their experiences are central to the study.

This study is guided by the following research questions: (1) How do faculty and students view the dynamics of an intergenerational higher education classroom and how do they think this affects student learning? (2) When connections and relationships develop among students across generations, how do they evolve? (3) From a social constructivist view, how do those relationships affect the learning experiences within the classroom, either positively or negatively, for both types of students and for faculty?

In this final chapter, first, a summary of the findings of the study is provided. Second, the major findings of the study are reviewed and discussed in connection with the literature. Then, implications for practice in adult and higher education are addressed as well as suggestions for future research. Finally, the chapter concludes with my reflections on the process.

Summary of the Findings

The findings of this study were grouped into three major categories which also form a timeline: (1) the first impressions that the adult students have of being in a multi-generational classroom, (2) adapting and relationship building, and (3) lasting impressions of this multi-generational classroom experience.

One of the significant findings in this study was the anxiety that the participants felt when they realized that the classroom has students of many different ages. They were apprehensive, afraid of and intimidated by the younger students, perceiving the younger students were more accustomed to being in school; the information presented in school was fresher to them. The participants mentioned concern about the younger students treating them as if they were their parents and were concerned about the differences in the generations. They felt that the younger students knew so much more about technology than they do. They noticed that they dressed differently and sometimes used language and grammar that the non-traditional students did not understand. Some of the younger students' lackadaisical attitudes toward school were perceived as different from their own.

The participants related how they began to adapt to college and the younger students. They shared how they became more understanding toward the younger students and what events lead to that understanding and credited the influence of their own children in helping this understanding. They shared their thoughts on relationship building through nurturing the younger students. The nurturance of the adult students by the younger students also became a major dynamic in the building of relationships; what surprised most of the participants is how the younger students nurture the adult students.

The adult students also reported on the influences of their instructor in building relationships.

The third finding of this study provided a summary of the adult students' impressions of their experiences in a multi-generational classroom. The participants shared what they learned from the younger students and what they hope the younger students learned from them. The participants freely gave advice to both older and younger students in a multi-generational classroom. They revealed a common belief that in the end, age does not matter. Finally, they disclosed the benefits of being in a multi-generational classroom.

The Study in Light of the Theoretical Framework

The primary theoretical lens for this study was social constructivism. As explained in Chapter Two, constructivism is a theory about "knowledge and learning; it describes both what 'knowing' is and how one 'comes to know'." (Fosnot, 2005, p. ix). A constructivism stance "maintains that learning is a process of constructing meaning: it is how people make sense of their experience" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 261).

Socially constructing knowledge occurs within the individual (Patton, 2002). Constructivists "study the multiple realities constructed by people and the implications of those constructions for their lives and interactions with others" (p. 96). Vygotsky proposed that language and social interaction was a primary indicator of an individual's learning. He also believed that development depends on the sign systems such as language with which individuals are accustomed. These systems are the symbols that cultures create to help people think, communicate and solve problems (Slavin, 2006) and are used to help develop relationships.

From a social constructive perspective, learning is a shared activity between the educator and learner rather than an individual activity; a teacher's role in this environment is to stimulate the process of meaning and knowledge. According to social constructivism, learning can not take place without interaction – interaction including discussion of experiences in relation to the course content with other members of the class. Merriman (2002) believes that constructivism underlies a basic interpretive qualitative study because meaning is constructed through engagement in the world that is being interpreted (Crotty, 1998). The interaction in this study takes place in an intergenerational learning environment, where groups from different ages relate to and learn from each other.

The active construction of meaning by the participants is evident in the findings. Learners gained new understanding through the continual integration of new content and experiences with past knowledge and constructed new meaning from the experiences. Participants in this study shared their initial anxiety about returning to higher education and about being in a classroom with students who were so much younger than themselves. But the participants freely admitted that they overcame their anxieties. People, materials, and situations such as technology, self-presentation, language and attitudes about school, influenced what they learned or what they adapted to. They integrated new information with their learning environment and constructed new meaning within their surroundings. Within a few weeks of starting school, many of them said that they felt very comfortable with school and being in a multi-generational classroom.

Another approach to constructing knowledge is constructionism which implies that the learner, through direct interaction with the environment, actively constructs

knowledge (Resnick, Säljö, & Pontecorvo, 1997). Social constructionism "refers to constructing knowledge about reality, not constructing reality itself" (Patton, 2002, p. 96). Gergen emphasizes the social aspect of knowledge constructionism (Phillips & Early, 2000). He is focused on language and discussion to construct understanding. Knowledge is a constant construction and reconstruction of understanding through dialogue and interaction with the social community. People, materials and situations influence learning. Learners gain new understanding through the continual integration of new content and experiences with past knowledge and construct new meaning from the experiences. Nick's example of a direct interaction with a younger student and trying to understanding some of the language that this younger student was using in the social community of a multi-generational classroom highlights constructionism. Although the student's language was "kinda shocking" Nick shares that he laughed as the "meanings kick in."

The theory of social constructivism also is evidenced in how the participants constructed the beliefs about generational differences, how the adult students communicated with the younger students, and how the relationships were built by forming common understandings with the traditional students.

This was a basic interpretive study. A basic interpretive research can interpret how a participant makes meaning of a situation. Participants adapted to the issues of the younger students and made sense out of particular situations. The participants accepted the differences between the two groups, empathized with the younger students and began to nurture them. The participants clearly state that their journey in a multi-generational classroom was a positive learning experience.

This study is also framed by Knowles' model of andragogy. Knowles' definition of andragogy is "Another model of assumptions about adult learners that seems to "fit" with particular situations" (Knowles, 1980, p. 43). Knowles argued that adult learners are uniquely different from children and the differences between how adults learn and how children learn need to be taken into account when working with adult learners (Knowles, 1980). How Knowles' model of andragogy "fits" with this study is now discussed.

The first concept of this philosophy regarding adult learners is that as a person matures his or her self-concept moves from that of a dependent personality toward one of a self-directing human being (Knowles, 1980). As time progressed in the semester, the participants in this study overcame their anxiety and became more comfortable with their role as learners and fellow students. They took an active responsibility in managing both their in-class curriculum and major core and electives courses.

The second concept of andragogy is that an adult accumulates a growing reservoir of experience. This becomes a rich resource for learning. The participants in this study did indeed possess rich reservoirs of experience and were always willing to share this experience to create an enhanced learning environment within the multi-generational classroom. As stated by Kasworm (2003) the vast majority of adults bring some type of collegiate experiences into the classroom which can add to the reservoir. This concept of andragogy works well with both generations of students. Both adult students and younger students gained new understanding through the continual integration of new content and experiences with past knowledge and create new meaning from the experiences and adapt to this new meaning.

The third concept of andragogy is the readiness of an adult to learn is closely related to the developmental tasks of his or her social role. This again reflects social constructivism suggesting that people construct more meaning to the things that they have learned from experience than those things that they have learned passively. Most of the participants told stories of how they learned about the younger students and developed an appreciation for them. In contrast though, two participants, Truvy and Neil, freely stated that they had no desire to learn about the younger students. Yet, in spite of this, they too formed relationships with them.

The final concept of andragogy is that adults are motivated to learn by internal factors rather than external ones. Learning takes place when personal goals, interests, attitudes and beliefs come from within the learner. The learner becomes the self motivator or the internal teacher (Knowles, 1980). All of the participants except for Troy and Bobby, who were involuntary students, talked about internal factors that had influenced then to voluntarily return to school. Some of the internal factors that influenced the participants to return to school were: to fulfill a wish or desire, to gain more knowledge and to improve one's status in life.

Using the concepts of andragogy from a social constructivist/social construction lens and basic interpretive research will inform this study and add to our understanding of the ways adult students learn from and interact with younger students in the classroom.

Discussion of the Findings in Light of the Literature

In this section, the findings of this study are discussed in relation to the pertinent literature. This discussion encompasses how the findings relate to, expand upon, or contradict some of the prior studies that were reviewed earlier.

Reentry to Higher Education.

The challenges that adults experience when first returning to higher education is well documented with the literature. This study revealed the anxiety the participants felt not only about returning to school, but also about being in a multi-generational classroom. The literature suggests that there are many stressors faced by returning adult students. Often they face limited resources such as time and finances. They have multi-level experiences with technology and are often pulled in many directions trying to manage family responsibilities, home life and work/career (Brumagin, 1999; Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Kasworm, 1990; Kasworm, 2003). Other stressors identified in the literature are the extent of perceived demands within work, school and personal life and the inter-role conflict between work, family and school (Giancola 2009). These stressors may negatively or positively affect their impact on the college experience (Giancola, 2009; Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Morris, Brooks & May, 2003).

The experiences of many of the participants in this study reflected what the current literature suggests. The stressors they experienced were family concerns, financial concerns, time constraints and guilt due to time and finances for returning to school. Two of the participants were so stressed and anxious that they admitted to crying the first day. Truvy, a nursing major, was terrified the first day because when she looked at the material, she thought she was in way over her head. She admitted to crying the first day. She said: "The first two classes I took I was crying. I cried the first day I went. I thought maybe I am too stupid to do this." Heather, a human services major, also cried on her first day. She recalled: "I cried all the way home after my first general psych class. I felt like so out of my element."

Although many stressors are mentioned in the literature about adults returning to higher education and the participants in this study admitted to experiencing them, there is very little in the literature addressing the stressor of how adults feel about being in a multi-generational classroom. Most of the literature that exists on the multi-generational classroom is focused on how to teach adults (Bishop-Clarke & Lynch, 1992; Bishop-Clarke and Lynch, 1998; Giancola, 2009; Pratt et al., 1998). It does not address the issue of the anxiety that the adults feel about being in this type of classroom with younger classmates which is a significant contribution of this study.

The participants in this study stated they experienced feelings of anxiety when they realized that they were in a classroom where, at times, they were the oldest student present. Many participants expressed shock, wonder and fear when they recognized the age difference. When asked to describe what it was like when she saw so many younger students in her classes, one of the participants shared what she was thinking: "I felt I had landed on the game show "Survivor." It was the "Them" tribe and the "We" tribe. Literally, oh God, don't sit by the old lady." Another participant shared how she felt: "I felt like so out of my element. Like, none of those classes had any really older adults. Most of them were the kids and I thought 'what am I really doing here?' These kids are my kids' age." A third participant shared her anxiety: "When I walked in to the classroom and sat down I noticed I was surrounded by young children. There was no one in my first class that was my age. I felt like their mother. It was just, I felt out of place. I felt uncomfortable. I thought what am I doing here?" This anxiety is reflective of the same type of anxiety that Kasworm (2005) describes as "adults taking personal risks of their identity and self-worth to enter the college classroom," (p9).

What was evident with these participants is that initially they felt uncomfortable, not only because it was the first day or the first few days of school, but because they were in classes with people so much younger than they. But they shared that their initial shock and their level of discomfort usually dissipated after a few weeks. This developmental process is evident in the findings of this study and sheds light on how returning adult students find their way in a multi-generational classroom. For the participants in this study, the personal risks of returning to higher education (Kasworm, 2005) were overshadowed by the rewards.

Recognizing Differences.

The age difference manifested other differences between the non-traditional students and the traditional students. The adult students recognized differences in the knowledge of technology, the manner of dress, the language the younger students used and their attitude toward school. Current literature addresses the technology differences. It does not address the other differences that the participants discussed, such as self-presentation and language. Bishop-Clarke and Lynch (1992) recommend that differences and similarities between the generations should be aired by means of a discussion during the first week of class. This may facilitate a better understanding of each group of age differentiated students.

Traditional aged students are very computer savvy and technologically dependent. This is evidenced in the growing demand for on-line courses which have increased in enrollment from 1.98 million in 2003 to 2.35 million in 2004 (Allen & Seaman, 2007). It is also in evidence by the use of personal blogs and the popularity among traditionally aged students of websites such as Facebook, MySpace and YouTube. (American

Demographics, 2004). The literature also states that adult students have multi-level experiences with technology (Brumagin, 1999; Donaldson & Graham, 1999; Kasworm, 1990; Kasworm, 2003). Some are very tech savvy; others are extremely frightened and intimidated by any type of technology.

The participants in this study stated that technology is the number one issue that differentiates them from the younger students. The majority of the participants feel that their computer skills were challenged. These findings are consistent with Bishop-Clarke and Lynch (1992) which state that "some older students are paralyzed with fear when they must use a computer." (p. 3). The participants in this study addressed the fact that the younger students were very proficient at computer skills while the adult skills seem to be lacking; yet, they freely admitted that they eventually learned many of these skills from the younger students. There are many examples of this cited in the last chapter. For example, Nick stated that he is always more than willing to "let the younger students help me with the technology. Then I gradually learn from them." Heather and Angel marveled at how the younger students communicate via technology. Heather says, "It just is…its part of their generation the whole Facebook. It's interesting to go into computer lab before class and I'm working on a project and they're on Facebook. They're doing their social networking through the computer." These findings are consistent with the current literature about social constructivism. These statements theoretically resonate with Vygotsky's More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) (Galloway, 2001) which refers to someone who has a greater knowledge or experience about a subject than the learner and Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978) which refers to someone who provides the appropriate assistance or scaffolding to the learner.

In addition to what is seen in the current literature, the participants in this study were cognizant of a number of additional differences between traditional and non-traditional students. For example, the participants commented on the style of dress, predominately casual, that the younger students favored. Two of the participants state that they were not comfortable with the tattoos or piercings that the younger students had. The participants' feelings correspond to the generational literature which characterizes their "baby boomer" generation as team oriented, collaborative and focused on group goals more than individual goals (Ansoorian, Good & Samuelson, 2003). The individual expressionism and differences that the younger students displayed is an important difference between these generations, yet, is not addressed in the literature.

One participant had a particularly difficult time with both the grammar and language or "slang" that the younger students used. Other participants credit their own children with helping them understand the younger "slang." The use of this type of communication can be generational and related to the younger students' constant use of technology to communicate (Strauss & Howe, 1991; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2006; McGlynn, 2005). Again, although this was considered important to the adult students, language differences are not addressed in the literature. The participants did reflect the social constructivists' view by constantly processing the language differences to understand the traditional student meanings and the classroom experiences.

According to the participants, the traditional students' attitude about school was another issue that differentiated them from the non-traditional students. Many of the participants expressed surprise and disappointment at the way some of the students

managed their studies. This is consistent with the literature that discusses the belief that younger students are less serious about class work (Bishop-Clarke & Lynch, 1992; Bishop-Clarke & Lynch, 1994; Kasworm, 2005).

Because this study is about adult learners, Knowles model of andragogy was used. Andragogy is a term that "belongs" to adult education (Merriam & Brockett, 1997, p. 135). It is a way of thinking about working with adult learners. It identifies significant characteristics of adult learners and suggests what educators can do to help adults to learn (Marienau & Chickering, 1982). Self direction and experience are characteristics of andragogy and these characteristics go hand in hand with constructivism. The first concept of this model regarding adult learners is that as a person matures his or her self-concept moves from that of a dependent personality toward one of a self-directing human being (Knowles, 1980). Within the first few weeks of school, participants in this study moved from being an anxious dependent person to one of self confidence within the multi-generational classroom.

Adapting and Relationship Building

The participants in this study reported on the evolution of relationships with younger students in the multi-generational classroom. Some participants shared how they felt about the study ethics of the younger students; some discussed how their own children influenced their feelings about the younger students. Some spoke of the nurturing aspect of the multi-generational classroom. Others talked about the influence or non influence of the instructor in developing relationships. These outward and visible signs may imply the foundation of building a sense of community, as suggested by Palmer (1991).

Understanding and tolerance develop over time. Many of the participants were eager to share that, over time, they became tolerant and understanding of the younger students' issues such as study ethics, time management, expression of freedom and social and family pressures.   As they reflected back, they shared that they had similar issues when they were at that stage of their lives. In light of social constructionism, Gergen (2001) and Phillips and Early (2000) theorize that knowledge is constructed by the learner; individuals learn through adaptation by creating their own meaning of a particular situation and then learn from that situation; and people, materials, and situations influence what they learn or what they adapt to. The participants acknowledged the different attitudes that the younger students had about school and they accepted these differences and even related to them. In addition, while the literature addresses that there is some hostility between the traditional student and the adult student (Bishop-Clark &Lynch, 1992; Kasworm, 2005), it does not address this level of tolerance and understanding that the adults are willing to extend to the younger student. This is a significant contribution of this study.

Many of the participants said that the influence of their own children made it easier to build relationships and understand the younger students. Although the assistance of the adults' own children in building relationships is not mentioned in the literature, the participants believed that they had more insight about the younger generation because of the guidance of their own children.

Nurturing. The majority of participants referred to some type of nurturing when discussing their experiences with traditional age students. This nurturing theme did not manifest itself immediately. For most of the participants, nurturing almost became a

natural process after the students, both adult and traditional, became comfortable with each other. Nurturing usually occurred about four to five weeks into a semester.

Many of the younger students sought out the older students for advice on both academics and personal problems. The participants shared that they were comfortable when this occurred and some are even happy to be sought out. This coincides with Bishop-Clark and Lynch's (1992) findings that their participants had a tendency to act like a parent to the younger students. It is also reflective of the findings of Kasworm (2005), who states:

> Adult students desired to counsel and persuade their younger peers about the importance of college; however, most of these adults believe that young adults had to discover for themselves the importance of becoming a committed college student (p11).

This also reflects the social constructivism lens. From a social constructivist perspective, learning is a shared activity between the educator and learner rather than an individual activity. According to social constructivism, learning can not take place without interaction. This interaction can take a variety of forms such as a discussion of experiences in relation to the course content or in relation to life experiences with other members of the class.

Not all of the participants desired to take on a nurturing role, but ended up doing it, in spite of themselves. Even though some of the participants resisted a nurturing role Kasworm (2003) states, "the face-to-face engagements with younger students in the intergenerational classroom co-constructed many diverse understandings of a relational identity for these older students" (p.15).

While many of the participants related incidences of how they nurtured the traditional student, they also told of incidences of how the traditional student nurtured them. These reverse nurturing experiences can be seen similarly to the findings of other studies that suggest that there were positive and valued interactions that adults received from the younger students in a multi-generational classroom (Kasworm, 2005).

There were a number of participants who said that there was some friendly teasing and bantering between the older and younger students. Most of this was positive, but there were a few negative experiences as well. Angel, for example, had an unfortunate experience with teasing. Because of this incident, she dropped out of school for almost a year. Louise also had a problem seeing the blackboard, sat up front and reported that some of the younger students starting calling her 'pet' though she said it didn't bother her. Nonetheless, these incidences of negative teasing are indicative as some studies (Kasworm's, 2005; Bishop-Clarke & Lynch, 1992) have found that participants experienced a few hostile younger students. This hostility involves younger students believing that the older students were ruining the curve or were tired of hearing about the adult students' experiences. Along with the teasing, the above named studies suggest that the adult students feel that the young students do not take school seriously. Both groups viewed the other as having it easier. This may be a source of the animosity. The participants in this study admitted that these differences of opinion actually lead to a multifaceted understanding of the younger students.

Influence of instructor in relationship building. The participants were asked if their instructors were instrumental in helping them build relationships with the younger students. Most participants agreed that the instructors did not purposefully attempt to

build relationships but their teaching styles helped relationships with the younger students evolve. Teaching styles that promoted group learning, conversation, discussion and study groups seemed to help develop relationships. Seating arrangements of students also helped develop relationships. Brookfield (2006) addresses the essence of a skillful teacher from an adult educational perspective in a constructivist manner by implying that the teacher is constantly researching students' responses to learning and making pedagogical decisions from those responses. Listening carefully to students is critical in understanding how they make meaning of their experience.

Current literature supports this way of teaching to build relationship. Brookfield and Preskill (1998), Baxter Magolda (2000), and Brookfield (2006) address dialogue and interaction as a way to create community or democracy in the classroom. These adult students also displayed characteristics typical of their "baby boomer" generation (Pew Research Center, 2005). They tend to be team-orientated and collaborative (Ansoorian, Good & Samuelsson, 2003).   The younger students, who can be referred to as "Generation Y" (Strauss & Howe, 1991; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2006) value teamwork and are very good at multitasking. This generational combination can stand as a testament to the social constructivist lens which emphasizes social interaction as a way to make meaning.

From a social constructivist perspective, learning is a shared activity between the educator and learner rather than an individual activity. A teacher's role in this environment is to stimulate the process of meaning and knowledge.   According to social constructivism, learning can not take place without interaction. This interaction can take a variety of forms such as a discussion of experiences in relation to the course content

with other members of the class. Since learning from a social constructivist perspective takes place in community, the interaction may take place in an intergenerational learning environment where groups from different ages relate to and learn from each other and the culture of the classroom. Adults returning to higher education are simultaneously developing as students, learners and members of a learning community.

A few participants relayed that they had instructors who were helpful, not only with academics, but with establishing a level of comfort with the younger students. Occasionally, the older students would also service as a generational mediator between the teacher and the traditional age student. For example, Donald shared that "one instructor would say things in class that were just absolutely over the kids' heads. They did not understand what he was talking about. Occasionally he would mention somebody…Walter Cronkite…and I would have to turn around and give them the definition." An incident such as this is noted by Kasworm (2005) in which one of her participants took on the role of mediator of learning between the younger students and the faculty member. This contradicts an earlier study which noted, "And rarely is there an attempt to take explicit advantage of the presence of older adults in the classroom" (Manheimer, 1997, as cited in Knapp & Stubblefield, 2000, p. 612.).

In summary, relationship building took many forms. A social constructivist perspective suggests that knowledge is both self-constructed and constructed in the social context in which it occurs. In building relationships, these participants learned from each other, learned from the younger students and learned from their own children. Whether learners are dependent or autonomous in the classroom, the educator must not do for learners what they can do for themselves and conversely, must do for learners what they

cannot do for themselves (Pratt, 1988). Educators can create conditions in the classroom to help learners acquire knowledge through social interaction while incorporating the learners' experiences.

Lasting Impressions of a Multi-generational Classroom

A number of themes emerged when the participants expressed their final thoughts about attending classes with traditional students. The participants talked about the learning experience that occurred with or because of a younger student in a multigenerational classroom. They shared advice they would give to other older students about the younger students; stated advice they would give to younger students about older students. They talked about age differences and how that affected the atmosphere of the classroom. They reinforced the positive aspects of participating in a multigenerational classroom.

Participants were asked what, if anything, they learned from the younger students and if they thought the younger students learned anything from them. It seemed that they had some mutual learning experiences. They stated that they hope the younger students learned good study habits and time management skills from them. They hoped the younger students learned that their own experiences can be a powerful teacher. They wanted the students to be passionate about their undertakings. Most importantly, the participants hoped the younger students learned the importance of education and that education never stops.

The participants shared what they learned from the younger students. Some of the participants said that what they learned from the younger students will help them when they are employed. Annie for example, believed that her experience with the younger

students will help her to be more open minded and tolerant especially when she is employed.

Both Tom and Louis agreed. Tom said: "This younger generation has given me a good balance for when I go to work. I can mix old ideas with new ideas." In addition, the adult students felt that their experiences in the multi-generational classroom provided levity and perspective. Lois for example, felt that the thing that the younger students have taught her was "how to lighten up a little. Um, that it's not the end of the world if you don't get an A!"

Social constructivist theory emphasizes that learning is a process of the active construction of meaning. Learning cannot take place without interaction. This interaction can take a variety of forms. Many of the topics that the participants stated they learned from the younger students were not related to course content but implied a more holistic type of learning through interaction. As Kasworm (2005) states, "Many of these adult students entered into co-learner relationships with younger students." One of her participants said, "You learn what they're experiencing and I think it goes both ways" (p.16).

The participants were asked what advice they would share with other adult learners who were returning to school for the first time about younger students. One of the main pieces of advice the adult learners would share with other adult students in a multi-generational classroom was to not be intimidated by the younger students. They counseled them to have confidence because of their experience. This is consistent with the research of Bishop-Clarke and Lynch (1994) who found that older students believe that they are less prepared than younger students and this affects their self-confidence.

Also, the participants would remind future adult students that the younger students are different and they are of a different generation. Their actions, dress, mannerism are not what an adult student may be accustomed to. But the adult student's life experiences and motivation to return to school will soon establish confidence. The second concept of andragogy "fits" (Knowles, 1980, p. 43) with these statements. Adults accumulate a growing reservoir of experience which is a rich resource for learning. This concept is that there is respect for an individual's uniqueness and experiences. By nature of the non traditional student, the vast majority of adults bring some type of prior collegiate experiences into the classroom (Kasworm, 2003) which can add to the reservoir. This agrees with social constructivism because learners gain new understanding through the continual integration of new content and experiences with past knowledge and create new meaning from the experiences and adapt to this new meaning.

Most of the pieces of advice the participants would give adult students returning to school about the younger student centered on enjoying the company of the younger students and learning from them. Truvy used an interesting analogy and said: "Let the water come to temperature. You will form friendships with them."

From these pieces of advice, one can see how these participants adapted to their scholastic situation from a position of an anxious, concerned student to a position of self confidence and assurance. This suggests a developmental process over time through social interaction. This finding is theoretically supported by the main assumptions of social constructionism from the point of view of Gergen (2001) and Phillips and Early (2000): knowledge is constructed by the learner; individuals learn through adaptation by creating their own meaning of a particular situation and then learn from that situation;

and people, materials, and situations influence what they learn or what they adapt to. Although this adaption process was slow, it was consistent.

The final thoughts of the participants on their experiences in the multigenerational classroom were very positive. They agreed with Donald who stated: "It was a very positive experience. The multigenerational classroom is the best thing because the real world is multigenerational. And the classroom is supposed to prepare you for the real world." This quote highlights the need for aging education. Students should be taught about different generations as early as childhood (Klein, Council & McGuire, 2005) and possibly throughout the entire higher education process. The multigenerational classroom can prepare students for issues such as the aging workforce. In the midst of this intergenerational variance, opportunities for positive exchanges between members of different generations are sorely needed (Knapp & Stubblefield, 2000).

In summary, the lasting impressions of these fourteen participants in this study bear witness to the premise of social constructivism and student interactions when they indicate how much they appreciate the multi-generational classroom and the younger students within that classroom. They affirm that they have learned a great deal from the younger students such as tolerance, open-mindedness, self-enlightenment and the ability to not take life so seriously and to put to use what they have learned. They also hope the younger students learned from them good study habits and the importance of experiences. They gave advice to other non-traditional students about the traditional students and advice to traditional students about non-traditional students. This process taught them that for most students, either traditional or non-traditional, age really does not become a

barrier to learning or relationships. Their final thoughts illustrate the fact that they

believe that a multi-generational classroom is a positive experience (Bishop-Clark &

Lynch, 1995; Bishop-Clark & Lynch, 1998; Brumagin, 1999; Kasworm, 2005).

Interdependence of the Findings

Although the findings of this study are presented in separate sections, they are

interrelated aspects of the experiences of adult students in a multi-generational classroom.

This study followed the participants' initial anxiety as they return to school. Along with

the anxiety that adults experience when returning to school ((Donaldson & Graham,

1999; Brumagim, 1999;   Kasworm, 1990; Kasworm, 2003) the participants in this study

also experience age differential anxiety. This anxiety was heightened by the presence of

differences between the age groups. One of the foremost differences the participants

noted in this study was the superior technology skills that the traditional students

possessed. Other differences noted by the participants are the manner of dress of the

younger students, the language they use and their attitudes about school.

Participants acknowledge the differences and proceeded to elucidate how in spite

of these differences, relationships formed with younger students. Occurrences such as

nurturing and reverse nurturing, the influences of their own children and the teaching

styles of their instructors supported these relationships.

The final section of this study addresses the positive opinions that the participants

shared. For all of them, the experience in a multi-generational classroom was self -

enlightening rewarding and fulfilling. In conclusion, the findings of this study are not

only important in their own right; but they are also interdependent upon one another for

creating an environment of mutual understanding and respect between the two groups of students.

Implications for Practice

The findings in this study of adult community college students can inform the community college experience in a number of ways. First, this study illuminates the importance of the community college in society. It is also reflective of how globalization, demographics and economics are driving up the enrollment of community colleges because of the need for an educated and diverse workforce resulting in an extremely diverse classroom population. Community colleges are unique because of their wide selection of subjects, courses and majors. They appeal to some applicants because of their various course offerings, some of which a four year institution does not or can not offer. Three of the participants in this study, Bobby, a culinary arts major, Samantha who majored in electrical contract technology and Troy who received a certificate in computerized numerical control are examples of the students who selected just three of the many diverse fields of study that a community college can offer. The American Council on Education (2005) presents statistics estimating that "sixty one percent of students are traditional and thirty nine percent are non-traditional" (p.6). According to the American Association of Community Colleges (2009), the average age of a student attending a community college in this country is 29. Sixteen percent of students are older than 40 years of age. Community colleges need to have a strategic plan in place to recruit, train and graduate non-traditional students with emphasis on students who are 45 years of age and older.

Second, there is a need for community colleges to realize that in addition to initial anxiety that adult students experience simply returning to school, there is added anxiety about attending classes with younger students in a multi-generational classroom. Participants in this study have reported that they were initially intimidated upon entering a classroom where much younger students were present. They freely admitted that they did not know how to act or react to this situation. Community colleges can highlight this initial concern by adult students though a program that is geared to assist students with college success. These one credit programs are usually offered during the freshman year and are usually mandated. One topic within this course can focus on issues of diversity including age. The age issues can include the initial feelings of intimidation adults may experience in a multi-generational classroom. Differences can be discussed, but similarities should also be mentioned. If possible, seasoned adult learners should be invited into this classroom to share their experiences, both positive and negative, to let the new adult learners know that their feelings are not unusual. The adults can also let the new adult learners know what to expert from this type of classroom.

Third, participants of this study admitted that their instructors had little, if anything, to do with acknowledging age differences within the classroom and building relationships. Instructors should be informed about the anxiety that adults experience when they return to school and are joined with students who are generations younger than they are. Taking this one step further, instructors should address both the differences and similarities within this type of classroom. Instructors should be cognizant of the learning abilities of the students and consider appropriately partnering students of different ages. This of course is merely a good teaching technique.

Suggestions for Future Research

As cited in Chapter 2, there are numerous research articles addressing the issues of the adult student returning to higher education. However, that research did not address the specific ages of the adult students. This study of adult community college students is comprised of students 45 years of age and older. The previous adult student research did not follow these adult students' experiences throughout their tenure in a multi-generational classroom. This study includes the students' own words about their journey with younger students in this type of classroom.

Although this study has added to the adult education literature and has increase knowledge about adult college students' experiences in a multi-generational classroom, areas for future research remain. The research discloses information about the non-traditional students' experiences but never addresses the thoughts and feelings of the younger students about these non-traditional students. Many of the participants expressed a desire to ask the same research questions to the traditional students. They were very interested as to how the younger students would answer these questions. The answers to these questions would complete the equation and yield more information on experiences of students in the multi-generational classroom.

The literature review addresses issues of adult students in both a community college (Kasworm, 2005), and a research university (Kasworm, 2009). This study was also conducted at a community college. But would the answers to these particular research questions be different if the study was conducted at a four year institution, a research university, a graduate school or even an on-line course?

Another suggestion for further research would be to involve faculty experiences and observations about relationship-building in a multi-generational classroom. Two articles address age differences in the classroom (Bishop-Clarke & Lynch, 1995; Bishop-Clarke & Lynch, 1999). Yet, within the last decade, an even greater influx of non-traditional students has occurred (AACC, 2008; American Council on Education, 2005). The evolution of faculty attitudes would be interesting to track.

Final Reflections

Two years before I began teaching at the community college, I decided to return to higher education to pursue a second master's degree, this one in management. I was 46 years old at the time. When I entered the classroom for my first class I was totally shocked at the younger students who were there. There was actually a student in class who was the daughter of one of my classmates from college! Did I feel old! In retrospect, I actually do not remember much about the dynamics in the classroom of that program except for the fact that we laughed a lot. How strange, all I can really remember is that we laughed! Throughout the two years, I can only remember that we had fun, all of us, adult students, traditional students and instructors. So, twelve years later, I find myself relating to the participants in this study. I experienced the initial anxiety that the participants experienced in this study, then the many positives, but I did not realize where that experience was going to take me.

I have been teaching in the community college for about ten years. Prior to that, I was in a management position for a large, major service organization. I had very little teaching experience. Once I became acclimated to the community college and the world of "academia", I realized that I had a desire to hone my skills as a teacher. After

researching a number of doctoral programs, I decided on the adult education program at Penn State Harrisburg. Thank heaven they also decided on me. What I learned in that program goes beyond my expectations and I will always be grateful to my instructors for opening my mind to so many different philosophies of education.

During my first year as an educator at the community college there was a closing of a major industry in the area. Almost three hundred people lost their employment. Many of them were offered financial incentives to return to school and take classes in a demand employment major. Because of this employment situation, my classes were almost an even mix of adult students and younger students. Day after day, I would watch the interactions between these two age different groups and remember the fun I had when I was in a multi-generational classroom. I wondered what they were thinking about each other. Were they having fun? Were they anxious? Did they see this experience as positive? Thus, the seeds of this research were planted.

My first surprise in this study was the adult reaction to being nurtured by the younger students. The adults in this study were pleasantly surprised at how helpful and encouraging the younger students are. I see this type of nurturing many times in the classroom, but I did not realize that the adults did not expect it.

Another surprise was the discovery that the adults believe that their instructors did little to help in the development of relationships, either with other adult students or with younger students. I found this surprising because I try to accomplish this in my classroom. I assumed that all faculty attempt to develop relationships, and of course, maybe some do. This discrepancy could be circumstantial. The participants I

interviewed did not have instructors that use this method of building relationships. It was nonetheless disappointing.

My last surprise was that this research revealed that although the older students learned to appreciate the younger students, they did not aggressively seek a relationship with them. The participants said that they still favor to form relationships with students of their own age.

In conclusion, every semester I watch the evolution of relationships between the adult students and the traditional students. I still question what they are thinking about each other. But the findings of my study help me realize that maybe I do know some of the answers to my questions. I feel very fortunate to be teaching in a multi-generational classroom. Like the participants reiterated in their statements, it is a positive experience. I feel as if I have the best of both worlds with these age diverse students.

Similar to the participants of this study, I have learned and grown through this process. I would like to share a metaphor to describe my experience as a doctoral student writing a dissertation. Upon reflection, I think about my own experiences as a parent and can compare that experience to creating this study. I look at my children and remember the wonder of childbirth and also the pain. It was not easy to deliver them. As I think about their childhood, I recall the joy I experienced and of course, the doubt. I was always second-guessing myself about raising them. And I look at them now and see what wonderful individuals they are and realize how proud I am of them and how much I love them. I have experienced the same emotional roller coaster while writing this dissertation. There was much joy in this writing, but also much pain. I was constantly

second-guessing myself about thoughts or ideas for this paper. And now that it is

completed,   look at it with much pride and realize how much I enjoyed my journey and

how much I really do love my study!

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Appendix A

PENNSTATE
1855

Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research
The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Experiences of Adult Students in a Multi-Generational
Classroom

Principal Investigator: Kathleen Ann Clemente
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1. **Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this study is to explore how adult students, specifically those who are 45 years of age or older view their experiences in a multigenerational community college classroom where classroom interaction is encouraged by faculty and is intended to be part of the learning experience. Individuals participating in the study will be interviewed about their experiences in a multi-generational community college classroom.

2. **Procedures to be followed:** You will be asked to participate in at least one conversational interview and one focus group. The interview will take place at a location that is convenient to you; possibly a place on the college campus. The focus group will be on the campus of the community college. The interview, which will take about an hour, will be audio recorded and transcribed by me, the researcher. The focus group will also take about an hour and be audio recorded and transcribed by me.

3. **Discomforts and Risks:** There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. Some of the questions are personal and might cause discomfort.

4. **Benefits:** You might learn more about yourself by participating in this study. You might have a better understanding of how important relationships are to you. You might realize that others have had similar experiences as you have.

   This research might provide a better understanding of how relationships affect college students. This information could help plan programs and make student services better. This information might assist students in getting accustomed to college life.

5. **Duration:** It will take about 15 minutes to complete the demographic survey, no longer than two hours to complete the interview and no longer than two hours to attend the focus group.

6. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Your participation in this research is confidential. The data will be stored and secured at the researcher's home located at 306 James St., Kingston, Pa. The data will be stored in a locked file cabinet and the recordings will be stored on the researcher's password protected computer file. Only the researcher will have access to the recordings. The recordings will be destroyed in 2019. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.

7. **Right to Ask Questions:** Please contact Dr. Elizabeth Tisdell at 717 948 6459 or Dr. Dana Clark, Vice President of Academic Affairs and Provost at Luzerne County Community College at 570 704 0387 with questions, complaints or concerns about this research.

8. **Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would receive otherwise. If you speak about the contents of the focus group outside the group, it is expected that you will not tell others what individual participants said.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

_____
       _____
Participant Signature   Date

_____   _____
Person Obtaining Consent   Date

Appendix B

Interview Questions

GENERAL QUESTIONS
1. "Why did you decide to come back to school?
    a. What were your expectations? What are you majoring in and why?
    b. What were the first 3 weeks like in your life when school began? At home? In school?
    c. What strategies did you use or are you using to balance your academic life with your personal life?
    d. How was school different from when you attended as a teenager/or when you were first out of high school?
2. Your classes are typically made up of traditional-age students and adult students like yourself with many different work and family responsibilities. How did it feel initially to be in classes with folks of different generations?

DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS IN GENERAL
3. Who have you gotten to know best in your classes, and how did you get to know them?
    a. How did these relationships develop?
    b. Can you tell me about a specific assignment that you had in class where you worked with a traditional student and how that worked out?
    c. How did your instructors' teaching style or class activities facilitate the development of these relationships (if at all)?

RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS GENERATIONS

4. I am particularly interested in relationships that adult students have with traditional-age students. What was your initial reaction to the younger students in your classroom? How did you react to the way the younger students look, talk, act and their attitude? What is your reaction to them now? Did you connect with any of these younger folks? How did that happen?
5. Can you describe three significant experiences or relationships you've had with traditional-age students and how they unfolded?
    a. How do you feel about these experiences?
    b. If these experiences are all positive, ask about negative ones and vice-versa
    c. Do you have any interaction with traditional students outside of the academic setting? School or professional clubs, social? Can you tell me about this?
    d. How (if at all) has the instructor in your classroom impacted the development of your relationships with traditional students?

LEARNING FROM/WITH TRADITIONAL-AGE STUDENTS

6. What are the most important things you've learned from traditional-age students, both academically? Personally?

    a. How do you think your relationships (positive or negative) with traditional-age students has affected your academic achievement or study habits, or overall academic learning? How do you think your experiences with the younger students will effect your working environment? Any benefits or hindrances?
    b. On the personal level, what are the things you have learned from these traditional-age students from sharing personal stories, confidences, humor, or advice?
    c. What are the most important things you think they might have learned from you?
    d. If you could give 3 pieces of advice to adult students returning to school about traditional students, you would tell them…
    e. If you could give 3 pieces of advice to these younger students, you would tell them…

FINAL QUESTIONS

7. If I were a newspaper reporter interviewing you for a feature on multi-generational classrooms, what would you tell me?

    If you had a metaphor to describe your experience of being with or learning from traditional-age students in the community college classroom what would it be? A metaphor is a figure of speech or a symbol. An example would be: Being in class with these younger students was like… Or I felt like….being in class with these younger students.

Appendix C

Participant Demographics

Name	Age	Race	Major	Graduation Date
Angel	58	White	Nursing	May 2010
Annie	58	White	Journalism	May 2010
Bobby	49	White	Culinary Arts	May 2009
Donald	50	Black	Human Services	May 2010
Heather	50	White	Human Services	May 2009
Lois	50	White	Journalism	May 2010
Louis	52	White	Education	May 2010
Louise	51	Black	Human Services	December 2009
Mary	49	White	Nursing	December 2010
Nick	49	White	Nursing	December 2010
Samantha	50	White	Electrical Contract Technology	May 2009
Tom	54	White	General Studies	May 2009
Troy	59	White	Computerized Numerical Control	Summer 2009*
Truvy	45	White	Nursing	May 2010
*certificate				

VITA

Kathleen A. Clemente

Education:
Pennsylvania State University, D. Ed., Adult Education, May, 2010

Misericordia University, Master of Science, May, 2000

Marywood University, Master of Science, May, 1977

Misericordia University Bachelor of Science, May 1974

Academic Positions:
Luzerne County Community College
Associate Professor

Licenses and Registration:
Registered Dietitian – American Dietetic Association
Licensed Dietitian Nutritionist – State of Pennsylvania