

**THE LIVED EXPERIENCES  
OF SENIOR STUDENTS  
RETURNING TO UNIVERSITY**

**by**

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for the degree of  
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## ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study of six purposively selected senior students, over the age of sixty, explored their learning experiences at a small regional university. Participant profiles created from the students' own words, generated in the interview transcripts framed the data analysis. From the constant comparative analysis of the transcripts, an overarching theme of learning emerged. During the analyses and interpretation, three sub-themes emerged. The first two sub-themes represented the outer realities of the participants' life-worlds. The outer realities, common to all participants were *lifelong learning* and *personal performance*. However, the participants' inner realities served to integrate their life-worlds. In this study, inner realities were explored using tact, which is a 'thinkingly feeling' process melding the head and the heart (van Manen, 1995). Refinement of the data and returning to the literature led to the final sub-theme of *fulfilment* intertwined with *generativity*. The participants experienced a sense of happiness as they were learning at university. They also expanded their generativity while learning among younger students and nurturing younger members of their families. Implications include the need for research in classroom-based studies of seniors' learning experiences, the use of focus group methods for seniors' collective input, the need for curriculum development and support systems for senior learners and policy development and implementation based on research.

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# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTORY BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

### **Introduction**

This research report documents a phenomenological study of the lived experiences of senior students returning to university. I invite readers to listen to the voices of senior students as they describe their university experiences and indirectly challenge the stereotypical attitudes towards seniors in university education in the new millennium.

### **Rationale**

As a senior student myself, I interviewed six senior students over the age of sixty. The purpose of the study was to discover the reasons senior students return to university, to document the experiences they are having at university and to explore their reactions to university. Additionally, I reflected on similarities between my experiences as a senior at university and the experiences of my participants in this study.

Diverse purposes for studying older populations are cited by Sarkisian (1982), Jensen (1999), Edwards and Usher (1997) and Feldman (1990). Sarkisian and Jensen conducted research within their institutions of higher education, whereas Edwards and Usher, and Feldman reflected on contributions of adults and seniors to themselves and to the future of society. The participants in this study will describe their academic pursuits in higher education and their contributions to society using their own words and their own feelings.

## **Overview of the Research Process**

The research question, "What are the lived experiences of senior students returning to university?" was examined phenomenologically. This choice of methodology was influenced by Collins (1981) and Sarkisian (1982) who employed phenomenological methods in their research studies. By listening to the voices of students, Collins and Sarkisian analyzed the learning process described by adults and seniors. Collins presented his views of how adult learners describe their learning themselves, rather than relying on researchers' findings. Sarkisian conducted dissertation research on senior learners to discover what their learning means to them. Thus, Collins and Sarkisian were used as models for phenomenological research with senior adult learners.

After deciding to conduct my study in a regional university, I received information that there were fifty-four students over the age of sixty who were registered part-time and full-time in courses at the university. Seventeen students volunteered to be interviewed. Three of the volunteers lived out-of town and fourteen lived near the university. Eleven females and six males volunteered. Four females and four males had graduated, but were enrolled in undergraduate courses; and the remaining nine volunteers also were registered in undergraduate courses. The six volunteers selected to be participants were part-time students who lived near the university. To balance the sample, I chose three males and three females to be participants in the study. The number of participants is small—only three of each gender. The reader therefore is invited to listen to the individual voices of the participants and cautioned not to view their comments as representative of their gender.

At the initial interview, each participant signed the participant consent form and responded to my guiding questions, while I tape-recorded their responses. I generated transcripts and numbered the lines before inviting each participant to return for a reflective interview. Details of the data collection are described in “Chapter III: Methodology.” The data analysis followed the constant comparative method by Glaser and Strauss (1970). In this process, I read and re-read the transcripts to find common themes across the participants’ transcripts. I also conducted a review of the literature and I created figures to illustrate organization of the literature, preliminary categories of data and emergent themes.

### **Key Terms for the Study**

The foundation for defining key terms emanated from the research literature on adult and senior learners. These terms include *qualitative research*, *phenomenology*, *adult learning research*, *senior student* and *lifelong learning*. The additional terms, *phenomenological time*, *productive aging* and *tact* were added after analyses of the transcripts.

In this study, these terms have been defined as follows:

*Qualitative research* explores people as living subjects, generating 'soft data' in a natural setting with emphasis on narrative and context (Blaikie, 1999).

*Phenomenology* is the study of the lived experience from the point of view of the participant (Quigley, 1997).

*Adult learning research* is systematic listening to and analysis and interpretation of the voices of adult students as they describe their learning (Collins, 1981).

However, this study focussed on senior learning research similar to that conducted by Clavner and Clavner (1992) and Scala (1996) who studied senior learning in the context of their higher education institutions.

In this study,

*A senior student* is a student over the age of sixty returning to university.

*Lifelong learning* is a continuous re-education in knowledge, skills and values.

#### **Additional Key Terms**

Analysis of the transcripts determined the need for defining additional key terms. The first term was time, which was a recurring word in all the participants' transcripts. *Phenomenological time* is the time experienced by individuals in their daily routines. Hargreaves (1990) was commissioned by a teachers' union to discover why policy changes affected teachers detrimentally. He decided that teacher frustration developed when the time lines for administrative changes conflicted with their daily routines. He explained that the administrators were attempting to implement changes according to *technical-rational time*, which is objective time and not congruent with the teachers' subjective, phenomenological time.

This concept of phenomenological time applied to the participants in this study, as they experienced changes in time in their lives as employees, retirees and now university students. The participants also were learning in the context of younger students whose perception of time differs from seniors' perception of time. Also faculty deliver courses in accordance with university administrators' technical-rational time.

Another key term surfaced in the experiences portrayed in participants' transcripts. *Productive aging* is the phenomenon of seniors possessing a new image of participating actively in society. It is similar to the term 'resourceful aging' in a paper presented by Feldman (1990) at a conference, describing an experience of melding 'the head and the heart' -- thoughts and feelings intermingled with words.

Finally, while listening to the voices of senior students, the researcher recorded indirect clues which revealed the participants' feelings. This required tact. *Tact* relates to reflective inquiry and it results in "the ability to interpret inner thoughts and feelings from direct clues such as gestures, demeanor, expression and body language" (van Manen, 1995, p. 42).

Finally, during the interpretation phase, two other concepts emerged as sub-themes:

*Fulfilment* is the experience of achieving a degree of happiness through educational participation leads to an overall feeling of well-being (Jensen, 1999).

*Generativity* is a characteristic which individuals develop later in their lives. It is associated with nurturing future generations.

## **Overview of the Study**

### **Chapter I: Introduction**

This introduction provides an overview of the study and enables the reader to prepare for Chapter II: Review of the Literature, Chapter III: Methodology, Chapter IV: Participant Profiles and Data Analysis, Chapter V: Interpretation and Chapter VI: Summary and Implications. The introductory chapter provides a rationale and purpose for

the study as well as introducing key terms that are used in this report.

## **Chapter II: Review of the Literature**

The review of the literature comprises my literature search, followed by preliminary research literature and finally a systematic organization of selected literature. The systematic organization of the review of the literature graphically represented themes generated from the research. These included *Listening to Student Voices*, *Productive Aging*, *Effects of Computer Technology*, *Pivotal Events* and *Institutional Research*.

## **Chapter III: Methodology**

My initial methodology focussed on the collection of data by conducting interviews with guiding questions for structuring the participants' responses. However, the second participant knew about a similar thesis (Jensen, 1999), which he presented to me. Jensen's research report suggested that the researcher also should conduct a self-interview to develop insight into her participants' thoughts and feelings. This procedure altered the role of the researcher to become researcher-participant for reflective purposes.

Jensen (1999) also developed profiles for each of her participants with their own words to describe their identities. This procedure was replicated in the current study to enable readers to formulate independent analyses and interpretations of the data, apart from the data analysis and interpretation.

## **Chapter IV: Participant Profiles and Data Analyses**

I analyzed the field notes and conducted a frequency word count to create preliminary categories. The frequent words in the participants' transcripts were associated with the preliminary categories. *Time*, *younger students* and *learning outcomes* were the

preliminary categories, which formed a framework for excerpts from each participant's transcript. The profile, which was created within this framework, represented the identity of each participant. These profiles enabled both myself as a researcher and my readers to hear the voices of my participants as they describe their experiences in their own words and with their own feelings. The participants also have pseudonyms in the profiles to protect their identities. The participants explain their experiences of *time*, their perceptions of *younger students* and younger members of their families and *learning outcomes*. As Jensen (1999) suggested, I interviewed myself to gain perspective about my participants. Thus, the profile, "Jane" is for reflecting on the participants' transcripts.

Data analysis procedures from Sarkisian (1982) influenced the present study. Sarkisian created preliminary categories to organize her data. The preliminary categories for my study were reported as part of my methodology.

I followed the constant comparative method of data analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1970) to explore and refine the preliminary categories of time, younger students and learning outcomes, which were then collapsed into an overarching theme with three sub-themes, which included commonalities among all the participants in the study.

#### **Chapter V: Interpretation**

This chapter extended the analyses and presented focussed observations with a figure to illustrate the collapse of the literature supporting the participants' transcripts. The theme of learning emerged and then expanded into three sub-themes which identified the dimensions of learning which were described by the participants. The participants were able to integrate their multiple realities and thereby develop meaning in their life-worlds.



Finally, the meaning of the interpretation is explained.

#### **Chapter VI: Summary and Implications**

This summary chapter accomplished four purposes. It restated the research question, outlined each chapter of the report, described the emergent theme and sub-themes and explained the meaning of the interpretation. Finally, it offered implications associated with senior student learners in university courses with younger students.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

Two processes were involved in the review of the literature. The first is a description of the literature search. The second process is a refined grouping of the research into conceptual categories, with the research references described in each conceptual category, drawn from my literature review. Finally, I created a graphic representation to illustrate the conceptual categories with the supporting research for each category.

#### **Literature Search**

Collins' (1981) recommended phenomenology as a research methodology in adult education to hear how adults learn from the learners themselves. The education library texts on phenomenology suggested dissertations by Sarkisian (1982), Hardin (1985) and Murphy (1986). These reports illustrated findings related to adult and senior learning. In addition, my library research for graduate student reports located Howard (1994) and George and Camarata (1996) on adults' responses to technology. These studies also were congruent with Redding, Eisenman and Rugolo (1998) who described seniors' relationships with both technology and instructors. For my study, technology is investigated to determine how senior students' learning experiences were enhanced or limited by computers and internet. Also, Fraser (1993) revealed adult student learning strategies on computers from my point of view as the teacher of these adult students. This study focussed on outcome based strategies and evaluation for computer keyboarding in

an inter-generational class.

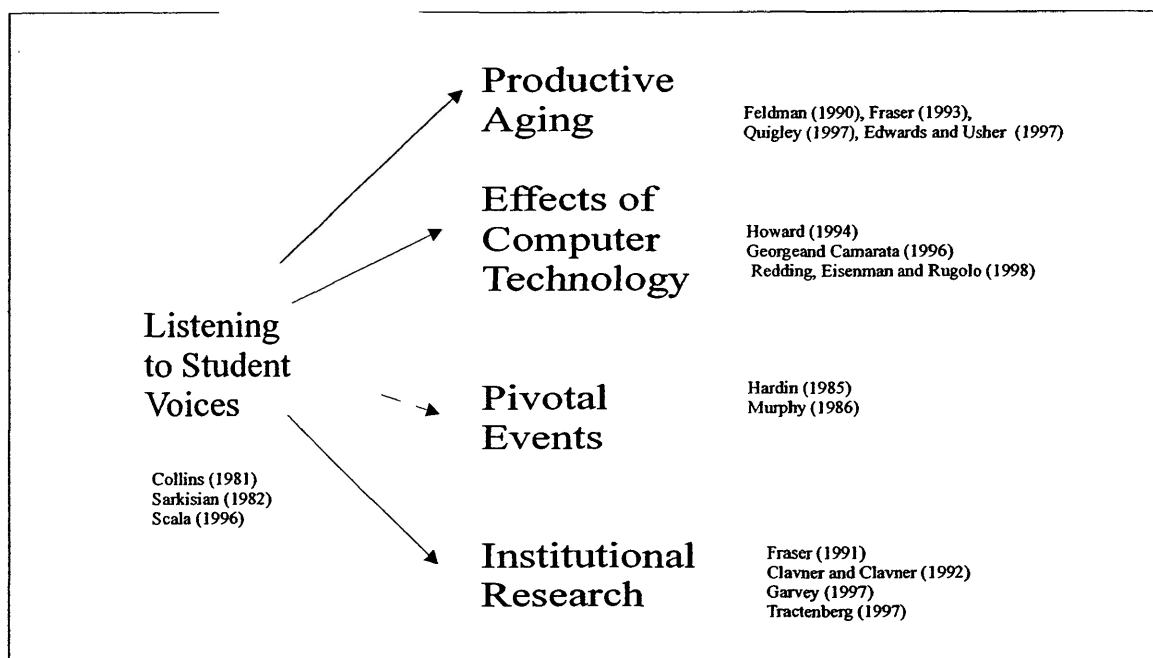
The next search was on microfiche where adult student learning was reported by Feldman (1990), Edwards (1997), Clavner and Clavner (1992) and Scala (1996). These researchers studied the learning by a new wave of adult and senior students in their institutions. Finally, articles by Garvey (1997) and Tractenberg (1997) present administrative viewpoints on senior learners.

The development of an overview of conceptual categories is a complex process. The grouping of researchers into conceptual categories involved reading and re-reading the research reports and analyzing the reports for commonalities. This process was similar to data analysis recommended by Glaser and Strauss (1970). The resulting conceptual categories were: *Listening to Student Voices*, *Productive Aging*, *Effects of Computer Technology*, *Pivotal Events* and *Institutional Research*. Each conceptual category was represented by selected research studies.

These conceptual categories organize the review of the literature according to *Figure 1*, which was created to show that *Listening to Student Voices* generates responses about *Productive Aging*, descriptions of the *Effects of Computer Technology*, discussions on *Pivotal Events* and suggestions for *Institutional Research*. This figure is a preliminary organization of the literature and was used to inform my preliminary analyses of the participants' transcripts.

#### **Systematic Organization of the Review of the Literature**

The creation of *Figure 1* was a useful strategy for analyzing research reports and choosing the conceptual category into which each study fits. The initial categories were



**Figure 1. Systematic Organization of the Review of the Literature**

The review of the literature was categorized under the title Systematic Organization of the Review of the Literature Research.

*Listening to Student Voices*, was a methodology strategy first reported by Collins (1981) as a means of learning about adult students in their own words. Sarkisian (1982) also discovered the meaning of learning to students by listening to their own voices and analyzing their words and feelings in the transcripts. Scala (1996) listened to students as they described their motivation and learning experiences.

*Productive Aging* was described by Feldman (1990). Learning about productive aging comes about by listening to student voices as they describe their lived experiences. Fraser (1993) discovered that inter-generational learning assisted the older students in a mixed age group of students. Quigley (1997) also was a proponent of adapting adult programs in response to the students' needs. Edwards and Usher (1997) explained that the end product of the liberal university, as it attempts to focus on student contributions to future generations in society.

*Effects of Computer Technology* is also reported by researchers who listen to student voices as a source of their data. Howard (1994) reported on first-time computer experience. George and Camarata (1996) described the anxiety associated with the use of computer technology as 'cyberanxiety'. Redding, Eisenman and Rugolo (1998) offered concrete suggestions in his case study interview with a computer instructor in a Learning in Retirement Institute.

*Pivotal Events* in the life-worlds of participants were also revealed by listening to student voices in research by Hardin (1985). Pivotal events lead to transition in the life-worlds of participants and finally result in transformation of those individuals into 'generative persons' who 'seek to develop their higher potential. Murphy (1986) also reported on how a pivotal event may create resistance to societal expectations and bring about a non-material reward in the life of an individual. Murphy describes non-material rewards as power, prestige and a sense of happiness.

*Institutional Research* was described by researchers who examined the students within their respective institutions as a means of gaining insight into their experiences. Institutional research is informally conducted by listening to the voices of students as they describe their learning and examining the resources which the institution offers to facilitate learning. Fraser (1991) discovered gains in self-esteem and cultural adjustment among her immigrant adult students. Clavner and Clavner (1992) reported on remediation for senior students' learning. Garvey (1997) recommended involving seniors in their program planning and training staff to recognize the heterogeneity of the senior population of learners. Tractenberg (1997) cautioned university professors to be aware of future challenges of baby boomers returning to university.

designed to be flexible so that they could be altered according to findings from the current study. The first concept is the method for conducting phenomenological research studies.

*Listening to Student Voices.* As this is a phenomenological study, I chose as my first category, *Listening to Student Voices*. Collins (1981) recommended phenomenology as a research methodology. He suggested that researchers listen to the voices of adult students as they reflect on their learning process. Collins encouraged reflection on the everyday learning experiences of adult students. Sarkisian (1982) was selected as a transition from adult learning to senior learning, because her dissertation was an exemplary report. Sarkisian listened to the voices of her senior participants to explore their motivation for returning to university and what their learning means to them. She shaped her study around Weisskopf-Joelson's (1968) definitions on the meaning of life: "the integration of the inner world with outer reality" and "tasks enabling individuals to "integrate the private and public worlds" (p. 36). Weisskopf-Joelson also listed integrating experiences of friendship and love, art, creativity and hope. Sarkisian examined the different values which older learners attach to their learning in the light of Weisskopf-Joelson's theory. Sarkisian identified *involved learners* who are learning for the sake of learning, *searching learners* who are investigating learning and *pragmatic learners* who have a specific practical purpose for learning. However, the participants in the current study are a different group of seniors, in a different place and at a different time. The Sarkisian study informs both the methodology and the data analysis of my study. She illustrated excellent strategies for data collection and a thoroughness in her data analysis.

Further investigation of researchers who listened to student voices, revealed Scala

(1996), whose participants loved learning, explored new ideas and made connections with people. Scala also described how seniors experience changes related to work and family activities. Finally, Scala suggested that seniors fill a perceived void in their lives with new educational experiences. This concept of void was explained in the present study.

van Manen (1995) espoused phenomenology as he listened to student voices of children in their classrooms. “Teachers teach with their head and their heart and they must feelingly know what is appropriate to do in ever changing circumstances with children who are organized in groups but who are also unique as individuals”(p. 33). This ‘feelingly know’ applies to the current study which examines the lived experiences of unique individuals with complex inner realities compared to children. Eliciting feelings and feelingly knowing are important features of investigation in a study of senior students. Therefore, *tact* was embedded in the researcher’s role of collecting data from the participants to “interpret inner thoughts, understanding, feelings and desires” of the participants “from indirect clues such as gestures, demeanor, expression and body language” (p. 42).

*Productive Aging.* Feldman (1990) noted that resourceful aging is created by learning a new identity as a person with skills and knowledge to share. Scala also suggested that resourceful aging was created by cultivating “nurturing skills for the future generation” (p. 26). The concept of *Productive Aging* was described by the participants in this study. They believed that their learning in university courses represented a productive activity for their retirement.

Edwards and Usher (1997) discussed the effects of ongoing changes in society.

These researchers hoped to increase the personal performance of all individuals in society based on contemporary needs. Edwards and Usher regarded education as a liberating force. They identified the university's responsibility to all members of society. Edwards and Usher decided that university was the most appropriate location for adult learning because it reinforces positive values in society and questions changes, which might affect society detrimentally.

*Effects of Computer Technology.* Because technology presently pervades every aspect of life, senior students may be highly motivated to learn about computer technology. Technological training, especially word processing and internet research, has become a prerequisite for university students. Senior students, who have had little previous computer experience, may find it challenging to acquire these skills at the level required by university courses. Howard (1994), George and Camarata (1996) and Redding, Eisenman and Rugolo (1998) contributed to the effect of technology on adult and senior learning.

Howard (1994) employed phenomenological methods to reveal themes in adults' first-time computer experience. Howard's themes were learning experience, becoming computer literate and the perception of the computer as other. George and Camarata (1996) identified the anxiety associated with computer technology as cyberanxiety. George and Camarata recognized phases of cyberanxiety among instructors, as well as computer users. Redding, Eisenman and Rugolo (1998) interviewed a computer instructor of senior students in a *Learning in Retirement Institute*. The instructor reported diversity among the different age groups between 45 and 90. He indicated that younger members of

the class were impatient with the older students. He explained that learning was facilitated by using a student to model computer functions and by creating a relaxed atmosphere in the computer classroom. The concepts of “early” and “late” adopters of technology were useful in describing the experiences reported by the participants.

*Pivotal Events.* A pivotal event is an experience in the personal or public life-world of an individual which results in change for that person. A pivotal event leads to transition which is an intermediate stage before transformation. A pivotal event motivates people to resist the *status quo*, as do the participants in the current study when they are senior students in university.

Hardin (1985) interviewed professionals who made contributions outside the traditional boundaries of society—individuals with unique contributions. She found that these contributions were initiated by a pivotal event in the life of each participant: “Pivotal events can be used positively ...Generative persons use them for future growth ....Generative persons learn to cooperate with the various forces within themselves, which seek to facilitate the development of their higher potential” (p. 129) and “a pivotal event preceded the transition experiences which began adults’ journeys in new directions” (p. 156).

Murphy (1986) interviewed resistant professionals who do not serve “the entrenched economic interests of society. His participants were “triggered by a pivotal event in their lives which led them to resist dominating ideologies” (p.55). His participants ultimately discovered non-material rewards including “power, prestige, happiness and a sense of being involved in something worthwhile and meaningful” (p. 158). The



participants in the current study all experienced the pivotal event of retirement from their worlds of work.

*Institutional Research.* Institutional research and theory, relevant for this study, include: senior students' learning needs, a survey of adult learners, senior learning in leisure activities and a futuristic report on the impact of the baby boomer population arriving as retirees at university.

Clavner and Clavner (1992) surveyed senior students attending a community college. They reported positive results of integration into academic life, remediation for improving learning and achieving realistic goals in community college programs. Fraser (1991) conducted a survey of immigrant adult students. These students were perceived by the teaching staff to have benefited from their education primarily in areas of employment, self-esteem and cultural adjustment. Garvey (1997) reported on senior students who were participating in experiential education involving leisure activities. He described diversity among senior age groups. Garvey explained how seniors were permitted to assist in their program planning. This experience resulted in improvement of seniors' learning.

Tractenberg (1997) described the reality of population statistics from a futuristic viewpoint. In his article entitled "Preparing for the baby boomers ...", he explained the Elderhostel movement is dedicated to the pursuit of lifelong learning. Tractenberg cautioned professors that classes composed of senior students may be both "exhilarating and exhausting."

This study does not represent institutional research; however, the interview guide visited participants' responses on what should be maintained and what should be changed.

Their viewpoints on their university are reported as individual students and not as an aggregate of all senior students enrolled in classes at the university.

### **Additional Research Studies**

Additional research studies were included while the research was being conducted. First, Jensen (1999) was brought to my attention by one of the participants as the data was being gathered; then, Hargreaves (1990) was added as the data was being analyzed. Jensen contributed the concept of participant profiles for my research report. She also suggested that the researcher should interview herself to gain perspective about the responses of her participants. She also alerted the researcher to the role of the university student's personal fulfillment. Hargreaves contributed to the study by defining phenomenological time, the subjective time by which the participants are operating in their daily lives. Finally, van Manen (1995) contributed his definition of tact as 'thinkingly feeling' as a strategy to teach children from the head and the heart. A researcher may translate tact as a strategy to evaluate feelings from indirect clues exhibited by the participants in a study.

In summary, the review of the literature has highlighted the relevant studies from the search conducted. The systematic organization of the literature supported preliminary conceptual categories of the data, clarified key terms used in the study and guided decisions in data gathering, analysis and interpretation.

# CHAPTER III

## THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

This phenomenological research methodology involves descriptions of participant selection, ethical considerations, data collection, the interview guide, the interviewing process (initial interviews, reflective interviews, clarifying telephone conversations), settings for the interviews, preliminary categories of data and a description of creating the participant profiles.

Decisions for my research methods were influenced by Sarkisian (1982) who interviewed twenty senior students to discover their motivation for returning to university. She “allowed her participants to explain who they are, why they are learning and what their learning means to them”(p. 40). She organized her transcripts into preliminary categories to discover emergent themes. I encouraged my six senior students to express their experiences in their own words and with their own feelings. I also followed Sarkisian’s method of creating preliminary categories from my participants’ transcripts.

From Jensen’s (1999) study, I borrowed two organizing concepts for my report. The first concept was the creation of participant profiles. Based on the transcripts from my participants I created profiles in their own words to help the reader to know my participants. My participant profiles are presented as part of Chapter IV. The profiles include pseudonyms for the participants. Also, each profile is organized in the framework of my preliminary categories from the field notes, the participants’ transcripts and the computer word count. Jensen also suggested a researcher include a self-interview to gain

an understanding of the points of view of her participants. I also included my own profile in the report, so that I might use my words and feelings to reflect on preliminary categories and emergent themes from the participants' transcripts. Thus, the methods of analysis and reporting by these researchers has influenced my research study.

### **Participant Selection**

To determine my number of potential participants in the university database, I approached the Office of the Registrar, and was informed that there were fifty-four students over the age of sixty. These students were registered either part-time or full-time in university courses. The office of the registrar agreed to send my explanatory letter (Appendix A) with an invitation to participate (Appendix B) to these fifty-four students. The office of the registrar did not disclose who received the invitations.

Seventeen students replied to my invitation to be interviewed. Four males and four females had graduated previously but chose to enroll as undergraduates; and the remaining nine volunteers were registered in undergraduate courses. I chose a balance of genders in my purposive sample, three males and three females, because Sarkisian (1982) has an equal number of male and female participants. However, the reader of this study is invited to listen to the students as individuals, not representing either males or females.

All six volunteers were part-time students, enrolled in undergraduate courses, and lived near the university. They were chosen because they would need to travel to the university where the voice-activated computer program was installed in a computer room. I had intended to record the participants' interviews with advanced technology and with a tape-recorded backup.

The participant consent form (Appendix C) and Guiding Questions (Appendix D) were presented to each participant at the initial interview. At this time, each participant read and signed the consent form to participate in the study.

### **The Participants**

The participants were a heterogeneous group of seniors enrolled in diverse courses. The first participant was a 'quasi retired' engineer. He had completed a course in Astronomy and was now studying Philosophy of the Paranormal in the Summer Session. The second senior student was a retired teacher, enrolled in a Visual Arts and an Introductory Business Computer course. The third interviewee was a former women's movement worker who was registered in Sociology and planned to continue next semester in Psychology. The fourth participant was a former physiotherapist, who had worked with seniors in a residential setting. At university, her focus was on courses leading to a Bachelor of Science degree, but she was now studying French. The fifth participant was the most senior member of the research study, walking with the aid of a cane and having a disabled designation sticker for parking her car. She was studying History, although she was already a qualified accountant. The final participant was a retired law enforcement officer and administrator. He was enrolled in Spanish to prepare himself for international travel.

### **Ethical Considerations**

University ethics guidelines for research on human subjects were followed. The participant consent form explained that the participants were volunteers and able to withdraw at any time. They were assured that was no risk of physical or psychological

harm. Also, anonymity was maintained by assigning each participant a pseudonym. I selected pseudonyms for my participants based on my perception of their personalities. I also asked each of the participants if they agreed with the pseudonym which I had chosen.

The final ethical considerations were confidentiality and data storage.

Confidentiality was assured by sharing the transcripts only with my thesis superior. Also, only excerpts from the participants' transcripts were to be included in the report. Finally, the interview tapes and full transcripts will be stored securely for seven years, as required by University Research Guidelines.

### **Data Collection**

Initially, I planned to use two methods of data collection for each interview. The primary method was tape recording the interview, according to traditional methodology. The secondary method was using a voice-activated computer program, Dragon Systems *Naturally Speaking 8.0*. However, the primary method of tape-recording the interviews became the only source of data collection after the first two interviews. The first interview was completed by both methods of collection, and fortunately, there was a tape-recorded backup, because the computer shut down the program, without saving the data. The second interview was saved successfully, but the hard copy was interspersed with unintelligible words and therefore unreadable. Thus, after these initial experiences with voice-activated technology and its required training period, I readily agreed to use the traditional method of data collection by tape recording the participant interviews.

Then I set an unobtrusive tape recorder beside my last four participants to record their interview. During the interviews, the tape recorder did not distract the attention of

my participants, so they were able to speak with ease during their interviews. Finally, the tapes were transcribed and the lines were numbered on each transcript. These numbers served as reference for the creation of the participant profiles and the data analysis in this research study.

### **Guiding Questions**

Patton (1992) recommends that guiding questions serve to elicit information from the participants and also to provide a unified structure for comparisons of the participants' responses. I used probes (Appendix D) during the interviews to encourage the flow of the responses, to explore each participant's feelings and to clarify intended meaning in the words spoken during the interview. The questions for the participants were:

1. Tell me about your experiences as a senior university student.
2. Describe a typical day.
3. How well prepared were you for what you encountered?
4. What features of your university experience should be maintained?
5. What would you like to see changed if you were asked to give advice?

Responses to these guiding questions are embedded in the participants' transcripts in the participant profiles. Their responses are also found within the analyses and interpretation of this report, but not listed, participant by participant. The emergent theme and sub-themes with explanation of their meanings encompass content from the responses to these guiding questions.

## **Interview Process**

There were three phases to the interview process: the initial interview, reflection follow up, and telephone clarification. The interview process describes my interviewing techniques and communication strategies with my participants in the study. I modeled my interviewing after Sarkisian (1982), as her senior participants contributed detailed responses to her professional interviewing techniques. The role of the researcher in this study is defined in van Manen's (1995) description of tact. He refers specifically to the ability of teachers being able to interpret children's inner thoughts, understanding, feelings and desires from indirect gestures. The researcher employed tact during interviews during interviews with the participants to meld their heads and their hearts while collecting data on their lived experiences at university.

### **Initial Interviews**

I replicated Sarkisian's (1982) strategy of recognizing the importance of pace in each interview. Also, because there were pauses in each interview, I respected these silences and waited for the participant's response. I was sensitive to the data saturation point in both initial and final interviews as well as in clarifying telephone conversations with the participants. I took time between probes to permit each participant to complete each response. Finally, I signaled the end of each interview by answering any questions, which the participants had.

Sarkisian (1982) employs the terms "funneling" and "reverse funneling". These terms refer to entering probes into the interview in an appropriate location. "Funneling" means that the researcher probes from the main points to the details. If the participant



says, 'I was always on time for class,' I would say 'What do you mean by being on time?' and he would reply, 'If the class started at one o'clock, I would be there at one o'clock.'

"Reverse funneling" refers to researcher probes from the details to the main points. An example of "reverse funneling" would be the fifth participant explaining the 'peer group thing' when she is describing the younger students in her classes. I probed, "Are you comparing the younger students in your classes to the younger students in your family?" and she replied, "I never saw that in my grandchildren. They were doing 'the grandma thing'. They are not popular culture. None of them smoke. None of them drink."

### **Reflective Interviews**

Similar to Sarkisian (1982), I conducted reflective interviews in which I permitted each participant to read the initial transcript, to add, to delete or to modify the words. I also tape recorded the reflective interviews, transcribed the words and numbered the lines of the transcripts. However, there were three exceptions. The senior student, who was attending summer school classes, was satisfied with his initial interview after reading his transcript. Another exception was the final participant, who wrote his reflection on the interview, because he was leaving on vacation. I transcribed his reflections and numbered the lines, as in the other participant transcripts.

The third exception required more description, because it was held in the participant's home, to accommodate her time constraints. Sarkisian (1982) had collected her data in the homes of her participants. I discovered how a relaxed setting enable the participants to contribute more easily. However, this home-interview procedure had not been planned, due to the fact that the use of the voice-activated computer program would

have necessitated my transporting equipment to diverse locations in the city.

### **Telephone Conversations**

I supplemented the interviews with telephone conversations for clarification of details in the initial and reflective interviews. In the first and the fifth interview I used funneling and reverse funneling to clarify expressions and feelings with the participants. The use of funneling reduces the need for clarifying telephone conversations. However, I conducted a conversation with the participant, who requested her reflective interview in her home. Finally, I held an extensive telephone conversation with the sixth participant whose initial interview led to his six page handwritten 'reflective interview.' The telephone conversations illuminated data collected by initial and reflective interviews.

### **Settings for the Interviews**

The three settings for the participants' interviews were a computer room, a seminar room and in the living room of a single participant's home. My self-interview was input on my computer, which was located in my kitchen-office. The first two participants, Alexander and Peter, were interviewed in the computer room, so I could save their interviews on the voice-activated computer program. The computer possessed adequate memory for recording audio files. The training program was followed, but there had to be sufficient time to switch between the voices of Alexander and me. The second participant, Peter, followed similar procedures, with voice-activated computer program recording and tape recorded backup. The computer room was small room (2.8 m. x 2.5m. or 9'1.5" x 8' 1.5"). In addition to the computer table, there was also other office furniture in the room, so that the tape recorder had to be placed on the floor between the participant and me.

Fortunately, the tape recording supplemented the voice-activated program, because the computer technology failed to produce a satisfactory recording.

I conducted the four remaining interviews for Virginia, Margaret, Nancy and Larry in the spacious seminar room (4.9 m x 8.4 m. or 16' 2" x 27' 6"). I placed the tape recorder, successively, on the conference table between the participants and me. Also, I conducted reflective interviews for Peter, Virginia and Nancy in the seminar room.

Margaret was an exception for the reflective interview setting. She requested her reflective interview at her home. The living room was filled with art from Africa. There were carvings on the teakwood shelves, skins of African animals on the chesterfield and African paintings on the walls. Some members of Margaret's family were in other parts of the house and others arrived near the end of the interview. The golden retriever was demanding Margaret's attention and her newborn granddaughter completely monopolized Margaret's attention, as I was leaving her home.

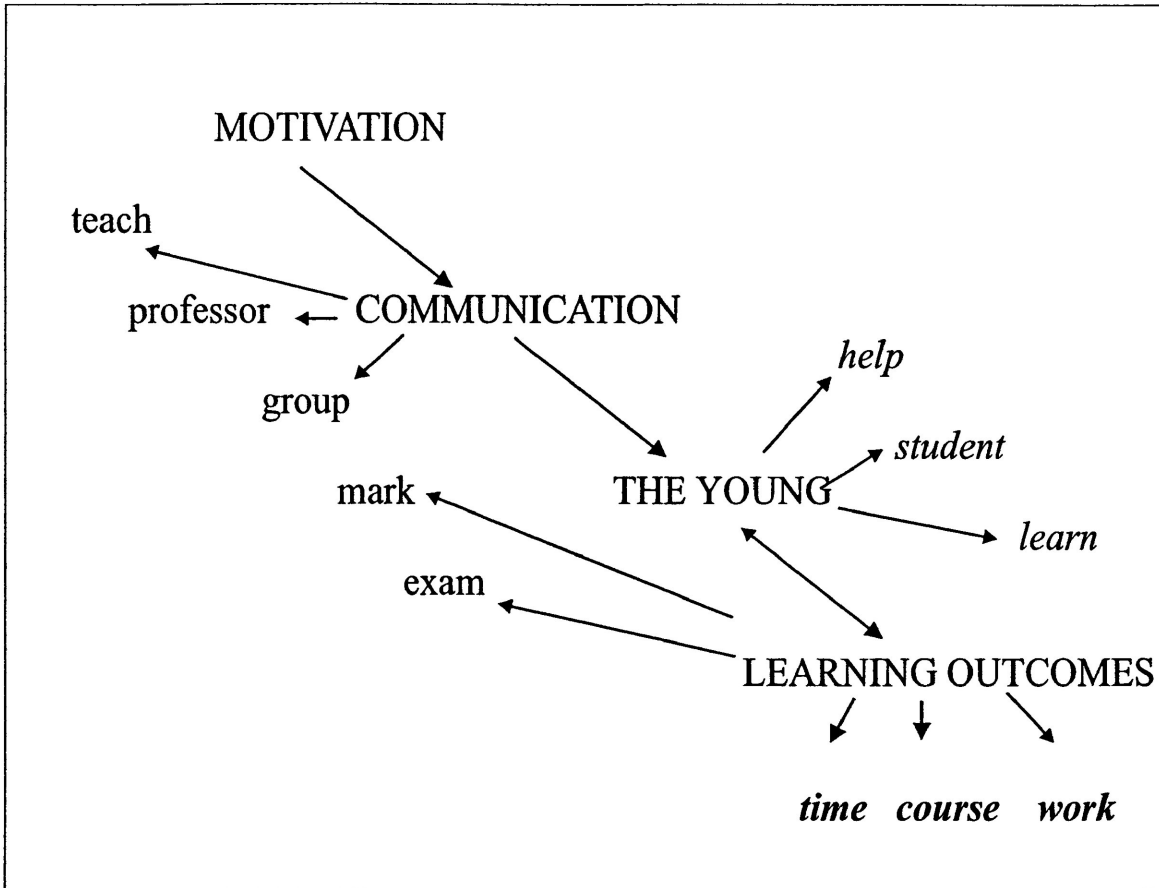
My self-interview was conducted in my kitchen-office, which had identical dimensions to the computer room where Peter and Alexander were interviewed. Unlike the computer room at the university, I experienced the comfort of my home as a location for my reflective interview. Although a self-interview was recommended by Jensen (1999) who described its purpose of clarifying the thoughts and feelings of the participants, Jensen did not specify where this self-interview was to be conducted. The next procedures are comparing participants' transcripts, organizing preliminary categories and creating participant profiles.

### **Creation of Preliminary Categories**

I read and re-read the field notes and transcripts. Then, I conducted a frequency word count from the participants' transcripts. The frequency word count involved deleting my guiding questions and probes from each participant's transcript, and then counting the frequently used words, and ordering their frequency of occurrence. I sub-divided the eleven words into three groups: *most frequent*, *mid-range frequency* and *least frequent*. I inductively arrived at sub-headings of *Motivation*, *Communication*, *The Young* and *Learning Outcomes*. I examined the transcripts in which these words appeared in context. None of these frequent words were in the preliminary category of Motivation. *Time*, *course* and *work* were associated with *learning outcomes*. *Help*, *student* and *learn* were associated with the preliminary category of The Young. The *low frequency words*, *teach*, *professor*, *group*, *mark* and *exam* are associated with preliminary categories, but these words are not common to all the participants' transcripts. The most common word in all the transcripts is the word *time*, which is selected as a new preliminary category, along with *The Young* and *Learning Outcomes*. Figure 2 represents Preliminary Categories from Field Notes and Word Frequency Counts.

### **Participant Profiles and Data Analysis**

A chapter is created in this report for the participant profiles. This chapter is Participant Profiles for Preliminary Data Analysis. Jensen (1999) used participant profiles to permit readers to formulate identities of her participants from the words and feelings from the participants themselves. I developed profiles for my participants by first selecting pseudonyms, and then organizing each transcript according to the preliminary categories of



**Figure 2. Preliminary Categories of Data from Field Notes**

*Preliminary Categories* were derived from the participants' transcripts after reading the field notes and according to the organization of data across participants' transcripts by means of the guiding questions. Preliminary categories were *Motivation, Communication, The Young* and *Learning Outcomes*.

A frequency word count associated with each of the categories was interpolated into the figure. The primary frequency word count (in bold) includes **time, course and work**, associated with learning outcomes. The secondary frequency word count (in italics) includes *help, student and learn*, associated with The Young. The tertiary frequency word count (in normal) has teach, professor, group, mark and exam. Of these words, the relevant words are associated with learning outcomes, although participants did refer often to help when describing younger students in their university classes

*Motivation* for returning to university was different for each of the participants in the study, reflecting the diversity among seniors in a student population. There were no words associated with motivation in the frequency word count.

*Communication* questions followed motivation. Responses to questions on communication with university administration and faculty were featured in the interviews. Then, participants described their experiences in university computer labs and in the library.

*The Young* experiences refer to younger members of the participants' families and younger students in their university classes. These questions follow communication and require a more 'feeling' response in comparison to the general questions which precede this section of the interview.

*Learning Outcomes* are the participant's reports on themselves. The previous questions were discussions of others. Learning outcomes contribute to the main theme in the later interpretation of the data.

*Time, The Young and Learning Outcomes*. Following the creation of the participant profiles, data was analyzed by reading and re-reading the transcripts by the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1970). The data was then explored and refined as a precursor to the interpretation.

### **Interpretation**

In the interpretation chapter, the organization of the literature and the preliminary categories were collapsed and a main theme emerged, which was explained by three sub-themes. Two figures illustrate the interpretation chapter as an explanation of the emergence of the final theme and sub-themes. Finally the research question was addressed.

### **Emergent Theme**

The final chapter summarizes the report, answers the research question and suggests implications arising from this research study. The lived experiences of senior students returning to university represent these participants in this university at this time.

### **Trustworthiness**

In a research study, trustworthiness is established by the rigor with which the research is conducted. *Rigor* includes the components of *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability* and *confirmability*. These terms are initially developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and aptly represented by Jensen (1999), whose explanations were followed in the current study. Jensen's study of senior students seeking degrees encompassed similar findings to the present study, although her emphasis is on social science, rather than education as a basis for her report.

*"Credibility* is the truth of the findings for the participants within the context of

their situations” (Jensen, 1999, p. 104). The report of this study attempted to report the realities of the participants in the participant profiles, and the reconstruction of the realities in the data analysis and interpretation by using their own words to describe their experiences and their feelings as senior students returning to university. Similarities emerge from the participants’ transcripts after using constant comparative method of analysis to explore and refine the data, and after collapsing the preliminary categories into an emergent theme. Diversity among the participants was revealed as they described their outer and inner realities in their life-world experiences.

“*Transferability* is the degree to which the findings of research can be applied in other contexts and settings” (Jensen, 1999, p. 105). The results of this study have been compared with the work of other researchers, providing additional information for readers who are interested in senior students returning to university.

“*Dependability* stems from the researcher being able to track the logical process so that all decisions and interpretations are documented for another who might be interested in the evolution of the study” (Jensen, 1999, p. 106). Dependability in this research study was enhanced by permitting the participants to be spontaneous during their interviews and providing both graphic representation and verbal descriptions of my interpretation of their responses.

“*Confirmability* relates to findings that can be tracked to their sources” (Jensen, 1999, p. 107). In this report, participants reported honestly and accurately, and the researcher conducted reflective interviews for feedback and interpretations. All data was coded from the original audio tapes and transcripts which have been stored securely at the

university for seven years, according to the university guidelines for research on human subjects.

The components of rigor as developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and represented by Jensen (1999) have been used to guide the current study in order to enhance its trustworthiness both in conduct and reporting.

### **Summary**

This chapter on research methodology has included descriptions of participant selection, the participants, ethical considerations, data collection strategies, guiding interview questions, the interview process (initial interviews, reflective interviews, telephone conversations) and settings for the interviews. Finally, trustworthiness, developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), and illustrated by Jensen (1999), has been addressed for the present study.

Preliminary categories and reference to the participant profiles and data analyses, follow in Chapter IV. The participant profiles create a framework for the data analyses by the constant comparative method of Glaser and Strauss (1970), to explore and refine the preliminary data.



# CHAPTER IV

## PARTICIPANT PROFILES AND DATA ANALYSES

### Introduction

The data analyses were composed of several preliminary components. The first component was the analysis of the field notes. The second component was a computer word count of word frequencies in the participants' transcripts. The third component was the selection of preliminary categories to organize the participants' transcripts. Fourth, from these preliminary categories, participant profiles were generated as an analytical framework. At the end or within each profile, there is a summary. The data analysis continued with the constant comparative method described by Glaser and Strauss (1970). Reading and re-reading the transcripts resulted in further clarifying recurring ideas.

### Analysis of Field Notes

The inductive approach for data analysis included a review of field notes (pages 20-24). This, with the computer word count, formed the foundation for the preliminary categories of *time*, *younger students* and *learning outcomes*, which were found in all the participants' transcripts. Then, a colour-coded summary was created to guide the first rough draft of the data analysis in the field notes (pages 35-47). In this draft, learning outcomes were common to all participants. However, learning outcomes varied among these participants. Some wanted specific skills, others knowledge, quality of life, a degree, or a productive activity which was meaningful to their lives. Field notes listed the word frequencies (pages 49-53), which were generated by the computer. *Time* was the most frequent word in the computer word count. Quoted excerpts from the transcripts

with the word *time* covered pages 54-74 in the field notes; and 7.6 pages of participants' transcripts addressed aspects of *time*. Thus, the advice of staying close to the data and to preserving the context was followed.

Field notes also included preliminary drafts of *younger students* (pages 122-129) and *learning outcomes* (pages 130-144) categories. These categories represent commonalities across the transcripts. Although these common categories predominate in the transcripts, other categories initially existed. The interview guide contributed to the four categories of data: *motivation, communication, the young, and learning outcomes*.

As students responded to the questions in the interview guide, they explained their motivation for returning to university. They also described communication with professors, their classmates, administrative staff. Then, they branched into more personal discussion about their experiences with younger students and younger members of their families. Finally, they became more analytical about their learning styles and learning experiences. Also, the guiding questions served as a sorting mechanism for the data. Then, within this framework the computer word count was grouped with the preliminary categories of the participants' frequently spoken words.

The final step was integrating initial categories by association with frequently used words from the participants' transcripts, which provided a content for the computer word count. The word count in the context of the participants' transcripts was meaningful for the analysis of the data. The next description illustrates how the computer word count assisted in assigning the order of importance of the preliminary categories.

### Computer Word Count

Eleven words were used frequently in the participants' transcripts. The three words appearing most often were *time*, *course* and *work*. The next group were *help*, *student* and *learn*. The last word group included the words *teach*, *professor*, *group*, *mark* and *exam*. The participants' frequently spoken words were grouped in context with the categories in the transcripts. Figure 2: *Preliminary Categories from Field Notes and Word Frequencies Count* illustrates *motivation*, followed by *communication* and next by *younger students* and *learning outcomes*. The development of the figure revealed that *time*, *course* and *work* are associated with learning outcomes. *Mid range frequency words*, *help*, *student* and *learn* associated with *The Young* (younger students and the participants' families). The *low frequency* words were *teach*, *professor*, *group*, *mark* and *exam*. This category of words was infrequent and thus it was not included in the figure.

The higher frequency words were associated with *younger students* and *learning outcomes*, rather than with *motivation* or *communication*. *Time*, *course* and *work* are *high frequency* associated with *Learning Outcomes* in the participants' transcripts. This classification of word frequencies presented the words out of context. However, it provided a focus for designing preliminary data categories.

The computer word count was beneficial because it revealed the preliminary category of *time*, which was then added to the Review of the Literature. Hargreaves (1990) stated, "Time is essentially and unavoidably, a subjective phenomenon... Subjective variations in our senses of time are grounded in other aspects of our life-worlds... in our projects, our interests, our activities ... the kinds of roles we take on in life" (p.307).

Hargreaves informs this study by clarifying the concept of *phenomenological time*. The participants in the present study help us to understand the perspectives of senior students at university.

### **Analysis of Preliminary Categories in the Field Notes and Computer Word Count**

In this section, motivation and communication from the field notes are described. However, the computer word count indicated that there were no frequent words specifically associated with either motivation or communication. As a result, the categories of motivation and communication were integrated into the preliminary categories of time, younger students and learning outcomes.

#### **Motivation**

The male participants are described first. They represent a diversity of motivations as senior students. One participant, Peter, was motivated to return to study by his interest in art. This course led to computer art and computers in business. Alexander, first followed his interest in Music, but he later chose Astronomy and Philosophy of the Paranormal in order to learn more about subjects of which he knew little. However, Larry focused on languages--Spanish, French and Russian. His motivation for acquiring language skills was international travel. The female participants also revealed different motivations for returning to university. Margaret wanted a degree in Science, but was studying French for international travel. Virginia had not been in school for fifty years. She was motivated by her grandson to start university. Nancy had enrolled for 16 years, starting with a course in Economics on May 1, after retiring on April 30.

All participants demonstrate personal motivations grounded in their interests, lifework, and personal life-worlds. This diversity of motivation has been addressed as a preliminary category and further analysis focused on those categories which were common to all participants.

### **Communication**

*Communication* with faculty, administration and younger students overlapped with the preliminary themes of *The Young* and *Learning Outcomes*. *Communication* is described by participants in their interaction with younger students, faculty and administrators and also in relation to their learning experiences in courses. Thus, because *communication* is embedded in the preliminary themes of *The Young* and *Learning Outcomes*, it can therefore be collapsed into these preliminary themes. *Motivation* and *communication* were integrated into the preliminary categories of *younger students* and *learning outcomes* because the participants were motivated to return to university in classes with younger students with whom they communicated in their learning experiences. However, the computer word count indicated that *time* remained as the most frequently used word by all participants. *Time* therefore became a preliminary category for this study.

Three preliminary categories form the framework for describing the participants in their own words and with their own feelings. Their own words are preserved for accurate analysis and interpretation of the data.

### **Preliminary Categories: Time, Younger Students, Learning Outcomes**

As the participants explained their experiences of returning to university as senior students, threads of commonality emerged from the transcripts. These preliminary

categories were *time*, *younger students* and *learning outcomes*. The participants described their experiences, as they responded to guiding questions in the initial interview, the reflective interview and the clarifying telephone conversations. Also noted are the participants' feelings about their life-worlds, as they describe their experiences at university.

### **Creation of the Participant Profiles**

The preliminary categories were used to frame the participant profiles. These participant profiles included the words and the feelings of the participants, providing the reader with sketches of the six participants, and their own perspectives of these senior students. *Table 1* summarizes the participants' pseudonyms, codes for the transcripts, university courses and their professions before retirement. The next task was to decide the order to present the participant profiles.

#### **Order of the Profiles**

The participant profiles first are grouped by gender, although the transcripts are analyzed individually, and not according to within-group and between-group differences. Peter, a retired teacher is first. The second description is of Alexander, who was a retired engineer. Like Peter, Alexander was interviewed using the voice-activated computer program recordings with audio tape back-up. Larry, another male was chosen for the third description. The reason for Larry's early inclusion among the participant descriptions may be not only his gender, but also his comment in a follow-up reflective telephone conversation in which he revealed that he had been involved informally in teaching his

fellow officers throughout his law enforcement career. Larry was motivated by reflection on his transcript to write an extra response.

The second set of profiles describes the female participants. These are presented in the following order: Margaret, Virginia and Nancy. Margaret's transcript was clear and concise. Virginia was beginning her learning journey in contrast to Nancy's well-seasoned life journey, filled with poignant memories. Nancy provides an excellent culminating description. In addition, Jensen (1999) suggested a self-interview in her report to enable the researcher to reflect on words and feelings of the participants in this study.

Each profile begins on a new page, so that the identities of the participants are distinct from each other. Excerpts from the participants' transcripts on time, younger students and learning outcomes are quoted, with bridging sentences for continuity. There are six participant profiles and then the researcher self-interview profile. At the end of each profile readers have a picture of the participant's identity.

*Table 1* on following page introduces the participants. *Column 1* gives their pseudonyms, which were agreeable with the participants. *Column 2* describes the codes for the transcripts. The initial interview is represented by an A and the reflective interview is represented by a B. The second part of each code is p., which is the page number of the transcript for the excerpt. The third part of each code is l. for line, which is followed by the lines for each excerpt. *Column 3* is the course for each participant. *Column 4* is the profession of the participant before retirement.

An example of coding for an excerpt is 4B p. 3 l. 12-15. This means the excerpt was located on page 3 between lines 12 and 15 (reflective interview for Margaret).

**Table 1. Participants, university courses and professions before retirement**

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Transcript Codes*</b>	<b>University Course(s)</b>	<b>Profession Before Retirement</b>
Peter	2A, 2B	Visual Arts Computers	High School Teacher
Alexander	1A	Astronomy Philosophy	Engineer
Larry	6A, 6B	Spanish	Law Enforcement Executive
Margaret	4A, 4B	French	Physiotherapist
Virginia	3A, 3B	Psychology	Women's Movement
Nancy	5A, 5B	History	Accountant

\*5A = initial interview, fifth interviewee  
 5B = reflective interview, fifth interviewee

p. 1 = transcript page 1  
 1. 23-25 = lines 23 to 25



## Profile of Peter

*Time.* Peter reflected on his career in teaching, longingly, as he missed his relationships with the students. Initially, he had done very little in his early retirement and then he took action:

The first year I was out of teaching, I went to the Terry Fox Centre [in Ottawa]. That was the first time I realized what I most missed about school was the kids and the fun that they bring to you. It's fun to be with kids (2B p.3 l. 4-6).

When Peter returned home, he enrolled in university. Peter described a specific purpose to motivate his visual arts studies:

I wanted to know what good design was and I've always done things so that they balanced—that was symmetrical. You know, a small red object on one side and a large grey object of the other side balance each other. It was a wonderful experience (2A p.3 l. 2-7).

However, at university, Peter soon realized that he could spend a lot of time to gain technological expertise. He explained his time spent on computers: "It could almost fill up my whole time because I would try to go over the lesson ahead of time so that when it came to class time, I would profit" (2A p.5 l. 1-4). Peter then compared time in art to time on computers: "I can spend all kinds of time, just taking my time and enjoy doing what I'm doing with the art, whereas in the computers, it took me all the time just to do the stuff because I'm so slow" (2A p.6 l. 36-39). When Peter's description seemed long and painful, the research probe: "Did you ever feel like quitting?" (2B p.1 l. 18), elicited Peter's answer, "My wife encouraged me to quit. 'You're spending too much time on it. You're frustrated. Why don't you quit?' When she said that, then I couldn't [quit]" 2B p.1

l. 21-23). Time appeared again in Peter's transcript, when Peter replied to the professor's compliment on his box art: "I told her I've been working on it for 40 years" (2A p.4 l. 7-8). He was being modest, but also very proud to have been noticed by an expert.

In his reflective interview, Peter commented on other seniors' use of time: "A lot of people I know don't really know what to do with their time after they retire. I've been so busy that I don't have the time to do all the things that I really want to do" (2B p.7 l. 18-20). Peter explained how he used his time and how other seniors experience leisure. He gave as much time to his courses as he could in order to reach his learning goals, without concern for what others said about his learning. Peter was moving forward in his quest for developing skills which interested him, regardless of the amount of time required. He demonstrated dedication of time to his choice of mastering new technology.

*Younger Students (and family).* Younger students had a reciprocal relationship with Peter in his university classes. Because of his teaching, he found communicating with them a comfortable experience. He was not too proud to ask them for help when he needed it, or to give help to younger students when they asked him about courses in which he had experience.

In the computer course, there were a number of students from whom I would get help [for computers]. When it came to other parts of the course, I could give them help especially doing the sculpture, but not when it comes to theory (2A p.2 l. 20-28).

In addition to younger students in his class, Peter had a close relationship with his son. Field notes revealed Peter's dedication to his son, who had arrived on an earlier flight at the airport than Peter expected. Thus, Peter was not at home to receive the transcript of

the initial interview. Peter rescheduled his appointment for the reflective interview. He came, en route to a funeral for a former teaching colleague. He showed his respect for others in his profession, by attending the funeral. However, the research project was still important for Peter, so that he was able to fit both the funeral and the reflective interview into the same morning. Peter is dedicated to people while also maintaining his personal growth by returning to classes at university with younger students.

*Learning Outcomes.* Learning outcomes for Peter meant changes. He described his design course: "I found that a lot of the theory was brand new to me and I had to do a lot of learning and break away from thinking that I had learned earlier on"(2B p.2 l. 28-30). Then, Peter contrasted his computer experience in the business course. He discovered that it was necessary to adopt a different attitude toward academic success than what he experienced in his visual arts course. The business computer course had been listed as introductory, but it assumed a level of skill which Peter did not have.

When I came in I told you my definition of elder abuse. It's the computer! I probably went through as much frustration as I've gone through with any course in working on the computer for those three programs (2A p.2 l.6-9). You almost have to rationalize the fact that you're not going to do as well in a course of that type, so I was taking it to learn and I learned all kinds of stuff. It was great. This fall I wouldn't mind going into the computer course again [Adobe *Photoshop*]. That was great for me (2A p.2 l.12-14).

In his reflective interview, Peter accepted his previous interview, but he added:

In the business course—I realized there was a good chance I wasn't going to pass so the question, 'Why are you taking this course?' becomes 'Why are you continuing in this course?', and of course, the answer is: I can take a course and I can learn which is a tremendous amount but I may not pass it (2B p.1 l. 5-8).

These comments led to the probe: "How did it make you feel that you didn't get it quickly?" Peter hesitated for a minute to formulate a good reply, as he wanted to contribute accurately to this research study.

Not bad but very frustrated. Getting an A in the Visual Arts course was a positive thing and not doing well in a course where I know I didn't have the basics was acceptable. I would try and try and try and walk away frustrated, but when you're taking these courses, you're committed (2B p.1 l.13-16). I'm doing it with something in mind. I want to take the course and I can expand the amount of time that I want on the course. One of your questions earlier was 'Do you have enough time?' Well, if you're retired you can make the time. You said, 'Can you come in today?' Well if I couldn't finish this today then I could come in tomorrow. It's not a problem (2B p.3 l. 19-22).

Already the relationship between time and learning outcomes is revealed by Peter.

Throughout his career, Peter had been assisting students to gain achievement goals. He took his paternal role seriously as well, by delaying the reflective interview to be chauffeur for his son. As a husband, Peter discussed his learning with his wife, who encouraged him to quit. It must have sounded painful to her as she listened to what he said about the business computer course. She may not have been participating in learning activities, as she attempted to dissuade Peter to leave the difficult course, which was unnecessary for him in this retirement.

Peter exemplified strong decision making, an unwavering direction toward his goal, and a modesty in his accomplishments as a retiree. He compared himself to how other seniors use their time and how seniors communicate and how they learn. However, Peter had a singular purpose to achieve, and being contented about his decision, he will continue his studies. Alexander follows in this presentation of participant profiles.

### Profile of Alexander

Alexander presented a different senior student picture than Peter. Alexander described himself as a "quasi-retired engineer"(1A p.9 l. 30). He mentioned his motivation to return to university, "I suppose the nice thing is that you take one course at a time. I look forward to meeting with the young people who are keen and enthusiastic. I suppose it broadens one's horizons. It keeps the old brain from completely rusting" (1A p.1 l. 13-15). In the winter, Alexander studied Astronomy and in the Spring Session he enrolled in *Philosophy of the Paranormal*. He came directly from class to his interview. He was carrying a large load of books, which he described as being challenging to understand, as he had chosen to take courses about which he knew little, so that he would be in the same learning state as his younger classmates.

*Time.* Alexander explained his use of time as a senior student first in his typical day, then regarding his punctuality and finally, extra time required for mastering a course. He spent "a matter of not too many hours. [I] usually get to class on time and I usually get there a little but earlier" (1A p.2 l. 21-22). His "20<sup>th</sup> Century Music course involved spending a fair bit of time in the listening rooms there" (1A p.2 l. 30-32). Finally, he modestly explained his study strategies for the astronomy course [in which he received a mark of 100%] "more time to it [the course] than I otherwise would. It's more than just picking up a book and reading casually. It involves some concerted effort" (1A p.3 l. 17-18). Alexander, like Peter, reflected on his [senior] buddies: "spending that time doing something else but I think I have enough time to do most of the things I want to do"(1A p.3 l. 37-38). Alexander was self-motivated, and continued in directions he chooses,

regardless of the opinions of others. He had chosen to return to university, taking the courses seriously and studying to achieve not only a credit, but also an excellent mark.

In his classes, Alexander reflected on how the younger students perceive time:

My attitude was that if class started at one o'clock, you be there, ready for one o'clock. It turned out that people would just saunter in and they'd bring food along with them which was certainly taboo in my day (and even wearing hats in my day) (1A p.4 l. 7-9). I think this attitude of working hard for knowledge as opposed to working as little as you can to get an adequate mark to pass is much stronger now that it used to be (1A p.4 l. 10-12).

He then compared his initial university days to his present university experience : "I did get my bread and butter from the university sheepskin but I'm doing this now for the sheer joy of learning. My perspective has changed over the years" (1A p.4 l. 20-23). "Working hard for knowledge is much stronger now than it used to be"(1A p. 4 l. 12). Alexander compared himself favourably to his past student life. He had worked before going to university. That was an era when there was no university in this community, so Alexander was able to tell about advantages which the university brought to this community.

I remember this city before the university. It was really a different place. The university has attracted a lot of intellectual people who have made ...Theatre possible, and the Music Department and the Symphony certainly have a symbiotic relationship (1A p.9 l. 10-13).

*Younger Students (and family).* Alexander described his relationships with younger students in his university classes. He was not a parent, so his perceptions are different from Peter's perceptions of younger students. Also, Alexander was an engineer, and not a teacher, like Peter, so he may not have been as comfortable communicating with his classmates.

I made an effort to get to know some of the students and talk about various things, maybe even about the topic of the course (1A p.2 l. 22-24). She [a student] wanted the answers to an assignment that was due in the beginning of the period. She ended up talking to me about it (1A p.5 l. 16-17). At the end of the class, she snuck her paper into place (1A p.5 l. 19-20).

Other information which Alexander described in his interview was about university education as training for work. Alexander remarked, " I think one of the disciplines that should be imposed upon students is that once they get into the working world they are going to have to meet deadlines" (1A p.6 l. 21-23). In the era when Alexander first attended university, deadlines were much less negotiable than they are today. Also Alexander is hoping that deadlines are 'taught' in university for use in the workplace later. This 'deadline' concept mirrored Edwards and Usher (1997) notion about the value of the liberal university preserving positive values in society. For Alexander, there was also a new relationship between students and faculty: "There's much more informality between students and teachers. When I was in university the *prof* was *sir* whereas the prof today invited everybody to call him by his first name" (1A p.7 l. 12-14). Again, Alexander reinforced positive values. Also, in response to his influence on the younger students, Alexander remarked, "I think the white hair has some sort of influence on young people"(1A p.7 l. 33). Alexander believed that his presence alone has a mediating effect on the attitudes of younger students. However, Alexander was the only participant who compared his youth at university to his perceptions of the younger students in his classes.

***Learning Outcomes.*** Alexander, like Peter, described his philosophy of learning outcomes in some detail:

Except for music listening labs, the rest of it has been largely independent study" (1A p.2 l. 32-33). "My feeling is if the university is good enough to waive my tuition, the least I could do is make the effort to let them recoup at least a part of the cost. The other advantage is that you are really doing the tests and assignments and papers. The old adage, 'You get out of something what you put into it', applies. I suppose you get more out of it if you put more into it (1A p. 3 l. 7-11).

Alexander wanted to be 'equally ignorant' to his classmates. "I think taking courses that are really out of my previous experience and out of my field makes me equally ignorant so that doesn't pose any kind of threat" (1A p. 7 l. 18). He was modest, but at the same time proud of his expertise in music. He learned that the professors find student experts intimidating, as suggested also by Tractenberg (1997).

Once I took a course in music appreciation. Indeed I learned a lot from it. I happen to be a reasonable pianist and got up in front of the class and played a few things. Later it got back to me that the professor found that very

intimidating (1A p.7 l. 19-20).

Finally, Alexander appeared for a reflective interview but chose only to respond to his initial transcript. He observed that spoken words are quite different from written words (field notes).

Alexander was a complex personality, being well educated in the scientific field of engineering, as well as being an accomplished pianist. He balanced his retirement time with both leisure and study. He discovered that one course at a time permits this luxury of leading a balanced lifestyle. Then, Alexander described his learning, as a joyful experience, compared to when he first attended university. Alexander was introspective in his description of younger students and their current attitudes towards university education and peer behaviour. The final male profile is Larry on the succeeding page.



### **Profile of Larry**

Larry performed executive duties in his former law enforcement career while continuously studying foreign languages, in the past. Now as a senior, he enrolled in French and Spanish classes for travelling in Europe and South America. Larry could not participate in a reflective interview so his initial transcript was delivered to him, followed by a clarifying telephone conversation. Larry was prompted to write a six page reflective interview. In another telephone conversation, Larry revealed that he had been teaching throughout his career. The researcher responded, "You are really a teacher!" Larry was surprised to be re-identified!

*Time.* Time is depicted in Larry's initial interview. In his description of a typical day, Larry said,

Since I'm only taking one course at a time, my day is quite short. I would show up in time for class and since I am taking mostly languages, I would go to the language lab after the class (6A p.2 l. 12-14).

Larry organized his time, like Alexander, so he could attend university, travel and mentor his daughters at their universities. Larry also observed other seniors' use of time:

An awful lot of them seem to have a lot of time on their hands and some money. You see them sitting around the Mall, scratching lottery tickers and there must be something better they can do with their time or money. I'm too busy to do things like that anyway (6A p.8 l. 4-6).

It would seem that Larry regarded this hobby as mainly a waste of money! He believed in productive use of time, enriching his life with study, people and travel.

*Younger Students (and family).* In his initial interview and reflective essay, Larry generated over four pages of descriptions of helping younger students. Excerpts illustrate how others profited by Larry's presence in his university classes.

“I participated fully in class discussions and exercises. I always turned in my own work” (6A p. 2 l. 12-15).

“I think that [younger] students listen” 6A p.2 l.23).

“The Spanish speaking people in the class obviously valued my opinions on historical things like the conquest of South America” (6A p. 2 l. 23-25).

“I helped a girl from Peru with her Spanish translation” (6A p.6 l. 23).

“I gave a presentation and showed them my pictures from Argentina and Uruguay” (6B p.6 l. 37).

“I brought French Canadian magazines to class and suggested that the lady professor might distribute them to the class” (6A p.9 l. 4-5).

“I used to bring Spanish cultural material to class, such as music tapes” 6A p.9 l. 6-7).

“Some of my books, for example, a very detailed Russian dictionary, and grammar texts which they [the library] don’t have, I will donate some day if they want them” (6B p.1 l. 32-33).

Larry’s final comment involved his continuing assistance to the university in perpetuity. Not only is Larry interested in the present, but he has planned for his future. Larry mirrored Feldman’s (1990) comment on resourceful aging, “The future is now”.

**Learning Outcomes.** Learning outcomes for Larry involve some frustrations, which are unlike any described by the other male participants: “In Argentina, I remember a shouting match with a taxi driver because I wanted to go to *la playa* and he wanted to take me to *la playa*” (6A p.1 l. 11-12). They went to the beach, because Larry wanted to

go to both places, but in a different order on his travel itinerary. Larry had discovered that his polished Spanish from the language lab did not match the local dialect.

Larry had another frustrating experience with a university secretary who made decisions about class lists for courses. He said, "That's the waiting list and that's my name on the top of the list. Why is that so complicated" (6A p.4 1.18-19). Larry was frustrated by this experience, so he consulted his daughter about it. She replied, "What are you so surprised about? We put up with that all the time. The professors and the teaching staff are fine. The secretaries are [\*\*\*] – some of them" (6A p.4 1.26-28). Larry is a parent who mentors his adult children, and assists younger students in their university classes. He reflected productive aging in his life, which resulted from nurturing the young.

Larry also remembered his experience with the university Audio Visual Department:

I wanted a tape player to play some Mexican folk songs to my third year Spanish class. The people in the AV Department were very surprised at my request so I brought my own from home (6B p.2 1.31-35).

As a law enforcement officer, Larry expected to be obeyed, so that he could not comprehend why he found these experiences frustrating. He showed how well he communicated in close relationships by asking his daughter for advice about the secretary. However, Larry did enjoy other experiences at university, which are unrelated to his classroom learning.

Even the food in the cafeteria is OK. It was a good place to catch up on reading. Also, you meet some interesting people there. The campus is beautiful with the lake, the river [and] the paved trails. The paintings in the tunnels are out of this world. I just love them (6B p.1 1. 5-14).

Other questions in the interview guide were about library facilities. Larry indicated, "I have had a university library card for years even when I wasn't studying here and I was always impressed"(6B p.1 l. 22-23). When his daughter was unable to find a translation of a French novel in her own university, but Larry's library "had it in both French and English"(6B p.1 l. 29-30). Larry was pleased that "they brought a copy [Grand Marées], in from another university" (6B p.1 l. 30). Larry continued to mentor his adult children at their universities. He enjoyed communications as a father and as a senior student.

Also, participating in this study provided Larry the opportunity to explain how his learning experiences affected his career.

"Long ago in high school I had to take typing. When the police force went into computers in the 70's and 80's it was very easy to make the transition" (6B p.2 l.9-12).

"Often other officers would have trouble getting info. from Quebec police forces. They would come and ask me to send their message in French and ten minutes later, they would be astounded. They got a reply" (6B p.2 l. 14-16).

"I used e-mail to keep in touch from Buenos Aires in Argentina last winter. It took us a while because most of the prompts are in Spanish. Hi-tech stuff isn't the same as spoken language" ( 6B p.2 l. 18-20).

Larry did not continue into higher education from high school. He chose a career which gave him security in the workforce, and from that security, he ventured into lifelong learning situations, in his work, in his community and within his family unit. What he seemed most to enjoy in his life-world was teaching.

### Profile of Margaret

Margaret, a retired elder-care professional, was attending university to earn a Bachelor of Science degree. To continue in her field of physiotherapy, she needed to relocate, but could not do so. Margaret said, "I would like to have a degree just to be the same as everybody else"(4A p.1 l. 9-10). Margaret's initial interview was in the seminar room at university, but her reflective interview was in her home, with her family in the background during the interview and introducing themselves at the end of her reflection. Like the male participants, time is an important category in Margaret's transcript.

*Time.* Margaret initially mentioned time in relation to her advanced standing credits, in her schedule for French classes and the length of time for examinations. About advanced standing, Margaret explained, "I don't know how many times I sent in my curriculum with my studies. At one time they weren't going to give me any, but I got four in the end" (4A p. 5 l. 36-37). In her schedule for taking French, she said,

It was three mornings a week, which I find hard. I'd rather do a three hour block twice a week. For every next class, he [the French professor] wanted us to have done a chapter in the workbook, so every night there was homework"(4A p.7 l. 35-39).

Then, Margaret explained time for French exams, "They [younger students] were finished much earlier. I stayed the longest"(4A p. 11 l. 19-22). Finally, Margaret outlined the ideal course, which took three full weekends: "I liked the timing of that because the rest of the time you're on your own [writing papers]"(4A p.8 l. 16-17). Margaret's experiences with time were relative to her life-world, surrounded by visiting family members, her Golden Retriever, and her retired husband who did not attend university.

Margaret balanced her time so that she can do the courses which gave her the

dream she had about education—to have a degree the same as everybody else. Margaret also volunteered in addition to her other responsibilities. She missed her work, as did Peter, so that she accompanied seniors from the nursing home to their doctors' appointments. Margaret, like the other participants, learned among younger students at university.

In her second interview, Margaret spoke again about balancing time between university studies and her family.

You have to do what's necessary at home, especially when it comes to exam or paper writing time. You just get less sleep (4B p.1 l. 34-35). I don't study all night. I stay up late and then I regret it. I probably could have thought better if I wasn't tired. (4B p.1 l. 38-39). I don't know how I fit it all in but I do. My family loses out too. My husband feels neglected. He doesn't see the point in doing it. He's physical—very active—jogging, cycling, camping” (3B p.3 l. 43-45).

These excerpts intertwined preliminary categories of time, members of Margaret's family and her learning outcomes. She has prioritized the order by first describing her learning, and then her retired husband's life-world. Finally after a probe, Margaret explained her children's attitude towards her returning to university. My kids are pretty proud that I am at university (3B p. 3 l. 30-31).

*Younger Students (and family).* In her first interview, Margaret indicated that listened to younger students: “I heard about their reasons why they missed certain classes” (4A p.4 l. 9-10.[and] They approached her, “mostly about classes, nothing social” (4A p.4 l. 18). She also experienced taking classes with her daughter, “My daughter went here. She was in Honour Social Work. I even took one class with her—Social Work of Aging” (4A p.10 l. 22-24). Margaret also spoke proudly of her son, “I'm learning French to travel

to France where he is teaching English” (4A p.8 l.5).

Margaret, like the other senior students in this study, was aware of the attitudes of younger students towards older students. She related an anecdote about another older student.

The younger students know that I’m keeping up with them. I noticed in one particular class that I took, there was a lady who was quite a bit older. She was a bit of a pain. We all found her so. She was constantly talking and asking questions and butting in and taking over and we all felt the same –not just the young kids (4B p. 31 l. 31-33). I’m glad I’m not that way (4B p.3 l. 37-38).

Finally, Margaret arranged to have the reflective interview in her home. This setting provided another dimension to her profile. Margaret was disciplining her Golden Retriever as it distracted her attention from her interview by eating her dried flower arrangement. Margaret gave permission for her son-in-law to eat the frozen cookies. She finally was interrupted by her daughter with the newborn baby. This was the daughter to whom Margaret referred earlier, “My daughter kindly did it [computer work] for me” (4A p.1 l. 27). Margaret, the grandmother, was absorbed totally with this baby girl in her arms. She was blissful—a character trait never before observed.

*Learning Outcomes.* In the following excerpts, Margaret described her learning strategies, her schedule and her class participation:

“I took a few learning assistance courses on how to write papers” (4A p.3 l. 30).

“I only take one course at a time because I feel it’s all I can handle with all my other activities” (4A p.4 l. 1).

“If I knew about it, I would speak up. When I first started, I might not have done this. Now I’m more used to it” (4A p. 5 l. 3-4).

Furthermore, Margaret recognized that she needed assistance. “In the bereavement course, I had an advisor to advise me on writing my paper—how to go about it” (3A p.6 l. 38-39). She also commented about needing assistance in her French courses, “In the last course [French] that was peer tutoring”(4A p. 7 l. 1-2). Finally, she noted. “I have found that it [learning] does take longer. I mean you can still learn but you need longer to ingest” (4A p.11 l. 12-14).

From probes in Margaret’s interview, she revealed her learning style, “I tend to be a perfectionist. In writing papers, I always get reams and reams and reams of information and then it’s hard to weed out what I don’t need” (4A p.7 l. 24-27). To avoid essays, Margaret chose French, only to find that course also presented time constraints, as she compared herself to younger students. She was proud of her achievement after her effort in the course.

“I’ll take this one [French] because it’ll be easier with no papers to write, just and exam, but there was a vast amount of homework” (4A p. 7 l. 33-34).

“When we were writing tests, kids would be finished and I would be still half way through” (4A p. 11 l. 14-15).

“My goodness! One girl finished in half an hour. She got up and left. I wondered [how she did]. I ended up with the second best mark anyway”(4A p.11 l. 20-22).

Finally, Margaret reflected on her leisure activity of learning to play the organ, in her first interview. The value of the second interview was observed, when probes about



memory for learning, elicited more information about Margaret's learning.

I was just amazed how I remembered [the piano keyboard]. It's like riding a bicycle. I remembered all the notes and scales. Even French too, I remembered (4A p. 15 l. 1-3). [and] You never forget the most of it, but you forget some of it, if you don't keep it up (4A p.15 l. 13-14).

Memory and learning were re-visited in the reflective interview. "How was riding a bicycle similar to learning to play the organ, or taking French again as a senior student?" Margaret expressed a different experience of bicycle riding with hand brakes in her youth and having to convert to pedal brakes as an adult in Canada. Memory associated with leisure activities was a happier experience than memory descriptions of university courses. Margaret also remembered that French had mainly present tense verbs in her earlier education, whereas there may have been other 'unremembered' tenses. The description of senior memory did not appear in any other participant's transcript; however this information is useful for senior learning.

The reflective interview concluded on a sad note, as Margaret described the relationship between her university courses and her career working in a seniors' home. During this response, Margaret was solemn. She obviously was empathetic with the seniors who were incapacitated in later life.

In gerontology, we took how people aged. I could reflect on that in working with them—what their losses were. And there was a bereavement course that tells you that they lose their friends in later life, their homes and everything when they move into a home (4B p. 15 l. 9-12).

This excerpt reflected Margaret's pragmatic attitude to education and empathy to people. Margaret has integrated her worlds of learning and working, amidst her personal life-world. Margaret's profile contributes to learning strategies. Virginia's profile follows.

### Profile of Virginia

Virginia, a retired women's movement professional and experiencing a new role at university, expressed her motivation for returning, in joyful, optimistic words.

Now I'm 65 and finally two of my grandchildren started university so I thought it's time I went back. For me, going back was really a challenge because it had been fifty years since I had been in school and things have changed remarkably (3A p.1 l. 21-24).

*Time.* Virginia was the newest returnee in this study. She enrolled in Sociology this year, but considered the possibility of attending full time: "I'm not sure at this point that I could handle all those classes and do all that reading and give it my best"(3A p.2 l. 19-24). Then, in response to how she felt compared to other ages of people, Virginia said, "I think when you've lived as long as I have, you get a chance to see a whole lot of younger people. I think when you're older, you see more and experience more"(3A p.6 l. 9-10). Virginia has no regrets about her age; she is not remorseful, but resourceful (Feldman, 1990). However, she reminisced on her youth and her quest for knowledge in the world of books.

I had a friend that I went out with when I was a girl. He's older than I am. We're not young anymore. On Wednesday afternoon, I would go to the library and I would get my list of books and I would read them and we would discuss them (3A p.13 l. 5-13).

Virginia exemplified a double pivotal event of retirement and widowhood. She wanted to speak about her late her husband: "He'd been the biggest part of my life for 45 years so when he died it left a real empty space"(3B p.1 l. 29-30). The next probe was, "What do you think you gave yourself this past year?"(3B p.4 l. 22). Virginia replied, "Freedom! I didn't have to ask anybody to do anything, I would come and go as I pleased

to school and I could spend as much time as I wanted”(3B p.4 l. 24-25). Virginia experienced personal growth and realized a dream of achieving the education which she missed as a teenager, in an era where education for girls was not as revered as in the present time. Virginia has continued to read and to think profoundly throughout her lifetime. She was a lifelong learner, outside the formal institution of school. She knew that she has not missed learning, only the courses in university. She did not want to do anything else with her new-found freedom, but to come and go as she pleased and to stay as long as she wanted, at university.

*Younger Students (and family).* Virginia’s first mention of a younger student at university was her grandson in the BEd program. She said, “I’m really proud of you because you’re doing so well, but then I always knew you would”(3A p.4 l. 8-9), and he replied, “Grandy, I’m proud of you. The fact that you went back to school is wonderful”(3A p.4 l. 9-10). Virginia thought, “Thank you, God, for such great kids”(3A p.4 l. 10-11). With these family values as a basis for communicating with young people, Virginia was able to connect well with younger students in her classes.

Wonderful! They were just wonderful. This little old lady in the class: It fascinated them that I was here in my sixties and I was hep to all their talk (3A p.4 l. 16-17). They asked me things about my youth because they really wanted to know(3B p.1 l. 6-7).

Also, Virginia had specific opinions on inter-generational communication:

Sometimes the children find it easier to communicate with the grandparents than with the parents. We forget what it’s like to be a young teenager. We think, ‘I never did that’, and then if you’re really honest about it, you really know your children (3B p.9 l. 11-16).

Finally, Virginia explained hope for future generations. Without being long in her

new role, she has learned to link the past with the future and to see how she can contribute to the betterment of youth.

Children are people. They may be small people but they are people with the same kind of feelings that big people have. I think what we have to remember to deal with them is not to pressure them to think the way we do but show them the things that we have been through and what we would like them to do. Take what we have learned and what we have done and make it better and make it bigger so that each generation, as they come by, will get better and we will become better (3B p.7 l. 29-31).

*Learning Outcomes.* Learning outcomes were described by Virginia in detail: “Well there were essays which I found very difficult because I hadn’t written an essay in fifty years (3A p.3 l. 3-4). “The first examination was brutal for me. I tend to panic and go blank on an exam”(3A p.9 l. 35). Despite those experiences, Virginia claimed, “As long as I can keep the grey cells moving I think I’m going to keep coming to school”(3A p.4 l. 36-37). Then, Virginia commented on how her course was delivered: “The professor is a very fair person and insisted that we learn our material and read the assigned work. It wasn’t excusable. You had a week to do it in. Do it”(3A p.9 l. 6-9). Virginia was growing intellectually in her self-assessment during the interview. She was able to describe her experience clearly.

I think that I set impossible goals for myself: to show everybody around me that I can do this. I think that I know my limitations. I know the reason I’m doing this is not for anyone else. What matters is that I do achieve what I want to achieve (3A p.10 l. 16-20).

In an aside, Virginia reminisced on her early education, “For me, leaving school in Grade was traumatic”(3A p.8 l. 22). Then, she explained her philosophy of learning from learn from everything that is happening in your life. [Also] I am an avid reader”(3B p.5

1. 27-29). Virginia now learns in university classes, where she is resuming her education after fifty years.

Virginia offered her learning history of learning and family life. She lived in an era when girls were perceived to marry, and thus education was not important. Her brother was the child who was to receive the education. Her father's request that she leave school in Grade 10, was a traumatic experience for her, because she loved learning. Later, when her brother quit school, she attempted to persuade her father to allow her to return to school but she was unable to convince him to let her return. Virginia spoke about reading books and discussing their content with a young man in her youth. She loved that relationship because it combined what she revered—learning and companionship. However, Virginia was married, but to someone else. She did not enjoy financial stability, but she loved her children and talked openly with them about everything in their lives. She was able to inspire their education and the education of other members of her family.

Sadly, Virginia described the emptiness of her life after her husband died of cancer. She spoke fondly of her grandchildren, and her children with whom she was able to share her life after becoming a widow. She was very happy to be able to return to school and she was doing what she needed to do after many years. Virginia has a deep rooted belief in nurture and personal growth, which she explains fully in this report.

Nancy's profile follows. She and Virginia are both widows, which sets them apart from the other participants, in that Nancy and Virginia have experienced two pivotal events. First was the death of their spouses and second was their retirement from work.

### **Profile of Nancy**

Nancy, a retired accountant, was the most senior participant. She was enrolled in World History, and used the disabled parking area to be near the lecture theatre. Nancy participated actively in Seniors Day each year. She was motivated to learn for the sake of learning. When Nancy retired 16 years ago on April 30, she immediately enrolled in Economics on May 1, and has been taking one course a year ever since.

*Time.* Nancy spoke often of time in her transcripts: how long it takes to do a paper and how much time she has to do the papers. “The professor who was talking to me afterwards said, ‘That’s the first typed paper I’ve seen in years’ ”(5A p.3 l. 21). Nancy replied, “Believe me, it took a long time. The white out was used extensively too because I’m not a typist”(5A p.3 l.25-26). In describing her papers, Nancy says, “I’ve lots of time to do a paper. I can spend all the time I want on it. It’s a fill in. It’s a blessing to have those things to do— to prepare those papers”(5A p.12 l. 6-9). Nancy, like Virginia, perceived a void in her life as a widow. She experienced a happy marriage, until she lost her husband to cancer. Nancy devotedly nursed him at home, instead of in the hospital, where she was able to play his favourite Scottish bagpipe music to help him forget his pain. Nancy has tender feelings about her family. Nancy compared her time to younger students, “Sometimes you go and half the class is away but I was always there because that is what I did at that time of day on that day”(5A p.13 l. 28-29).

*Younger Students (and family).* Younger students and the time continuum between generations arose in Nancy’s interview. In describing her participation in class, Nancy says, “I don’t want to have a lot to say when there are fifty kids (5A p.7 l. 17-18).

They [the younger students] were really impressed that I remembered Diefenbaker” (5A p.7 l. 24-25). She explains how the younger students help her, “What it’s giving me is contact with somebody that hasn’t got grey hair. A lot of my socializing is down at the 55+ Club”(5A p.10 l. 29-30). Then, Nancy described her attitude towards attending lectures: “I hated to miss a class. I found there was a big gap, plus I know the students would share notes– a couple of times I did but I was an awful writer”(5A p.13 l. 35-38). Then, Nancy compared the youth in her family to university students:

My grandchildren are young adults in their 20's except for one little guy. The ones in the class that I noticed--I never saw that part of my grandchildren. When I see my grandchildren, they're in the family group and they're doing their grandma thing, whereas these students are doing their peer group thing, so it's different. I realize that they're different from what I see on TV and hear on the radio and my children are not popular culture. None of them smoke. None of them drink (5B p.2 l. 5-15).

Nancy was also humble about her learning, and at the same time ambitious to try every option to enhance her learning experience. She explained her learning for the internet:

After the course [with the gifted high school student] I thought maybe if I go in with more seniors ... but it wasn't in depth and everyone who came already had a computer and knew half the stuff they were teaching. We did it in the library (5B p3 l. 24-26).

Finally, Nancy persevered to use the internet, characteristic of her learning:

My grand daughter has a computer. She looks things up. I sat with her. She just goes ahead. I've got to do it myself. I don't know enough about it to want to buy a computer. I really should (5B p.3 l. 30-32).

*Learning Outcomes.* Learning outcomes for Nancy included diverse reflections and useful information on her learning strategies and learning style. After reading her transcript, she added, “The method of allowing seniors to make decisions is to refrain from

interfering. If they make a mistake, it is their mistake”(5A handwritten on page 1 by participant, as reflection for initial interview). Nancy also responded to interview questions about the library, and she outlined her experience with inter-library loans:

I managed to get something that wasn't there and eventually it came the day before I had to turn my paper in so it wasn't any good to me. It's not their fault. People think the day they put it in the mail, we get it tomorrow(5A p.5 l. 19-20).

Nancy also contributed to the university. She reflected on Seniors Day: “I've handed out papers and I've given a little speech one time”(5A p.8 l. 22). Nancy also contributed to research which was being conducted at the university:

I've been in three or four of them [research studies]. One was how seniors interpret instructions. That was sort of fun. The one last year was on remembering to take medicine and drugs. (I don't take any medication). Another was on seniors' memory (5A p.16 l. 2-7).

Nancy portrayed her learning style. She explained how she learns sociology: “I am an accountant. I'm a numbers person. It gives me what you call this continuity theory of retirement”(5A p.1 l. 30-33). Nancy then outlined how she learned in terms of her interpretation of the continuity theory:

One course led to another. The Sociology was a combination between words and numbers. I had done the numbers thing so I thought I should get into the word thing. I liked the idea of using numbers to explain things. The sociology did that. It was a natural transfer of one thing to another. (5A p.1 l. 30-33).

Nancy portrayed her learning style, along with many memories of her life-world. She enrolled in courses which she enjoyed and dedicated herself to achievement, gaining satisfaction. Among her younger classmates, she reminisced about her grandchildren, whom she had never seen in the peer group setting. The profile of the researcher follows.



**Jane (Researcher Self-Interview)**

My participants for this research study were cooperative and informative. The study was labour-intensive but probably the best language learning, which I have undertaken in my lifelong learning experience. “I returned to university to take a second Master’s degree as foundation for a doctorate to which my former degree did not lead (R1 p.1 l. 2-3). My experiences were similar to my participants in feelings, rather than in course load. I was challenged by time constraints, with a full course load, compared to the participants taking one course at a time. I experienced more group activity in learning than the other participants and through these collaborations, I opened communication with the younger students. Now I will outline my transcript excerpts like the participants, according to the three categories of time, younger students and learning outcomes.

*Time.* I referred to time for essays and the long wait for success: “My essays were too long and time was too short for successful cutting down to the appropriate length”(R1 p.1 l. 9-10).[and] “When we came to the research seminar I was thrilled to be able to do something well, at last. I waited all through my course to feel at last that I was on a level playing field with my classmates”(R1 p.1 l. 19-21). Then, I reflected on my schedule:

In retrospect, I wish I’d taken one course the first summer, two in the fall, two in the winter (I did that) and one in the last summer. I have no one to blame but myself for creating a heavier than necessary workload (R1 p.2 l. 3-5).

Answering the question about my typical day, I replied,

My typical day had a variety of activities: a full work day with a minimum of leisure. I rested a lot at home. I slept a lot at home. Somehow, I was able to attend all classes and complete all assignments and papers in the required time lines (R1 p. 2 l. 20-22).

I then outlined highlights of my year—the conferences and the availability of administrators.

“It was great to hear the thesis and project journeys in the fall and winter grad student conferences”(R1 p.4 l. 16-17). [and]

The chairperson and secretary are often needed without an appointment and this year both were very accommodating to student interviews and special requests. It is much better to have a useful answer than to spend hours of unproductive time due to inadequate information. [and] All administrative communications before, during and after courses were efficient and accurate (R1 p.5 l. 3-6).

Here I reflected on my productive use of time, and the practical examples from former students who presented their completed research at conferences to act as role models for my research journey. Of particular interest in this study are the concepts of productive aging and productive use of time. Feldman (1990) had described resourceful aging from which I transferred the meaning to the term productive aging. Along with my participants I believed in productive use of time. Also, my learning has enabled me to enhance my life and redefine my goals, which are not yet realized, either vocationally or academically.

*Younger Students(and family)*. I described how I had experiential learning activities with younger students in her class. Learning seemed to be very easy for the younger students.

The class inquiry in postmodernism in my first summer course was a conundrum for me until the fourth last day when I realized all students in the class were in their last course and I was only beginning. My favourite part was the experiential activity of wading through the river in our clothes and having a picnic on a rock. I love nature and was inspired by this event, especially because I got to know my classmates better (R1 p. 1 l. 13-18).

What I missed was being able to use my personal experience to benefit my learning.

When we came to the research seminar I was thrilled to be able to do something well, at last. I waited all through my course to feel at last that I was on a level playing field with my classmates (R1 p.1 l. 19-21) .

I discovered that relationships with younger students took time to develop. They may not have known how to react to me and I did not know how to talk to them, either. However, as a second year student I discovered communication with younger students was now much easier than it had been during my first year in the MEd Program.

I did feel lonesome in the fall as my classmates and I had not bonded as well as I hoped we might have done. However, all year, I really enjoyed marking BEd papers to see what younger students were writing about their future careers. [The professor to whom I was assigned as a graduate assistant] even permitted me to teach a class. This was the highlight of my duties for the academic year (R1 p.2 l. 14-18).

*Learning Outcomes.* I described my learning in courses and achievement: “By December, I had finished five half courses and I was relieved to have only one left plus the research seminar” (R1 p.1 l. 11-12). [and] “Grades were demoralizing for me. I had a 3.59 GPA on my first post-grad degree twenty years ago. Getting five B’s seemed almost like failing” (R1 p.2 l. 2-3). Like Margaret and Virginia, I had surprises and learned coping strategies and attitudinal ‘adjustments’ to accommodate for my unrealistic expectations.

I had no experience with journal writing, with inquiry, with postmodernism, with qualitative research or with APA format. I approached tutoring centre as soon as I discovered it was available to me. For the first time I felt I could competently complete papers. The tutor was excellent and patient in her approach. My APA style improved immeasurably. My self-esteem rose in leaps and bounds. I believed in my academic skill once more (R1 p.3 l. 4-9).

I wanted to conclude my interview with the best learning experience in my Masters

Program.

Our qualitative research class collaborative was the best example in which we each identified transformative experiences in our lives. The professor was the facilitator and we did the literature search, the data collection and analysis and interpretation. She identified our categories and put it all together in a useful example of academic writing, to serve as a model of what we should do in qualitative research. The end result was excellent. We had a final reflection meeting when we expressed our feelings about the research and our lived experiences. Then the professor took our collaborative research to her presentation at an international conference. I would like to see this type of research replicated. It can be done easily as a course to lead neophytes on their research journey (R1 p.6 l. 16-22 and p.7 l. 1-2) .

### **Researcher Reflections**

There were similarities among the participants' transcripts and mine. Both Peter and I took all our time on courses. Virginia and I both report freedom to spend much time at university. We seem to be 'indwelling' in our university experiences. Larry, Margaret and I were similar by not allowing time to interfere with our academic endeavours. However, my time was very structured with a complete course load. I felt disadvantaged compared to the younger students in my class. At first, I learned, alone, in their midst, but later, I learned to communicate with my younger classmates, during collaborative learning activities. I discovered that the younger student with whom I was most challenged for interaction was similar to my daughter in personality. During the year, my learning outcomes evolved from being marginally successful for writing papers, to being a researcher drawing on my action research from my teaching career. The three preliminary categories were ever present, and interwoven inextricably into my senior student learning. My learning outcomes were achieved in the context of younger students in the university

classes, and according to the time lines of courses for younger students.

This self-interview, recommended by Jensen (1999), exemplified the research as partner. From these profiles, readers continue to follow the participants through the data analysis during the exploration and refinement phases. The constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1970), involved reading and re-reading the transcripts to discover common themes across the transcripts. These common themes are called emergent themes.

### **Comparisons of Preliminary Categories**

This section of the report describes the preliminary categories within and across the two genders. The males are presented first and then the females. Similarities and differences for all participants are then explored. The individuality of the six participants is noted within as well as across the genders. Thus, the reader is cautioned to listen to the student voices, as individuals, not as representatives of their gender. In this section of the report, literature support is included throughout the analysis of the data to enhance the credibility. Finally, preliminary categories and organized literature are collapsed into an emergent theme.

#### **Time**

All the male participants agreed that their time spent learning at the university was more productive than the time they observed among other retired seniors who were leisure seekers. Both Peter and Alexander devoted much time to achieve their academic successes. However, time moved slowly for Peter for courses in which he was struggling, so that expanding his time and effort did not contribute to the excellent achievement which

interfere with his enjoyment of the ambiance of the university facilities and setting.

Alexander also experienced more formal social activities at the university, through his wife, who was a benefactor. In contrast, Peter reported that his wife experienced decreased social time while he devoted all his time to the business computer course.

The male participants differed in their perspectives on time with reference to their professions. Alexander had been an engineer and Larry had been a police officer, so their punctuality was important, whereas Peter had an attitude of coming to class early to practise for the lesson, a quality he would have encouraged for his former students. All male responses to time were different according to each participant's life-world (Hargreaves, 1990). These responses also reflected the heterogeneity among seniors (Garvey, 1997; Redding, Eisenman and Rugolo 1998).

The female participants' responses also reflected subjective time and confirm heterogeneity among seniors. Margaret spoke of balancing learning time with her family and her university learning. Virginia and Nancy, as widows, also balanced time with their children and grandchildren. All the female participants spent much time on their essays and examinations. Another similarity was their pursuit of university courses in retirement, who compared herself to other seniors. She mentioned that her husband experienced a physically active retirement compared to her choice of university courses as a retirement pursuit.

The female participants' experiences with time are supported by the literature as well. Margaret was an excellent example of integrating her "public and private life-worlds" (Sarksian, 1982, p. 36). Margaret has persevered to reach her personal learning goals,

while also enjoying family life. Also, Virginia's experience mirrored Hardin's (1985) observation that generative persons seek to facilitate the development of their higher potential (p.129). Virginia returned to university after the pivotal events of retirement and widowhood. Finally, Nancy mirrored Scala (1996) who referred to seniors' filling a perceived void in their lives, such as widowhood. However, Nancy balanced her social, personal and academic time very successfully. She did not dwell on her losses, but used her time productively by learning at university.

Comparing all participants, there were similarities across genders. All participants devoted much time to achieve their academic goals. They strove to balance time between their university courses and personal life-world responsibilities. All have experienced the pivotal event of retirement, as a incentive for returning to university. The productive use of time, the subjective experience of time and the heterogeneity in the experiences of seniors appeared across all participants' transcripts. Among all the participants, time was integral to their university experiences, as well as being different in their individual life-worlds. Only Margaret and the three male participants compared themselves to other seniors in their use of time, whereas Virginia and Nancy offered no comparisons. The second category, which follows, is younger students and younger members of the participants' families. The participants in this study were learning, according to the time lines institutionally set for younger students, and in classes among younger students.

*Younger Students (and family).* The male participants interacted with the younger students in their university classes. The male participants communicated about course content and assignments and offered help to their younger classmates. Peter discovered

two-way communication was simple because of his work as a teacher. Larry assisted his classmates, but at a group level. He regarded his class participation as beneficial to the professor. Alexander helped a classmate as well, but he was disappointed when he discovered that he had actually done her late assignment. Since Alexander was not a parent, he viewed the younger students in a different light than the other male participants. He made references to the younger students wearing hats and eating their lunch in class. Compared to his day, he regarded the attitudes of students as undisciplined. Edwards and Usher (1997) supported Alexander's contention that the university should preserve the positive values of society. Alexander believed that his white hair has an influence on the younger students. Peter and Larry did not emphasize attitudes, but rather, a daily sharing of their expertise with younger students in their classes.

Other similarities between Peter and Larry were their generative attitudes towards their grown children. Peter acted as chauffeur for his visiting adult son, whereas Larry assisted his daughter with library research. Alexander indirectly nurtured future generations, as his wife was a university benefactor. Feldman (1990) supported the concept of generativity as leading to resourceful aging. These male participants experienced resourceful aging, as a productive activity. They did not regard their presence at university as resourceful, but productive, compared to other retired seniors.

The female participants in this study had two or more generations in their families. Margaret explained that her son and daughter were graduates of this university. Margaret perceived that her children were proud of her attending university. As well, Virginia's grandson, who inspired her to start university. Nancy compared her grandchildren 'doing



the grandma thing' to her younger classmates 'doing the peer group thing.' Margaret and Virginia also communicated with their younger classmates. However, Nancy was the only female participant who described lending her notes to younger students who had been absent. The generativity of the male participants differed from the female participants, according to Hardin (1985) who explained that females had the role of catalyst for significant others in their life-worlds. The male participants' generativity emanated from themselves, rather than as a catalytic experience transferred from their wives or extended families.

The widows described their personal relationships in detail compared to the other participants. Virginia lost her husband to cancer after forty-five years of marriage. Virginia also explained how she enjoyed sharing and caring for her children and grandchildren. Nancy lost her best friend in World War II. Later, Nancy met and married a fellow employee in her company and trained as a gemnologist to assist him in his career. She later became an accountant with compulsory university courses in her accounting designation. Nancy reminisced about her husband's final days of battling cancer, when she played bagpipe music for him to help him forget the pain. Nancy, Virginia and Margaret explained their generativity, which developed from life-worlds of caring and sharing. Nancy suggested letting seniors be responsible for the mistakes they make.

Virginia contributed taking what we have learned so each generation will become better. Margaret's generativity was evident after the reflective interview in Margaret's home, when her daughter handed Margaret the newborn grandchild and the interview quickly concluded. These descriptions represented the generativity characteristic, which is

supported by Sarkisian (1982), Hardin (1985) and Feldman (1990). All participants in the study have exemplified generativity, which was the nurturing of future generations. Until retirement, the male participants, who were parents, may have had their parenting shared more by their wives, but now they are actively and personally communicating with their adult children. The female participants have been catalysts for their families, and they continued to exhibit generative attitudes towards the younger members in their families and the younger students in their university classes.

### **Learning Outcomes**

The male participants explained how they learned and described other experiences as well. Peter was first disappointed with his progress in business computers; then he adopted an attitude of learning as much as possible regardless of his original expectation. Peter exemplified Scala's (1996) expressive goal, which was inherent in the process of learning, whereas Alexander reflected an instrumental goal, which was outside learning. Alexander changed his direction, instead of changing his attitude. He learned not to upstage the professor by exhibiting his expertise as a musician, and instead he registered in courses about which he knew little. Alexander also reflected on his first attitudes towards learning. He had worked after high school before starting his initial university education. Alexander believed that the younger students were more concerned with the process of learning. Larry offered a more historical description of his learning. He described how he transferred his skills from typing to computers at work. He also had assisted other officers with training courses and report writing; and Larry used his language skills for communicating with the Quebec police. Larry learned and taught

throughout his life. Learning histories enriched the stories of the male participants in this study. They learned in the context of classes with younger students, according to the time lines set by the university. They placed their current interest in university classes on the continuum of their journeys as lifelong learners. They also emphasized their personal performance when they described their current learning as senior students. Alexander summed up learning with a philosophy common to the male participants in this study, 'The more you put into it, the more you get out of it.'

The female participants had a diversity of learning outcomes. They emphasized more of their feelings about learning. They described their strengths as well as their weaknesses. Margaret sought extensive tutoring for writing papers, but Virginia had not discovered those services yet, because she was a newcomer to the university. Virginia also struggled with university study because she had been out from school for fifty years. Nevertheless, she was undergoing transition to a new identity with skills and knowledge to share (Feldman, 1990). Neither Margaret nor Virginia hesitated to volunteer this information, as they wished to share their strategies for overcoming barriers to their success as senior students at university.

Margaret avoided essays by taking French, but she discovered there was a vast amount of homework. Also, her French exam took the longest, but she achieved the second highest mark. However, Nancy wrote essays with ease; and she also enjoyed her library research for her university courses. Because Nancy was learning for the sake of learning, she enrolled in a wide range of courses for which she outlined her specific learning strategies.

All the female participants described their personal learning growth with pride. They were lifelong learners from life experience and they were lifelong readers, as well. They attempted to integrate their personal life-worlds with their public life-worlds (Sarkisian, 1982). Virginia mentioned that she was not doing this for anyone else. This was for her what mattered is that she achieved what she wanted. Virginia, Margaret and Nancy were proud, focused and dedicated in their pursuit of university courses.

All the participants have similarities as well as differences in learning outcomes. The participants explained strategies for overcoming barriers to their learning at university. They outlined their learning philosophies which guide their journeys at university. They also reflected on former learning experiences and the personal performance which they experienced at university. Literature supported both instrumental and expressive goals (Scala, 1996), reported by the participants, integrating experiences associated with learning (Sarkisian, 1982) and lifelong learning (Edwards and Usher, 1997) for all participants in this study.

Some differences among the participants appeared to be gender-based. The males explained how they learned and they also described other experiences associated with learning at university, whereas the female participants emphasized their feelings about learning. The ease of learning in an institutional setting was proportional to the length of enrollment for the participants. Newcomers to institutional learning or late adopters of technology were challenged by their experiences. Overall, these differences appeared in the outer realities of lifelong learning and personal performance which were described by the participants. The participants' inner realities of generativity and nurture were their

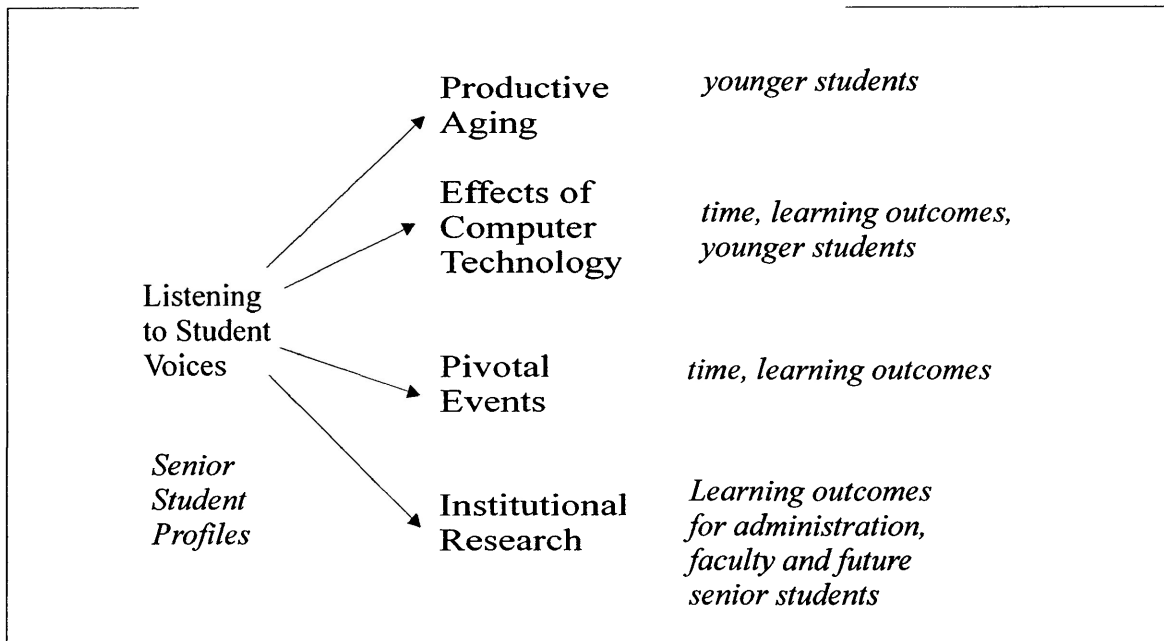
common life experiences as senior students.

*Summary of Gender Comparisons.* The participants devoted time to achieve their academic goals, while balancing time in their personal life-worlds with learning. They compared themselves to other retired seniors who were leisure seekers. As university students and private individuals, the participants all had generative attitudes towards the young. Also, they described their strategies for overcoming barriers to their learning and their personal philosophies which guided their learning. Overall, the senior students in this study learned among younger students and according to the time lines, set by the university, for the younger students.

### **Collapsing the Literature and the Preliminary Themes**

The collapsing process involved not only collapsing the preliminary categories of data into an emergent theme, but also collapsing the systematic organization of the literature. Because the preliminary categories of data were congruent with the literature, the collapsing process became a simplified process. First, the literature will be described in terms of its support for the preliminary categories of data. Then, both the literature and categories are collapsed into the overarching theme for the research study. *Figure 3* explains the literature supporting the preliminary categories of data.

*Listening to participants' voices* enabled the researcher to hear senior students describing their nurturing of younger students in the classes and younger members of their families. Nurturing of the young resulted in resourceful aging (Feldman, 1990), which mirrored the productive aging described by the participants in this study. The term



**Figure 3. Systematic Literature and Preliminary Data Categories**

Listening to student voices led to recording and transcribing interviews with six senior students returning to university. The profiles were created using the participants own words to describe their experiences. This figure interpolates the preliminary categories into the systematic organization of other research findings, in an attempt to analyze the data.

The main preliminary categories common to all participants in the profile were time, younger students and learning outcomes. By choosing categories, comparisons could be generated across the participant profiles.

Productive aging is associated with generativity (Feldman, 1990) in which senior students share their life experience with younger students and younger members of their families. Generativity is defined as senior students' attempt to preserve the positive values in society (Edwards and Usher, 1997).

Computer technology is emphasized in senior students' reactions to time, learning outcomes and younger students. The participants are aware of the need to become adapters to technology, although some currently experience 'cyberanxiety' (George and Camarata, 1996).

Pivotal events common to all participants in this study are retirement, and for some, widowhood. Resistance may be considered common to all participants as they may be seen to be resisting stereotypical roles by returning to university as senior students. All participants experience transition and transformation from their lived experiences as university students.

Institutional research represents a category of learning for university administrators and faculty as well as other senior students who read this research report.

productive aging emerged from the participants' transcripts when they described their productive use of time, compared to other seniors who were leisure seekers. The participants regarded leisure activities such as scratching lottery tickets as unproductive. Thus, in the presence of the young, these senior students experienced learning outcomes at university. Their life-worlds were enhanced by their interactions with the young, leading to their developing the characteristic of generativity, defined as nurturing future generations.

*Computer technology* also contributed to enhancement of the life-worlds of Larry and Peter, but detracted from learning by Alexander, Margaret, Virginia and Nancy who are late adopters of technology. Redding, Eisenman and Rugolo (1998) contrasted early adopters as those who learned technology as it developed, with late adopters who were attempting to 'catch up' to technological change by registering in an Institute for Learning in Retirement. Whether the participants were early or late adopters of technology, they were learning, according to time lines set for the courses, and in the presence of younger students. Thus, time and younger students are inextricably interwoven with learning.

*Pivotal events* were significant changes in the life-worlds of participants as they enter a transitional phase from work to retirement, searching for activities to replace their hours as employees in the workforce. The choices of returning to university has enabled the participants to make this transition as generative senior students fostering learning of younger students. Thus, learning in its broadest meaning is the primary theme emerging from the pivotal event of retirement for all the participants except Virginia and Nancy who also were widows, with two pivotal events.

*Institutional research* was of lesser consequence to these participants because they were a minority in the class and had individual and personal experiences. Their overall hesitancy to criticize the university or recommend change resulted from their positive acceptance and appreciation of their personal benefits of learning to senior students. In summary, institutional research was learning for readers of this report. The literature supporting the preliminary categories of data in this study was collapsed into the main theme of learning. Collapsing continues in the preliminary categories.

Both time and younger students may be described as outer realities in the life-worlds of the participants. These outer realities are explained as lifelong learning and personal performance by the participants, in comparison to the inner realities of the participants, which are their feelings, which guided their learning experiences. The participants ultimately experience learning as *generativity* which is defined as nurturing future generations in their university classes and in their families. Also, they experienced personal *fulfilment* from their university experiences. Thus, from the preliminary themes, a main theme of *learning* emerged. Learning has three embedded sub-themes: *lifelong learning*, *personal performance* and an inner reality of *fulfilment* intertwined with *generativity*.

Chapter V continues the analyses of the transcripts and provides an interpretation of the emerging themes.



# CHAPTER V

## INTERPRETATION

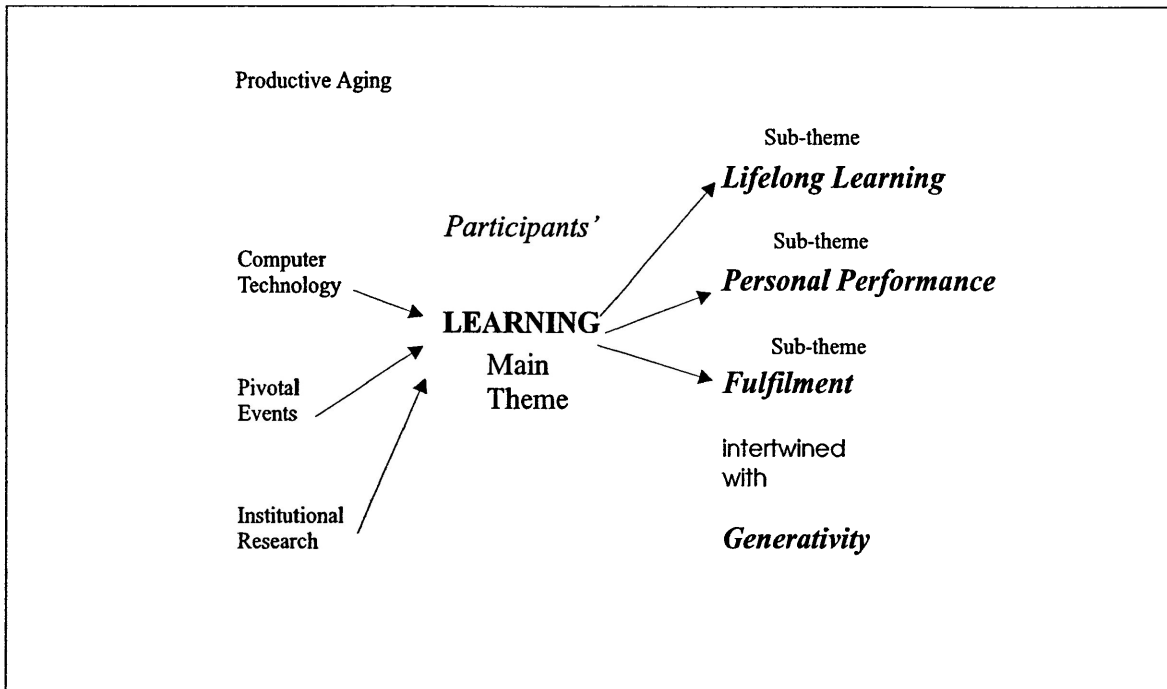
### Introduction

The purpose of this interpretation chapter is to extend the analyses and present focussed observations. To assist the interpretation, a model was developed. *Figure 4. Emergent Themes* illustrates the collapsing of the organized literature which supported the preliminary categories into an overarching theme of learning. Sub-themes, which are common to all the participants emerge from the theme of learning. These sub-themes are lifelong learning, personal performance and an intangible feeling, which is fulfilment intertwined with generativity.

The sub-themes are significant in this study because they elaborate on the participants' learning experiences, by illuminating the outer and inner realities of the participants' life-worlds. The participants' outer realities emerge from the participants' words and the researcher's interpretation of their transcripts. The inner realities represented the participants' personal feelings, as they described their learning relationships with their younger classmates at university and younger members of their families at home.

### **Sub-themes Within the Overarching Theme of Learning**

The sub-themes, representing the multiple realities of the participants are first examined, followed by the meaning of learning, as an integration of the participants' realities. Then, literature supporting the emergent theme and sub-themes also is presented. Finally, a concise interpretation of the analysis and findings is provided.



**Figure 4. Emergent Themes**

The organization of the literature and the preliminary categories collapse into the main theme of *learning*, a theme common to all participants. Sub-themes are *lifelong learning*, *personal performance* and *fulfilment* intertwined with *generativity*.

Productive aging, computer technology, pivotal events and Institutional research are collapsed into the main theme of learning

**Sub-themes**

–*Lifelong learning* throughout the life is accomplished both within and outside of formal learning institutions.

–*Personal performance* is the participants' description of learning achievement and experiences associated with learning.

–*Fulfilment* is the satisfaction and well-being gained by participants during their learning experiences at university. Intertwined with *generativity* means that the participants' sense of fulfilment was from learning among younger students and nurturing the younger members of their families.

Lifelong learning and personal performance are the *outer realities*, associated with people, places and things in the lives of the participants, whereas, fulfilment and generativity were their *inner realities*. *Integration* of their inner and outer realities provided meaning in their lives.

### **Lifelong Learning**

The participants experienced learning in different ways because they represented a diverse group of lifelong learners. Feldman (1990) explained that lifelong education was an agent of change. The participants agreed that lifelong learning described their experiences with change. Representing lifelong learning were Peter and Larry. Peter had been learning throughout his career as a teacher, as was necessary in his profession. Peter continued to learn in his retirement as a senior student at university, where he was challenged, as a 'late adopter' of technology (Redding, Eisenman and Rugolo, 1998). Peter mentions that his achievement included learning *Adobe Photoshop*, in which he intended to enroll again next year. Also, Peter exemplified instrumental motivation because his interest was in the course itself.

Larry talked about his lifelong learning in numerous courses since high school. During his career as a police officer, he also attended and conducted training courses. At university, his main focus has been learning languages so that he could travel and converse with people from other cultures. Larry represented instrumental motivation as his languages were related to his goals for learning them.

On the other hand, Alexander had expressive motivation because he wanted to learn something about which he knew little. Thus, he selected a summer course, *Philosophy of the Paranormal*, which he discovered he disliked, but he stayed to complete of it, according to his philosophy of commitment. Alexander had not continued from high school directly to university, so he had learned from life experiences in the interim. However, he also had expertise in the arts, being a proficient pianist. This was another

indication that Alexander was a lifelong learner, as pianoforte involves continuous learning.

Margaret illustrated strategies for achievement, as she enrolled in tutoring classes to improve her writing skills. Margaret was similar to Larry because she was taking her French course to travel to France, where her son teaches English. Margaret has been enrolled continuously in university courses to gain a degree, to be the same as everybody else. She chose to major in science because this course allowed more equivalent credits from her former professional accreditation in physiotherapy.

Like Margaret, Virginia explained her strategies for achievement. Virginia explained how she initially set impossible goals for herself, as she anxiously entered her first university course. She had been reading avidly for her entire life, before affiliating with formal learning at university. Virginia also explained that her learning about life from her life experiences.

Like Virginia, Nancy described enriched life experiences. She fitted the mould of a lifelong learner, having started work in an office, training as a gemmologist and other aspects of the jewelry business to assist her husband of a lifetime. Nancy's friend had been killed in action in World War II. After that, Nancy learned to overcome her grief by joy. Later, she married and became a mother and grandmother, who took pride in her five grandchildren and her two great grandchildren. Nancy's learning from life led her to working later in an accounting office and achieving a professional designation. The final two courses in accounting were offered by the university, where Nancy became interested in many other disciplines over the last sixteen years.

Personal performance in their university experiences was also common to all the participants. Like lifelong learning, personal performance represented the outer realities in the participants' life-worlds. Personal performance and lifelong learning are described in the participants' transcripts as common learning experiences.

### **Personal Performance**

Personal performance was the description of expectation realized by each participant. It represented the course or another aspect of learning, such as Peter's commitment. He continued his business computer course after his wife encouraged him to quit because he found it frustrating. On the other hand, Larry described how he shared his personal performance with his classmates and his daughters who were attending university simultaneously. Also, Larry had high cognitive functioning as he mentioned having achieved the highest mark in many of the courses, which he had taken throughout his life. In contrast, Alexander appreciated the university because he participated in social functions, as his wife was a benefactor. Alexander also mentioned that she appreciated education. This appreciation, along with his personal level of achievement (100% in Astronomy) led Alexander to enroll in courses continuously.

While the male participants spoke in generalities, the female participants described their personal performance in detail, whereas . Margaret explained that she took the longest for her French exam, but ended up with the second highest mark. Her goal for learning had the side effect of 'enablement of self' among family members with diverse attitudes toward her attending university. Margaret mentioned that her husband did not see the point of doing it, but that her children were proud. By comparison, Virginia's

personal performance represented a dramatic personal growth, since she had been out of school for fifty years. In her first year at university, Virginia mastered essay writing and examination phobia; and she also altered her attitude of learning for herself, rather than for anybody else. Virginia's return to university had first been influenced by her grandson, but now she was there on her own terms. Finally, Nancy experienced inter-generational learning more than the other female participants. Nancy was paired with a gifted youth for an internet course, then she continued in a course with seniors and finally she sat with her granddaughter. Nancy described that she really had to learn internet by herself, as she recognized that her personal performance was according to her own standards. Nancy, along with the other participants were self-directed in their learning.

In summary, personal performance was a common experience in learning for all participants in this study. However, these initial sub-themes of lifelong learning and personal performance represented the outer realities of the participants' life-worlds –people, places and things. Lifelong learning hinged on motivation and manifested itself in continuous learning in structured settings or in real life situations (Edwards and Usher, 1997). Personal performance was influenced by family members and encompassed the characteristics of commitment and personal growth (Jensen, 1999).

The next expression of learning was description of the participants' inner realities. This aspect of their interviews was intangible compared to their outer realities, as it represented the feelings of the participants. Tact was employed to learn for indirect clues from the participants (van Manen, 1995), followed by literature supporting feelings of senior learners, and completing the interpretation by inductive reasoning. Finally, what

began as intangible emerged as *fulfilment* intertwined with *generativity*.

### **Fulfilment Intertwined with Generativity**

This third sub-theme required returning to the literature for insight into research with similar findings. Jensen (1999) discovered that achieving a degree of happiness through educational participation lead to an overall feeling of well-being. When Jensen described the rewards experienced by her senior learners, she included fulfilment which was explained differently by each of her participants. Fraser (1991) explained that her adult students experienced achievement leading to enhancement in their quality of life. Also, in 1993, she further explored achievement due to inter-generational experiences of adults and adolescents learning collaboratively. Finally, Feldman (1990) outlined a relationship between fulfilment and generativity. She stated that generativity involved guiding and establishing the next generation. Feldman explained that individuals derived a sense of fulfilment from educating the next generation and from strengthening the institutions that support generativity. Synthesis, of these concepts expressed in this literature, assisted with search for the meaning of *fulfilment* intertwined with *generativity*. The participants will explain their fulfilment and generativity from their own points of view.

Peter persevered in his computer courses, which he found challenging. His commitment led to his experience of learning a lot about computers, and modifying his expectations for academic achievement. Peter was fulfilled because he completed the course and planned to enroll next year to polish his skills. On the other hand, Alexander experienced fulfilment by achieving a mark of 100% in Astronomy. He also expressed

how much he learned in his music appreciation course. Alexander's fulfilment stemmed from strengthening the institutions that support generativity (Edwards and Usher, 1997). In his comments about younger students' attitudes, Alexander illustrated his belief that the university had a responsibility to preserve the positive values in society. Finally, Larry illustrated continuous fulfilment as he spoke proudly of teaching his fellow officers during his career. In his retirement, Larry continues helping his classmates and professors at his university, and his daughters at their universities. Larry always was caring and sharing throughout his life, using his learning a basis for his generativity. He also developed continuous personal growth from his learning. The female participants now describe their *fulfilment* intertwined with *generativity*.

The female participants described diverse experiences of *fulfilment* and *generativity*. Margaret's fulfilment was illustrated during the reflective interview in her home, when her family came to visit at the end of the interview. Margaret had been explaining how important her learning was for her self-growth. She mentioned that she always had been helping other people. Then, she glowed with happiness, as she held her baby granddaughter in her arms. Margaret instantly integrated her public and her private life-worlds. Different experiences are related by Virginia, who described her philosophy of making each generation bigger and better. Virginia began slowly, by outlining her life of learning in her everyday experiences; but then she excitedly described her first year in university. A sense of ultimate fulfilment permeated Virginia's description of her learning.

The final female participant, Nancy presented another view of fulfilment. Nancy continuously searched for fulfilling learning experiences. She especially enjoyed courses



which enabled her to use metaphoric links to her prior knowledge. She hated to miss class, and she found the papers a blessing. Nancy was fulfilled to the extent that she had enrolled continuously for sixteen years. Also, she enjoyed her classes among younger students and was very proud of the successful lives of her five grandchildren and two great grandchildren because they were not popular culture. Literature supporting the participants' viewpoints is now described.

### **Literature Supporting Inner Realities**

The participants' life-worlds are the culmination of all experiences in their past work-worlds linked to their personal meanings in their lives. Collins (1983) described multiple realities, "No two people experience the same situation in exactly the same way. ... There are many different orders of reality. We confer the accent of reality on them and make of them finite provinces of meaning" (p. 184). In the present study, the diverse inner realities of the participants were the challenging aspect of interpretation. Patton (1992) alluded to interpretation challenges, as he outlined weaknesses in the interview guide for data collection, "...substantially different responses [to the guiding questions] from different perspectives, thus reducing the comparability of responses" (p. 288). Finally, the a solution to the interpretation of inner realities, was suggested by van Manen (1995), with the use of *tact* during interviewing. van Manen explained that a teacher used tact if teaching intermingled the head and the heart. In a similar mode, a researcher could adopt this 'thinkingly feeling' attitude with the participants during interviews for this study. The researcher's tact enabled the participants to open their responses to reveal their feelings. However, feelings also were described from the point of view of the researcher's inductive

reasoning. Furthermore, van Manen's tact for teaching children differs from tact for interviewing senior students, because the inner realities of children are more visible than the inner realities of senior students in this study.

When the senior students were at university, they were experiencing a role which was different from their peers, who questioned learning as a retirement pursuit. The participants also were challenged by their families, so that the participants intended to prove that they achieve successfully at university. Hardin (1990) supported these descriptions, "In response to the sense of call in generative people, they are led out of the safe, culturally defined roles into new territory" (p. 129). Therefore, this backdrop of challenge and questioning of motives created some defensiveness on the part of the participants, so that digging deeply into the participants' inner realities was handled in such a manner as to guarantee the reflective interviews and the clarifying telephone conversations. In summary, inner reality included the meaning of learning to the participants, their personal fulfilment at university, and also the nurture of the younger students and the younger members of the participants' families.

By definition, nurturing was the attitude of generativity, which people develop as a goal, later in their lives. Generativity was described by Sarkisian (1982), Hardin (1985) and Feldman (1990), who informed this study with similar findings. Of this group, Feldman was salient as she described *resourceful aging* instead of *remorseful aging*, and *generativity* instead of *stagnation*. For this study, however, *resourceful aging* is not the term which best describes the participants because they all referred to how they made productive use of their retirement, rather than other retirees who used their time

unproductively. Thus, the term *productive aging* applies to the experiences as they nurture the young with an attitude of generativity.

Research also cites how generativity and fulfilment are intertwined. Feldman (1990) supports the experiences of the participants, who gained their sense of fulfilment from leaning among younger students and nurturing the younger members. Also, the presence of the participants at university also strengthened the university, according to Edwards and Usher (1997), who regarded the university as a stable factor in a changing society. The participants in this study were also examples of social change. They defined new roles for seniors in society, in their productive lives as university students. In summary, the participants' learning was the overarching theme with sub-themes of lifelong learning, personal performance and fulfilment intertwined with generativity, and ultimately resulting in integration of the multiple realities of the participants. *Figure 4, Emergent Themes* represents collapsing into an overarching theme of learning with three sub-themes illustrating the components of learning which were common to the participants in this study.

Interpretation also requires a response to the question, **“What does this mean?”** The answers are embedded as sub-themes of *learning*.

*Lifelong learning* suggests that senior students in the present study are self-directed learners.

*Personal performance* reveals that these senior students are committed to their goals, but they also are willing to accept alternatives to their goals.

*Fulfilment* for these senior students means gaining personal satisfaction according to their life-world inner realities.

*Generativity* means nurturing younger students and younger members of the participants' families.

*Intertwining of fulfilment and generativity* means that a sense of fulfilment is achieved by the participants as they learn among younger students and also as they nurture the younger members of their families.

**While outer realities suggest and reveal, inner reality involves meaning. Ultimately, the blending the inner reality with the outer reality creates integration in the participants' life-worlds.**

### Summary

This chapter has extended the analyses and presented focussed observations with a figure to illustrate the collapse of the literature supporting the participants' transcripts. The theme of learning emerged and then expanded into three sub-themes which identified the dimensions of learning described by the participants. The sub-themes of lifelong learning and personal performance represent the participants' outer realities in their life-worlds, whereas the sub-theme of fulfilment intertwined with generativity is their inner reality, shown by their feelings. These generative participants gained fulfilment as they learned and nurtured younger students and younger members of their families. The participants were able to integrate their multiple realities and thereby develop meaning in their life-worlds. Finally, a synthesis of the interpretation has been provided. The Summary and Implications Chapter follows to conclude this report.

# CHAPTER VI

## SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

### Introduction

The research question, *What are the lived experiences of senior students returning to university* has been examined phenomenologically. This research study has reported on six senior university students over the age of sixty. The three male and three female participants were selected purposively from seventeen volunteers. The study was conducted according to the university ethical guidelines for research on human subjects. This chapter summarizes the major components of the report, describes the emergent theme and sub-themes, and offers implications associated with senior student learners in university courses with younger students.

### Summary

The literature review included *Listening to Student Voices, Productive Aging, Effects of Computer Technology, Pivotal Events and Institutional Research*. These categories informed the current research study. Resourceful aging was described by Feldman (1990), and by the participants, as *productive aging*. Feldman had noted that resourceful aging is created by learning a new identity as a person with skills and knowledge to share with future generations. Also, Edwards and Usher (1997) decided that adult students' learning in university affects positive values in society. *Computer technology* research by Howard (1994), George and Camarata (1996) and Redding, Eisenman and Rugolo (1998) described the adult and senior learning processes involved with computers. *Pivotal events* are described by Hardin (1985) as changes in the

life-worlds of individuals which initiate transition leading to transformation. Murphy (1986) explained how pivotal events led his participants to discover non-material rewards. In this study retirement appears to be the major pivotal event for these six participants. *Institutional research* was conducted by Clavner and Clavner (1992) to improve learning by implementing realistic goals for seniors in community college programs. In this study, I explored the learning experiences of senior students in the formal setting of a regional university.

The participants' transcripts confirm findings of earlier research. These included sub-themes of *lifelong learning* and *personal performance* (Murphy, 1986; Edwards and Usher, 1997), *fulfillment* (Jensen, 1999) and *generativity* (Hardin, 1985; Feldman, 1990) and integration of multiple realities (Sarkisian, 1982). The participants in this study chose their courses independently, having ownership in their learning. Garvey (1987) noted the diversity challenge among senior learners and recommended permitting them to make their own program decisions. As illustrated in this study, Redding, Eisenman and Rugolo (1998) explained that senior students were either 'late' or 'early' adopters of computer technology.

The method of data collection was tape recording interviews with the participants and then transcribing the tapes to create the participants' transcripts. Field notes, transcripts and telephone conversations with the participants were analyzed. The data analysis consisted of a computer word count, developing of preliminary categories of data, creation of participant profiles, and analyzing the data by the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1970) to discover the emergent themes. First, the preliminary

categories were explored and refined and then the categories were collapsed to generate one major theme of learning which included sub-themes of lifelong learning, personal performance and fulfilment intertwined with generativity.

Participant Profiles and Data Analyses were generated and presented in Chapter IV. The initial categories of *motivation* and *communication* (field notes) were collapsed into *younger students* and *learning outcomes*. Also, the additional preliminary category of *time* was initiated as a result of the computer word count. The profiles served to acquaint the reader with the participants as well as providing a framework for the data analyses, which used the constant comparative method of Glaser and Strauss (1970). Data analyses explored and refined the preliminary categories to discover the major theme of learning. During this process, the participants' transcripts were examined across categories; and then the preliminary categories were collapsed.

The Interpretation phase extended the analyses and presented focused observations. The overarching theme of learning branches into three sub-themes each of which is significant because they elaborate on the participants' diverse learning experiences. The sub-themes illuminate the participants' life-worlds, which are comprised of multiple realities. Common experiences of the participants are integrated in their outer realities of *lifelong learning* and *personal performance*, whereas experiences representing the participants feelings are their inner realities of *fulfillment* intertwined with *generativity*.

These generative participants gained their fulfilment as they learned and nurtured younger students and younger members of their families. Finally, the participants were able to integrate their multiple realities to develop personal meaning in their life-worlds.

Finally, the viewpoints of the participants in this study were particular to these six students at this time and in this university.

### **Implications**

From this qualitative study of senior students' learning experiences at university, four main implications emerge. The first is the need for classroom research in university courses to examine the effect of instructional and evaluation strategies on senior students' academic performance. This research could include input from the faculty, the senior students and the younger students in their university courses. The second recommendation involves the choice of conducting either a seminar and/or a focus group with senior students who currently are registered in the university. These groups would allow exploration of the collective consciousness of the senior learners rather than focusing on individual accounts. The third implication focuses on the need for curriculum development and support systems which enhance effective strategies for instructing senior learners. A final need would be policy development and implementation to address the learning needs of senior students based on research.



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## Appendix C

### Participant Consent Form

My signature on this sheet indicates that I agree to participate in a qualitative research study being completed by Jane Fraser, on the lived experiences of a senior students returning to university.

It also indicates that I understand the following:

I am a volunteer and can withdraw my participation at any time.

There is no risk of physical or psychological harm.

The data I provide will be included in the report under a pseudonym. This information will be shared with Dr. R.W. McLeod, as my thesis supervisor.

Raw data will be stored securely for seven years as required by the Lakehead University Research Guidelines.

I understand that I will remain anonymous in the written report.

I wish / do not wish (please circle one) to receive a summary of the final report.

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*Signature of Participant*

---

*Date*

---

*Signature of Researcher*

---

*Date*

## **Appendix D**

### **Guiding Questions for Participants**

**Tell me about your experiences as a “senior” university student.**

**Describe a typical day.**

**How well prepared were you for what you encountered?**

**What features of your university experience should be maintained?**

**What would you like to see happen, if you were asked to give advice?**

## **Guiding Questions / Researcher Probes**

**Tell me about your experiences as a “senior” university student.**

Motivation?

Registration?

Beginning courses?

Where are you now?

Library?

Computers?

Student Organizations?

**2. Describe a typical day.**

Study time?

Assignments? Projects? Reports?

Group Work?

Younger classmates?

Faculty? Administrators?

Family responsibilities?

**3. How well prepared were you for what you encountered?**

Physically? Psychologically?

Background learning?

Interpretation of expectations?

Interventions?

- 4. What features of your university experience should be maintained?**
  
- 5. What would you like to see happen, if you were asked to give advice?**
  - Time-lines? Deadlines?
  - Scheduling?
  - Seniors Organization?
  - Communication with faculty?
  - Contributions to class? to the university?