ABSTRACT

MCCLANAHAN, ANA MARI. Multigenerational Classrooms: Understanding Community College Faculty Experiences. (Under the direction of Co-Chairs, Dr. Sue Barcinas and Dr. Duane Akroyd).

For the first time in United States history, five of the six living generations matriculate together through college classrooms. The ever more rapid speed of change in the past 100 years has stimulated each generation's increasingly singular developmental experience resulting in ever expanding "generation gaps." In community colleges, where age-diversity is most prevalent in both the student body and the faculty ranks, this co-mingling generations is impacting teaching and learning in new or more intensive ways than currently recognized or understood. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate, describe and analyze how community college faculty experience the face-to-face multigenerational classrooms. Using Brookfield's (1998) critically reflective practice model as the theoretical framework, the research question is, "How do community college faculty members describe their experience with face-to-face multigenerational community college classrooms?" Qualitative semi-structured interviews with 34 community college faculty in a large network of urban community colleges were conducted, yielding more than 50 hours of data for the study. Four findings where supported by the data. First, faculty are tacitly rather than specifically aware of age groups associated with generational characteristics. Second, elements of teaching and learning practices for adults of mixed ages are present but are not explicitly underpinned by adult learning theory. Third, faculty were using instructional practices that support learning for every student. Fourth, the organizational impacts on age diversity among students and faculty. This study allows us to say that faculty experience the multigenerational classroom with the recognition that there are many student perspectives which vary with age. They respond to the complexities from different age cohorts with

compassion and empathy. They strive to support student learning. They need more support and training themselves in adulty learning theory than they are getting. The work of understanding and supporting such a complex community of learners (students and faculty) from so many different generations should be reimagined by policy makers, administrators, and faculty leaders to include age-diversity within the scope of diversity, equity, and inclusion objectives.

Multigenerational Classrooms: Understanding Community College Faculty Experiences

by
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DEDICATION

To every soul who has ever struggled to be better and leaves the world better as well.

BIOGRAPHY

I am only what I leave behind as fleeting impressions on the lives of others.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful for my better and for my worst teachers as each offered lessons. I am particularly grateful to those who showed me a little encouragement along the way. Among these are my advisor, Dr. Sue Barcinas, friends, and family members who reminded me and each other that even when things are really hard, "everything's going to be alright." We share the belief that the force of even the simplest affirmation can reverse the tides of destruction. We know that even the smallest kindnesses undergird the heaviest work as these are the fuel of hope.

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Foreword: The Age-Diverse Community College

Imagine for a moment that Malcolm Knowles (1913-1997), often held as one of the most influential thinkers in Adult Education, finds himself on a community college campus in 2022 as morning classes are being dismissed and students are moving on to their next class or off to work. Over 20 years have passed since Malcom was last on a community college campus.

As he gains his composure, his naturally inquisitive nature leads him to observe the bustle of people hurrying along the walkways. Aside from the changes in dress, manners of speech, and the omnipresence of cell phones, Knowles might notice how many students look like they are well over the age of 25, and he might wonder if there is a new series of continuing education classes targeting adults. He might also wonder if there is some kind of recruitment event happening on this day as clusters of teenagers gather nearby and then disperse again.

If Knowles continued his observation for long, he would also soon see that groups of much older students are chatting and sipping coffee together. He would come to realize that students with a wider range of ages than he has ever seen are filing into and intermingling inside every nearby classroom. When Knowles sees so many fresh faces alongside a majority of fully mature faces and wrinkled faces, he might find this combination of generations puzzling.

Being deeply aware of the learning differences between people of different ages, Knowles' thoughts might turn to how the faculty of this community college are meeting the needs of students with such a wide range of experiences and expectations in a single classroom. The questions about the dynamics of this multigenerational community would likely expand in many directions from there.

Introduction

Beginning in 2010, for first time in United States history, five generations began to matriculate together through college classrooms, with two-year colleges having the greatest concentration and range of age diversity (McFarland et al., 2018). In many states across the country, high school students are taking advantage of free college classes in their local community colleges (Barnett, 2006; Grubb, Scott, & Good, 2017; Lile, Ottusch, Jones, & Richards, 2018; Saenz & Combs, 2015). A growing number of older people are enrolling in college classes for encore careers, returning to complete degrees, retraining due to job displacement or life changes, or attending classes simply for enrichment (Boswell, 2004; Quinn, 2010). Added to this increased prevalence of both younger and older students is the *successively* greater increase in the differences between generations mirroring the rapidly increasing rate of technological advances and connectivity (Kelly, Elizabeth, Bharat, & Jitendra, 2016; Urick, Hollensbe, Masterson, & Lyons, 2017).

Age identity may be more nuanced and age-related impacts more variable than Adult Education and Higher Education scholars, administrators, and policymakers currently recognize. Chronological age is one of the three primary social identity categories, which also include race and sex (Brewer, 1988; Fiske, 1998; Kite, Stockdale, Whitley, & Johnson, 2005). Age diversity and the related complexity of intergenerational interactions should be as notable to scholars as other attributes of diversity in students and their teachers, yet studies of age impact are largely relegated to interactions between the meta-groups of "traditional" (18-24 years old) and "non-traditional" (25 years and older) students.

Age diversity will expand from five to six generations just two years from now (by 2024). The youngest students currently sitting in college classrooms are from Generation Z (Gen

Z, birth years 1996-2009). These "Zoomers" began enrolling in college classes as 14 to 17-year-old high school students in 2010-2013. Gen Z is lauded as a disruptive force of change in the business world (Dimock, 2019; Koulopoulos & Keldsen, 2016; Perna, 2018; Toosi, 2020). The over-25 age group, otherwise known as "adult students" in Higher Education, is comprised of four different generations (Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y). The next cohort to enter college in 2024-2026 includes those born 2010 and later; social scientists have yet to agree on a name for this youngest age cohort but are currently using 'Generation Alpha' or 'Gen A' (McCrinkle & Wolfinger, 2010; Pinsker, 2020; Ziatdinov & Cilliers, 2022). At the same time as the first Gen A students enroll in classes, the youngest members of the Silent Generation (birth years 1925-1945) will still be enrolling in college classes as octogenarians.

Each of us is shaped by our personal experiences, but part of our identity is shared with those who have witnessed or experienced similar events at similar ages. This shared history of developmentally impactful impressions links us to an age cohort or "our generation" (Campbell, 2017; Conway, 1997; Correll & Park, 2005; Manheim, 1952; Puiu, 2017; Rickes, 2016; Ross, Rouse, & Mobley, 2019; Trujillo, 2020; Vander Schee, 2007; Villegas 2020; Weiss & Lang, 2009). Students and faculty, like all humans, tend to view those who are not like themselves—those they deem as "not in 'our' generation"—through the lens of stereotyping (Ash & Walters, 2015; Hinton, 2017; Kasworm, 2005; Widman & Strilko, 2021). The tendency to stereotype keeps us from knowing and trusting one another fully. Age-stereotyping in the classroom inhibits the development of a fully integrated and inclusive learning community (Abrams, Eller, & Bryant, 2006; Ash & Walters, 2015; Wagner & Luger, 2021). Kite et al. (2005) found that adult students are less likely to notice differences between themselves and younger people. Although Kite et al. (2005) also describe student attitudes about each other in the college classroom as

being, overall, more positive than negative, older adults experience more ageism (negative stereotyping) than any other age group.

Kasworm's (2005) research on adult student identity in the multigenerational college classroom describes adult students as gravitating toward each other in the classroom for group work. Kasworm (2005) goes on to describe adult students as tending to believe that traditional-aged students are more likely to be better students than they themselves can be. These older students are stereotyping the younger students as well as accepting a negative stereotype of themselves–this is *stereotype threat* (Hess, Auman, Colcombe, & Rahhal, 2003; Weiss & Lang, 2009). Stereotype threat in the classroom inhibits the cognitive performance of older students as revealed on memory tests (Abrams et al., 2006; Hess et al., 2003).

Weiss and Zhang (2020) examined how people categorize others of different ages in a study that included data from over 1,100 individuals aged 18 to 86 years from the United States, Germany, and China. Among the findings were that older age *groups* are subject to negative stereotyping (or *ageism*) while older *generations* are regarded with a more positive stereotyping across the three cultures studied. Adult students who fall into the "middle-aged" category are the least likely to experience prejudice (Wiess & Zhang, 2020). Kite (2005) found, however, that middle aged people were the most likely to hold age-related bias toward older adults and postulated this may stem from a need to devalue older adults to "maintain their positive self-image" (p. 256).

It is interesting to consider how or if the widening generation gap impacts the tendency to stereotype among students or among faculty. It is unknown at this point in time if faculty and students tend to perceive each other in terms of "groups" or "generations."

The ever-increasing speed of change in the past 100 years has resulted in each of the currently matriculating five generations having an increasingly singular developmental experience. Differences such as work ethic, personal ethos, lifestyle, prior learning experiences, and worldviews among the five matriculating generations in community college classrooms are intensified by the rapid development of technology and the advancement of globalization. When a college-level course brings students from a wide range of ages together, the dynamics of teaching and learning are very likely influenced by the comingling of different age-related learning expectations and intergenerational interactions.

The Problem

There is an unprecedented breadth and relatively undefined richness of age-diversity in today's community college classrooms, and that age diversity is increasing. There is a rising appreciation of diversity by the general population in the United States in that many types of diversity are being celebrated and studied (Budman, 2020). Regrettably, age diversity is not among them, although each successive generation is markedly more diverse across multiple attributes than the last (Dimock, 2019). Given that age is inextricable from other defining attributes of identity, experience, and ability, age is very likely a contributing factor to differences in teaching and learning experiences.

In two-year degree granting colleges, where age diversity is most prevalent among higher education institutional types, the comingling of the most expansive range of ages in human history may be impacting teaching and learning in new or more intensive ways than is currently recognized or understood (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014; Hussar et al., 2020). At the time of the study, there was a greater percentage of students aged 25 and older enrolled in public two-year colleges (32.2%) than in public four-year colleges (27.6%) (*The Chronicle of Higher*

Education Almanac, 2020). Note that the very youngest "non-traditional" students, aged 14 to 17 years old, are not disaggregated out of the "under-21" age cohort, but these students generally enroll in community college and not in four-year colleges while in high school. There is much we do not know about these unprecedentedly age-diverse college classrooms. What is it like to teach and learn when so many different generations are present in college-level courses where there is often a set of expectations and a standardized rigor in place (Ferguson, Baker, & Burnett, 2105; Schutz, Drake, & Lessnar, 2013)? What are the perceptions of and by faculty practicing instruction in the multigenerational classroom?

A "traditional student" is generally defined as one who enrolls in college immediately after graduating from high school, is financially dependent on their family, and who may work part-time during active instructional terms (Choy, 2002; Chung, Turnbull, & Chur-Hansen, 2014). This would mean that most traditional college students would fall between 18 and 24 years of age during the undergraduate years. Chung et al. (2014) culled 45 definitions for "non-traditional student" from publications dated 1983 to 2002, focusing only on the mental health of higher education students. Among these variations is the definition which appeared in "The Condition of Education 2002 (Choy, 2002) and which summarizes most of the elements found in the others:

> The term "non-traditional student" is not a precise one, although age and part-time status (which often go together) are common defining characteristics (Bean & Metzner, 1985). An NCES study examining the relationship between non-traditional status and persistence in postsecondary education identified non-traditional students using information on their enrollment patterns, financial dependency status, family situation,

and high school graduation status (Horn 1996). Specifically, in this study, a non-traditional student is one who has any of the following characteristics:

• Delays enrollment (does not enter postsecondary education in the same calendar year that he or she finished high school);

• Attends part time for at least part of the academic year;

• Works full time (35 hours or more per week) while enrolled;

• Is considered financially independent for purposes of determining eligibility for financial aid;

• Has dependents other than a spouse (usually children, but sometimes others);

• Is a single parent (either not married or married but separated and has dependents); or

• Does not have a high school diploma (completed high school with a GED or other high school completion certificate or did not finish high school).

Horn and Carroll (1996) defined "non-traditional" on a continuum based on the number of these characteristics present. Students are considered to be "minimally non-traditional" if they have only one non-traditional characteristic, "moderately non-traditional" if they have two or three, and "highly non-traditional" if they have four or more. (p. 3)

Although this complex identity contributes to the challenges and opportunities the "non-traditional student" faces overall, for the purposes of this study, "non-traditional students" is defined as being17 years old and younger (younger than a high school graduate) and 25 years and older (older than a traditional college student who took six years to complete their degree). To clarify, age is the only attribute that is a primary determinant of which generation a person (student or faculty) identifies with.

There appears to be a persistent tendency for Adult and Higher Education researchers to focus on traditional students (aged 18-24) and to lump of all those who do not fit this category as "non-traditional" (Chung et al., 2014). Details of how faculty and their students experience each other as members of the age-diverse, multigenerational classrooms is reported infrequently in the literature. When age diversity and the complexity it might bring to the classroom does appear in the literature, it is usually reported indirectly as an ancillary observation to the primary research topic such as student services and technology (Hittepole, 2019; Lowell & Morris, 2019). A set of tandem discourse analyses of Higher Education's focus on adult undergraduate students revealed that less than 2% of all articles in the journals surveyed touched on the topic of adult undergraduate education even though adult students often comprise most students enrolled (Barcinas, Kachur, & McClanahan, 2018; Donaldson & Townsend, 2007).

Despite clear enrollment figures confirming a slowing of postsecondary enrollment growth after the peak in 2010 as well as a trough in some cases followed by the COVID-19 enrollment slump, there is a persistent presence of older students in college classrooms, which will continue (Causey, Liu, Ryu, Shapiro, & Zheng, 2020; Hussar et al., 2020). Notably, a decline in fertility rates beginning around 2010 will result in an enrollment cliff projected for 2026–a sharp decline in the number in traditional aged college freshmen (Conley, 2019; Hussar et al., 2020). As enrollment of traditional college students shrinks, the concern for the enrollment and success of non-traditional students as college students may be increasing as evidenced by the very recent search for literature about non-traditional college students (Chirraruvi, 2021; Faulkner, Watson, Pollino, & Shetterly, 2021; Grawe, 2021; Hafer, Gibson, York, Fiester, & Tsemunhu, 2021; Hart & Park, 2021). However, higher education as a scholarly discipline continues to consider all students outside of the traditional age of 18-24 years old as a meta-

group. There appears to be a lagging recognition that the meta-group of "non-traditional students" is comprised of four generations; there is also a frequent omission of data for the very youngest "non-traditional students" (14-17 years old) who are most often dually-enrolled in both high school (or home school) and community college.

Although the range of age diversity only recently expanded with the arrival of Generation Z in the college classroom, there is anticipation that this is a lasting circumstance rather than an ephemeral phenomenon. Even though enrollment growth in higher education overall has been experiencing a recent decrease in the rate of growth, prior to the coronavirus pandemic, it was projected that between 2017 and 2028, two-year college enrollment would increase at 3%, outpacing the 2% rate of four-year colleges (McFarland et al., 2019).

There is an expectation of a continued low enrollment trend for all of higher education over the next two decades, exacerbated by the current impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and punctuated by the enrollment cliffs in the mid-2020s and mid-2030s. According to the National Student Clearinghouse, FAFSA applications and college admission applications are down for 2021, likely due to the economic impact on financially challenged families (National Student Clearinghouse Today Blog, 2021). The bimonthly survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau during the COVID-19 pandemic explained that community college enrollment is impacted more adversely than 4-year institutions (Belfield & Brock, 2021; U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). We can assume that all types of colleges will aggressively recruit across expanded pools of diversity (DeWitty & Byrd, 2021; Grawe, 2021). This will include very young and older students to compensate for the drops in traditional student enrollment. Increasing pre-pandemic efforts to capitalize on the student success of students who begin in dual enrollment (Fink, Jenkins, & Yanaguira, 2017), community colleges are making stronger efforts to link to secondary school

pathways by expanding dual enrollment opportunities (Field, 2021; National Student Clearinghouse, 2020).

Adult students remain naturally attracted to community colleges because their programming makes it easier for them to enter classes and programs that fit around work and family obligations (Allen & Zhang, 2016; Anderson, 2013; Rosenberg, 2016; Schwehm, 2017). To summarize, colleges are anticipated to expand their recruiting efforts to all "types" of non-traditional students, including those on both the younger and older sides of the traditional age bracket. This embracing of diversity by college admissions, coupled with the anticipated higher motivation of these non-traditional students to seek out community colleges for the "supportive environment," affordable tuition, physical proximity, and more expansive class schedules will likely mean that the diversity traditionally seen in community colleges will continue expand or, at the very least, persist.

The American Association of Community Colleges' Fast Facts 2020 describes the average student demographics prior to the COVID-19 pandemic as having an average age of 28– well above that of the "traditional student" meta-group. Part-time students account for 64% of all enrollment. When part time and full-time enrollment is considered as a whole, 15% are single parents, 4% are military veterans, and 8% already hold a bachelor's degree (American Association of Community Colleges, 2022).

Community colleges long enjoyed a reputation for drawing learners of all ages in pursuit of postsecondary education, but that appeal is now in jeopardy. According to the 2018 *Condition of Education Report*, two-year institutions served 36% of all college students in 2016 (McFarland et al., 2018). Community colleges have been less successful at student retention and completion (Bailey et al., 2015). Because there are no "readiness" prerequisites, many

community college students take at least one remedial course. The same report found that only 24% of students who enrolled in 2-year colleges in 2013 and declared a goal of earning a certificate or an associate degree achieved that goal by 2016 (within 150% of the proposed timeline). This is compared to the 60% average graduation rate (within 150% of the proposed time) for all 4-year institutions (McFarland et al., 2018).

Although 4-year colleges are selective about which students matriculate (a selectivity which contributes to the higher completion rate), community colleges exercise "open enrollment." Community College professionals often say, "We take the top 100%" as a way to good-naturedly emphasize the open enrollment principle and, subsequently, the more varied student outcome expectations. The open access model began to be questioned with the "Right to Know" Act of 1990 as attention to data revealed poor retention and low completion rates to the public. In response to a call for improved outcomes, community colleges across the United States are evolving the "open access" mission to find ways to improve retention, completion, and transfer (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015).

With the sudden fiscal distress associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, it was anticipated that an unprecedented number of students of all ages would enroll in community college classes, but this was not the case. The time-tested relationship of economics and enrollment played out as predicted in the Great Recession (2008) in an inverse fashion, with economic hardship foretelling an uptick in enrollment as adults sought to reposition themselves in the workforce with new skills and professional pathways and traditional students capitalized on the lower tuition (Chen, 2019; Cohen et al., 2014; Eddy, 2019)). The Fall 2020 semester, the first academic term that fell within the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, saw the trending rate of declining enrollment in higher education almost double to 2.5 percent (National Student

Clearinghouse Research Center, 2020). Two-year institutions such as community colleges experienced a decrease in enrollment of 21% despite the economic disruptions associated with massive industry closings and unemployment (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2020).

With the added financial pressure of unemployment and attendant alienation for new students during the pandemic when all of higher education went fully online, many students decided to not attend college at all. The hardest hit was the community college sector (Belfield & Brock, 2020; Lanahan, 2021). If community colleges are to survive, it is imperative that scholars consider the efficacy of established methodologies of andragogy both in the face-to-face in the online environment, and they must attend to refining these methods. While a body of literature exists describing adult student and traditional students as they comingle in college classrooms, this study asserts that the contemporary multigenerational classroom has a greater diversity attributable to age than belied by studies of these meta-age groups. This study asserts that this age-based diversity is a vastly understudied and underestimated confounding factor in the modern community college classroom. Bryan Alexander, a futurist who studies and prognosticates on the future of Higher Education, has been tracking the post-Covid transition of classes to online formats, the changes in scheduling, and the closing of institutions at https://bryanalexander.org/. He pointed out that although many colleges were planning a return to "normalcy" with face-to-face classes, at the time of the study, it was unknown how effective the vaccine campaign would be for the overall health of the population (March 19, 2021).

As government funding decreases and the call for accountability in terms of student success increases, 28 states are implementing performance-based funding (Li, 2019). The formulae vary from state to state but include metrics centered on transfer and completion rates

for students. The outcomes of students of all ages in the multigenerational classroom are more important than ever before. Institutions are examining success metrics in subsets of their student population to determine how to improve student outcomes identified in their state's funding formula. Unfortunately, age and age diversity are not usually among the metrics which are disaggregated for analysis, and it is unknown if this data might help refine program planning.

For the past two decades, sweeping initiatives targeting student success such as *Achieving the Dream* and *Completion by Design* were heavily funded by educational foundations and philanthropists. Additionally, state-level initiatives prompted the implementation of assorted interventions to support students. These initiatives targeted the "indicating metrics" such as under-preparedness for college level work, race, ethnicity, and gender. Age has not historically been disaggregated beyond the meta-groups of "traditional" and "non-traditional,"' and it is often not included in the analyses which guide these initiatives. An example of the reliance of meta-groups comes in the data from *Achieving the Dream* where students who begin a degree program at age 25 or older as "adult learners" are considered as a homogeneous group equivalent simply to "not traditional" (Achieving the Dream Gallup, 2018) Another example where age diversity went unaccounted for is in the initiative *Completion by Design* which focused entirely on students coming to college directly out of high school (Grossman et al., 2015).

Although a culture of evidence has been established and faculty and administrators in higher education have begun to take a more empirical view of institutional interventions, the results in terms of improved student outcomes have been mixed. After the investment of billions of dollars, there does not seem to be significant change in student outcomes (Bailey et al., 2015). Many believe that this is because most interventions are based on a "student deficiency" perspective (Bailey et al., 2015; Twombly & Townsend, 2008). Often, these interventions are

based on quantitative data sets in which students are grouped by race/ethnicity and gender. They do not acknowledge or address other attributes such as age or "life stage."

It has been suggested that past efforts to support student success with tailored interventions have also left out the other side of the teaching and learning coin–faculty. In *Redesigning America's Community Colleges*, Bailey et al. (2015) contend that the success of any innovation must be based on a "grassroots" design and implementation, which intimately involves well-informed and adequately trained faculty and administration. Although *Guided Pathways*–the most recent student success intervention sweeping the nation—is underpinned by faculty investigation of retention and completion data, for the most part, that data continues to focus primarily on student needs, yet still does not consider age diversity.

Age diversity on college campuses has increased dramatically in recent years, perhaps impacting teaching and learning for the modern cohort of students and faculty whose ages span well over half a century. This study explored the faculty experience within the context of expanded age diversity in the community college classroom by collecting and analyzing data which explored, described, and reflected upon faculty perceptions of this phenomenon. The current study thus contributes to a sparse academic literature that addresses a burgeoning trend within community college environments.

Diversified Community College

Historically, undergraduate college classes were filled with the male children of well-to-do families who just completed secondary school. In the first half of the 20th Century, college became less elite as most of America's citizens began to see college as a way to prepare their youth for better jobs and, therefore, a better life. Between 1900 and 1970, the percentage of the traditional aged (18-24 years old) population enrolled in college grew from 2.2% to 25.4%

(Cohen et al., 2014). The proliferation of two-year colleges, both junior and community colleges, encouraged this enrollment by making enrollment geographically attainable.

In the latter half of the 20th Century, this youthful homogeneity of burgeoning college enrollees began to shift to a mixed age heterogeneity as 2.2 million of the 16-plus million World War II (WWII) veterans returning to civilian life took advantage of the GI Bill. Women also began enrolling in greater numbers as they began to embrace their right to embark on careers other than homemaking in the 1960s. The Higher Education Act of 1965 provided the financial means (scholarships, grants, loans) to provide for disproportionately impacted minority populations to claim their right to higher education in significant numbers (Kim & Rury, 2007).

When the children of returning WWII veterans, known as the Baby Boomer generation, began to graduate from high school in 1964, institutions of higher learning grew to meet the swelling population of traditional age students (Cohen et al., 2014; Snyder, 1993; Thelin, 2019). Coupled with the Boomer population bubble was an increase in the *proportion* of high school graduates who went on to college in the 1960s and 1970s, including more women and minority students (Cohen et al., 2014; Thelin, 2019). As the bubble of Baby Boomers graduated from high school and college, it soon became apparent that the population of traditional aged students coming behind presented a much smaller recruiting pool (Cohen et al., 2014; Thelin, 2019). Although a second wave of military veterans took advantage of the post 9/11 GI Bill swelling enrollment by about 3% overall (Barr, 2015; Zhang, 2018), the rate of college enrollment growth curve began to slow after peaking in 2010 (Hussar et al., 2020).

In response to dwindling numbers of high school graduates, most institutions of higher learning expanded their recruiting and program planning efforts to include a greater diversity of students in the late 1970s (Cohen et al., 2014; Thelin, 2019). These efforts were refined to reach

across age groups and across underrepresented populations in order to meet the *2020 College Completion* goals set in 2009 by the Obama Administration includes "Access, Quality, and Completion" goals that challenged higher education to raise the number of college graduates of "all ages" to 10 million in order to make the United States competitive on the global stage (Obama, 2009).

Although enrollment in higher education was in a low growth trough prior to COVID-19 (which appears to be continuing as the pandemic drags on), for the past several decades, enrollment growth of non-traditional students outpaced that of traditional students–especially in community colleges which attract more non-traditional students (NCES, 2020). Among undergraduate students, the adult student population was estimated to be 54% in 1986, and as of 2019, adult students (25 years and older) made up as much as 64% of enrollment in community colleges nationally (NCES, 2020). Among the factors supporting the rate of adult student enrollment, longevity increased over the past century, compounding the financial instability arising from the Great Recession (2007-2009), which then decreased the plausibility of retirement in middle age (Fry, 2019; Kasworm, 2014). More and more mature adults have also been enrolling in college classes to support second and third careers (Collman, 2018; Fry, 2019; Kim, 2017).

Additionally, with the cost of higher education escalating at alarming rates, families and high school counselors are encouraging high school students to complete college courses at local community colleges through free tuition programs developed as a strategy to improve both high school completion and college enrollment. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2017) reports a 72% increase between 2002 and 2010 in high school students' enrollment in college classes (Marken, Gray, & Lewis, 2013). An analysis of National Longitudinal Surveys of

Youth from 1979 and 1997 reported a correlation between taking college level classes in high school and completion and transfer to college (Aughinbaugh, 2012). These types of reports fueled an uptick in high schools partnering with community colleges to offer college classes on the high school campus and the establishment of early college high schools directly on community college campuses. Forty-seven states have enacted policies to support dual enrollment of high school students in community and state colleges (Kelley & Woods, 2019). According to the American Association of Community College's (AACC) analysis of data sets collected through the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), dual enrollment increased from 4.5% percent of all community college enrollment in 2001 to 11.2% in 2017. By 2018, at least 30 states reported that 10% or more of total community college students are still in high school; in Iowa and Indiana, that number exceeds 20% (AACC, 2019).

Age diversity has expanded on community college campuses to include a greater number of younger students who join the ranks of older students in the "non-traditional" student ranks considered as a meta-group by most Adult and Higher Education researchers. We might ask ourselves why we have heard so little about age diversity in the literature of higher and adult education, all while great attention has been brought to educational outcomes with respect to achievement gaps and equity concerns. Age, after all, is a "class" in that it is federally protected for those over forty on the same level as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, and sexual orientation.

A closer look at why age should be more carefully scrutinized by Adult and Higher Education scholars is the topic that inspired this study. There are models describing phases and stages along a continuum of developmental learning from childhood to adulthood (Barrouillet, 2015; Merriam, 1987). Malcolm Knowles (1980) introduced the long discussion about adult learning theory which grew into the discipline of Adult Education. There is notably less to be

found in the Adult and Higher Education literature about how to approach teaching when many age groups with diverse developmental stages comingle in the multigenerational college classroom. Business schools, scholars, and for-profit enterprises are keenly aware of differences between generations and tailor training for managers and marketing to subsets of each generations (Bialek & Fry, 2020; Buahene & Kovary, 2003; Fry, 2020; Joshi, Dencker, Franz, & Martocchio, 2010; Kane, n.d.; Kelly et al., 2016; Koulopoulos & Keldsen, 2016; Krahn & Glambos, 2014; Kupperschmidt, 2000; Kutlák, 2021; Lorreto, n.d.; Meister & Willyerd, 2021; Perna, 2018; Priporas, Stylos, & Fotiadis, 2017; Pruiu, 2017; Quin, 2010; Trujillo, 2020; Urick et al., 2017; Zhu, Yang, & Bai, 2016). Surprisingly, the discipline of Adult Education does not appear to closely examine learning differences across generations and generally lumps all students over the age of 24 into the meta-group of "adult students."

Faculty in the Multigenerational Classroom

Although every member of a learning community is important, faculty members have a particularly critical influence on students' experiences and outcomes. Faculty perceptions and framing of their teaching situations impact instructional practice. While Adult and Higher Education scholars have examined the adult student learning experience (Choy, 2002; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Horn & Carroll, 1996; Kasworm, 2005) and discussed the learning styles of the younger generations (Brooks, 2005; Brown, 2017; Bryski, 2013; Cambiano, De Vore, & Harvey, 2001; Mohr, 2017; Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Shatto & Erwin, 2016; Tuner, 2015; Tym, McMillion, Barone, & Webster, 2004; Villa, 2017; Wiedmer, 2015; Williams, 2015), the current literature offers little on how faculty experience the multiplicity of expectations from among the various generations comprising the contemporary multigenerational classroom (Barcina, Kachur, Akroyd, McCann, & Zheng, 2016; Bishop-Clark & Lynch, 1992). Studies which characterize the

learning experience of college students in a mixed-age classroom appear to only report faculty experience peripherally (Graham, Donaldson, Kasworm, & Dirkx, 2000; Kasworm, 2005). These studies are discussed in Chapter Two. Although not addressed specifically as a research question in this study, an examination of age diversity in the literature elicited a slightly more specific question the researcher wanted to keep in mind: Is it possible that the increased social complexity of the expanding multigenerational classroom presents a greater challenge to faculty as well as to the students interacting there? Thus it was determined that studying faculty experiences in the multigenerational classroom could provide important information about that environment.

Faculty are positioned to provide insights into student interactions. Additionally, faculty's personal perceptions of their students impacts the way in which these faculty communicate and teach (Royal, Eli, & Bradley, 2010). An examination of how faculty of different ages experience the expanded age diversity of their students differently is warranted. It seems plausible that veteran faculty have a different experience or perspective when they teach a multigenerational student group with many younger students than that of a newly minted faculty teaching under a similar age distribution. Do equity practices currently being touted as closing the achievement gap for disproportionately impacted students or the principles of universal design work as well for the very young as well as for the very mature undergraduate student? Understanding the teaching and learning experiences in the multigenerational classroom is essential to designing the adaptive approaches that will be required by faculty of such an age-diverse population for optimal student success.

Faculty fill many roles in the successful learning community. A few of these roles are content expert (resource), group facilitator, project manager, institutional and workplace mentor,

academic skills tutor, and coach (Grubb, 1999; Levin, Kater, & Wagoner, 2006; London, 1978; Outcalt, 2002; Theall & Arreola, 2015). Faculty may need to approach this work quite differently for students 16 years old, 25 years old, 35 years old, 45 years old, or 75 years old as representatives from the five matriculating generations: Z, Y, X, Baby Boomers, and the Silent Generation. It is anticipated that the role of "group facilitator" may be the facet of professional practice that is most critical in the presence of age diversity. Faculty are the facilitators of learning for the whole, for small groups, and for individuals in the college classroom.

Although generational divides are arbitrary, and individuals self-identify across the boundaries of group-identities, there exist definable differences across these generations in life experiences, worldviews, values, communication styles, work ethics, and learning approaches. It bears repeating that these differences contribute to a tendency to "make sense" of people from other generations, often through stereotyping or generalizations. The generalizations resulting from stereotyping can make it difficult to build the levels of trust and establish a clarity of language that are essential to a learning community's success. Trust and clear communication are often built into a newly established group through the work of a facilitator. It is important to ascertain if community college faculty are aware of or are prepared for the role of being a facilitator between and among generations as the complexity of the multigenerational classroom has expanded.

It is hoped that the findings of this study will enhance the body of literature on the multigenerational classroom as well as inform the efforts of administrators in the distribution of resources, the planning of professional development for effective instructional practice for faculty, and the consideration of age diversity by policymakers as they promote equity in student success efforts.

Purpose Statement

The complexities of increasing age diversity in community college classrooms may be impacting teaching and learning in unrecognized ways. In my professional experience, I believe that age diversity is influencing both the for-credit and career education environments.

The purpose of this study was to investigate, describe and analyze how community college faculty experience face-to-face multigenerational classrooms. Describing and establishing a baseline of knowledge about how faculty experience the face-to-face multigenerational community college classrooms can be used as an early step toward the larger goal of understanding and contributing to characterizing the holistic dynamics of the multigenerational classroom across higher education settings.

Research Question

How do community college faculty members describe their experience with face-to-face multigenerational community college classrooms?

Research Design

A core tenet of this study is that community college faculty, as participants in the multigenerational classroom, were asked to share their experiences so that the particular environment might be characterized by me, the researcher. The research design is summarized below and detailed in Chapter Three.

Qualitative Approach

Qualitative research was chosen over quantitative because I sought to understand human experience and the meaning people give to these experiences as they construct their sense of the world. The qualitative paradigm is best suited to this constructivist approach as it seeks to uncover the complexities of context and human interaction (Guba, 1978; Merriam, 2009; Patton,

2002; Stake, 2000; Yin, 2014). The modest collection of literature describing the multigenerational college classroom provides insight only into the meta-groups of traditional and non-traditional students and their interactions with each other as well as with their faculty. It does not adequately cover faculty experiences in multigenerational classrooms nor does it take into account that these faculty serve an unprecedented number of distinct age groups with increasing differences among them. By encouraging faculty with open-ended prompts to share, reflect upon, and expand on their experiences, this study investigated whether there is a more varied dynamic taking place in the multigenerational classroom than previously described in the literature.

Naturalistic Inquiry

A central perspective for qualitative studies which is essential to this study is a naturalistic approach, which was described originally by Guba (1978) as being "discovery-oriented." By asking faculty who are actively teaching in the multigenerational classroom to reflect on their experiences and observations, I collected details about what is happening *in situ* in real time. The naturalistic approach of observing things as they unfold also holds with an expectation for being open to discovering the unexpected in the data collection process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Stake, 2000).

Qualitative Case Study

Among the several qualitative research designs, that of a qualitative case study was chosen because I sought to uncpver common elements among the experiences of faculty in the multigenerational classroom. While a case study may focus on just one bounded system, it is implied that such a singular case study will be compared to other bounded systems by the reader (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). The purpose of this study was to

determine how the more age-diverse contemporary multigenerational college classroom is experienced by community college faculty *in general*. Preliminary investigation of enrollment data has confirmed that the phenomenon of five generations co-matriculating is widespread. It was anticipated that every faculty member would relate their unique experiences with face-to-face multigenerational classrooms in the interviews. The details shared during the interviews constructed a rich description of the multigenerational classroom which is the "single bounded system" targeted in this study (Stake, 2005).

Data Collection

Person-to-person semi-structured interviews have been established as a sound method for learning what a person is thinking and feeling (Patton, 2002). Among the techniques reviewed, it appears to be the surest way to quickly establish comfort in the online environment and subsequently establish rapport with faculty who were discussing the very personal topic of their professional practice (Gaiser & Abrams, 2018; Merriam, 1998). Chapter Three describes more of the data collection methods.

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Strengths and Limitations of this Study

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The limitations and strengths of this study intertwine as compelling paradoxes. I found very little literature that addresses teaching and learning in the contemporary multigenerational classroom in community colleges. This scarcity of information persisted as my search continued among Higher Education sources for the separate elements of this study, as well as for just one or two intersections with the other elements of the study. Although the foundational research in Adult Education provided an essential understanding of the adult learner in a mixed-age environment, that profile was difficult to locate in contemporary studies of the multigenerational classroom. Studies of mixed-age dynamics abound in literature associated with Human

Resources and Business Management, fields which validate the interest in study of intergenerational activities. Gerontology and Sociology researchers also report on intergenerational dynamics in educational settings. I found that the experience of searching broadly for information constructed for me an increasingly holistic perspective of the study's significance. The consideration of multigenerational settings at large informed how I approached follow-up questions in the semi-structured interviews and how I discussed experiences and relationships with the participating faculty.

Another limitation of this study is the inescapable integration of age with other forms of diversity. Exploring age diversity must take place with consideration of all forms of diversity in order to be understood at the individual and group dynamic levels. The particular limitation of this aspect of age as part of the whole fabric of diversity is magnified by this study's site. The study is situated in one of the most diverse areas of the country during a period of social activism which shines light on persistent discrimination based on other forms of identity such as race and gender/sexual orientation. I consider this limitation of age diversity being obscured by other forms of diversity as a strength, as it provided a shared context of understanding for me as the interviewer. The entanglement of age with other forms of diversity also suggests further inquiry into how the integration of age contributes to the continued invisibility of adult students.

The study site also proved to be a strength because it yielded a satisfactory age distribution among participants. Although the study took place during a time of heighted attention to other forms of diversity, it was also concurrent with mandated isolation. This isolation kept me from being with the participants, but because of the protracted nature of the pandemic at the time of the study, the participants and I had become accustomed to the virtual platform and the I perceived a naturalness to the exchanges.

My professional practice as an older community college administrator contributed to potential bias both by virtue of my age and by the power dynamic that exists between faculty and administrators. To maintain an external control for this bias, I solicited feedback from faculty colleagues during the piloting interviews and from my advisor when analyzing the data for how this bias impacted the research. Interestingly, consideration of the topic of age dynamics provided a prompt for regular internal review across both categories of potential personal bias.

Theoretical Framework

Brookfield's Reflective Lens Model (Brookfield, 1998) was used to ensure that an adequate body of data was collected, that data was verified through triangulation, and, finally, that a system for organizing the data was in place (Yin, 2014). The model consists of four lenses which guide the construction of prompts for interviews: autobiographical reflection on age diversity; reflection on students with respect to age diversity; reflection on colleagues with respect to age diversity; and reflection on how faculty participants seek to understand or adapt to age-related issues within the context of the multigenerational classroom.

Significance of the Study

At a time when student success is a primary driver for all institutions of higher learning and community colleges, in particular, understanding the complexity of age-related teaching and learning experiences is particularly relevant. Student success interventions and professional development for faculty in effective instructional practices must include the recognition that age is a form of diversity and must equip faculty with the skills to bridge the gaps between the generations. The drafting and implementation of policies that shape the funding and resource management for student and faculty support should be informed by understanding the impact of all categories of diversity in the college classroom–including age.

The phenomenon of the multigenerational classroom is further complicated by the sudden move to online instruction after the Covid-19 pandemic. This shift was prompted by the shelter-in-place directives designed to control transmission of the virus and presented untold teaching and learning challenges. A precipitous drop in enrollment has occurred post-pandemic, and colleges are faced with restrictive budgets, prompting a call to improve retention across all categories of diversity, including age (Jones, 2020; Krishnaiah, 2020; Lederer, Hoban, Lipson, Zhou, & Eisenberg, 2021; Nietzel, 2021). This is particularly essential during and following the pandemic since the economic fortunes of students in these classrooms are more tightly tied to successful completion of degrees and certificates, thus contributing to improved employment outcomes (Krishnaiah, 2020; Lederer et al., 2020; Schnell, 2020)

It seems there is a rising need to tease apart the increasing complexities of teaching and learning in the multigenerational classroom. By doing so, understanding might develop which can be used to better support students and faculty who interact there.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the primary element of the recently increased and overlooked phenomenon of age diversity as a possibly impactful force in the multigenerational community college classroom. The purpose of the study was to gain understanding about how faculty experience this phenomenon. The guiding research question is, "How do community college faculty members describe their experience with face-to-face multigenerational community college classrooms?" The chapter discussed the significance of the research as an intellectual contribution to the disciplines of Adult and Higher Education and, most critically, to the possible improvement of student outcomes.

The study design is the qualitative case study and data was collected primarily through online semi-structured interviews. Brookfield's (1998) critically reflective practice model serves as the theoretical framework. To provide a deeper understanding of the study design, a more detailed description of the theoretical framework follows in Chapter Two. This is followed by a literature review which explores extant databases and research on 1) age distribution of college students and faculty; 2) interactions and perceptions of students and faculty in the multigenerational classroom about each other; and 3) differences among the generations. Chapter Two concludes with a discussion of gaps in and concerns about the literature.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Foreword

As early as 2014, Generation Z (those born in 1997 or later) entered community college classrooms across the nation through dual enrollment and early college programs. In 2015, they appeared on the campuses of 4-year colleges and universities. That year was a milestone for higher education as five generations comingled for the first time, and the multigenerational classroom's age diversity expanded (Bryski, 2013). In 2020, Generation Z entered the workplace as college graduates. Some were already working alongside the other four generations in entry-level positions, in family businesses, and in the skilled trades.

The increased expanse of college student ages occurs against a backdrop of a novel skewing of age diversity in the classroom. Adults over the age of 60 now outnumber children under the age of five across the globe for the first time in human history (World Health Organization, 2018). The United States will likely reach that generational tipping point by 2030, five years ahead of the previously projected schedule for the nation and twenty years ahead of the total population of the world (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). *In some community colleges, adult students are already in the majority, although there appears to be drop in the rate at which non-traditional students are enrolling according to statistics gathered by the National Center for Educational Statistics. Adult and higher education researchers believe that these numbers do not capture the greater number of part-time, non-traditional students who pursue career education, certificates, or stop in and out of college in a discontinuous fashion (Barrett, 2018; Smith-Barrow, 2018).*

Leaders and policymakers worldwide have been examining the combined effects of decreased fertility, increased longevity, medical care advances, and the concurrent rise of non-communicative diseases such as diabetes and heart disease along with the maturation of Baby Boomers and Gen X, two particularly large age cohorts (World Health Organization, 2011, 2018). As the global age distribution shifts to an older population, an entirely new generation, Gen Z, is emerging and challenging centuries-old social norms. Consider that this dramatic change in the student population and societal landscape seems somewhat lost in the onslaught of pressing issues facing our educational institutions and societies.

Although student experiences are examined through many diversity lenses such as those of cultural and gender identity, little attention is paid to how the age of students and faculty influences their ability to learn and teach in the multigenerational classroom. With the growing complexity of age diversity, it seems prudent to examine the teaching and learning experience with respect to generational differences of the individuals occupying the nation's college classrooms.

Introduction

The greatest range of age diversity ever experienced in college classrooms has emerged concurrently with a national imperative to improve student outcomes in community colleges. At this point in time (2022), there is little that is empirically known about the multigenerational college classroom, as this literature review presents. It is critical that faculty, administrators, scholars, and policymakers consider this element of diversity as deeply as other elements, as it likely is part of a series of dynamic demographic shifts in the multigenerational classroom.

The field of Adult Education has labored long in the study of the non-traditional college student and issues of diversity, and the field has much to offer on these topics. The increase in age diversity draws a spotlight of appreciation on the research in this field as well as prompts a call for more studies on the interactions among students and faculty who occupy the multigenerational classroom. This chapter provides an overview of the scholarly work of Adult and Higher Education and of those in other fields who are making contributions to discussions about the impact of age. The first section reviews the works that touch on reflective practice to establish that Brookfield's Critically Reflective model is an appropriate theoretical framework. The second section provides a rough sketch of age distribution for faculty and students in community colleges and how that distribution has altered over the past decade in the United States. The third section presents the sparse collection of literature which characterizes interactions among faculty, traditional students and non-traditional students in the multigenerational classroom. The fourth section of the literature review examines the growing differences between sequential generations. The chapter concludes with a summation of the identified gaps and concerns in the literature.

Reflective Practice

The review of pertinent literature opens with an examination of critically reflective practice which serves as the theoretical framework for this study. A theoretical framework serves to ground the design of research in what is already known about the subject at hand and is especially useful to a novice researcher as a pragmatic device for guiding thought and practice during the design, collection, analysis, and reporting phases (Collins & Stockton, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Professionals assume a mantle of expertise which requires continuous learning and refinement of their knowledge and craft. Reflection is a time-honored practice involving self-examination and discovery followed by growth and change. Brookfield (1998) warns that "to some extent we are all prisoners trapped within the perceptual frameworks that determine how we view our experiences" (p. 197). Professionals have an obligation to evaluate their practice and continuously strive for excellence. Engaging in critical reflection–reflection which challenges what is being thought or done with respect to the effect it has on oneself *and* on others—is a deeply personal process. This is especially true for professionals as a good deal of their personal identity is entangled in their professional identity. The act of critical analysis of professional practice spills over and the resultant development is holistic analysis. Professional and personal perspectives are challenged during critical reflection and are either affirmed or altered if a shift in thoughts and beliefs is prompted. Changes in behaviors and habits may result from these shifts. Taken all together, these changes constitute growth.

Teaching is a complex and ever-changing craft. It involves delivering content as an expert in a manner in which many different people can understand and attain that content as new knowledge. The complex exchanges among humans as well as the organizational aspects of

teaching are best refined through critical reflection and critical reflection is often used in teacher preparation (Brookfield, 2009; Shandomo, 2010). Community college faculty are immersed in age diversity as they practice their craft in the multigenerational classroom. It is anticipated that critically reflecting on those experiences will provide insights to them, to the field, as well as to the researcher on the phenomenon of age-diversity as it impacts practice. This review investigates the literature exploring the role of critical reflection in the professional development of community college faculty and examines the literature pertaining to the application of the four lenses of the critically reflective practice framework.

Critical Reflection: Community College Faculty Development

There is a familiar adage that traces thought through to action which recommends critical reflection as a professional development strategy: *Thoughts become words. Words become actions. Actions become habits. Habits are who we are*. This adage is used in a cautionary manner to warn someone that they should be careful of how their thoughts might adversely affect their behavior. I argue that it is also an important concept to attend to "thought" when attempting to develop a new positive behavior. Developing a practice of engaging in critical reflection about one's thoughts is an effective way to regularly refine professional practice in the classroom.

Critically reflective practice is considered an essential skill set for contemporary educators, but it is considered to be a deeply personal and sometimes difficult skill to develop (Shandomo, 2010). Among the first education scholars to recommend reflective practice as a tool for professional development for teachers was John Dewey (1933) (cited by Tannebaum, Hall, & Deaton, 2013). Schön (1983) is credited with developing the epistemological understanding of how the implicit knowledge gained from experiences in the classroom can be brought forward

through disciplined reflection into an articulated form for consideration (Tannebaum et al., 2013).

Brookfield (2004) points out that critical reflection is particularly important for community college faculty, as they teach in the most diverse classrooms which are inherently complex. The practice informs faculty decision making by checking their assumptions and frees them from less-than-constructive assumptions and habits so that they can be better teachers. Saric and Steh (2017) note that critical reflection is recognized as an essential skill today, but they also note that there may be obstacles to effectively developing the discipline in some individuals. The disciplines of Adult Education and Higher Education have embraced the training of teachers and faculty and offer numerous certificate and degree programs as well as in-service professional development. Although professional development is offered for community college faculty and some regularly seek out conferences and training, there are few incentives to attend, even for new instructors (Hardré, 2012; Smith, 2007).

Even though critical reflection is considered essential for professional development in teaching, there is some disagreement as to how that training should be undertaken in formal teacher training programs (Collin, Karsenti, & Komis, 2013; Tannebaum et al., 2013). When community colleges were first being developed in the 1960s and 1970s, some faculty migrated from teaching roles in the K-12 sector where there is requisite pre-service training and exposure to educational philosophy and methodology (Tannebaum et al., 2013). Some faculty who teach in community college are also employed at four-year institutions or come directly out of graduate school or industry to teach. These faculty are not required to have pre-service training, although prior teaching experience is beneficial (Roueche, Milliron, & Roueche, 2003).

Critical Reflection: A Tailored Model

Much of what we experience is taken in as tacit learning and is not easily articulated. This tacit learning builds beneath our consciousness and becomes the fabric of the filters of our perception. These filters may take the form of assumptions, biases, predilections, and blind spots. This reflection is meant to bring forward these deep-seated filters for examination, providing opportunity to change the way we think and feel and behave.

There are several well-established models for reflective thinking: Atkins & Murphy Model (1993); Bain's 5Rs (Amhag, 2020); Brookfield's Critically Reflective Practice Model (2005); Driscoll Model (1994); Gibbs Reflective Cycle (1988); John's Model for Structured Reflection (2006); Kolb Reflective Cycle (1984); Mezirow Model of Transformative Learning (1991); Rolfe Framework for Reflexive Learning (Rolfe, Freshwater, & Jasper, 2001); and the Schön Model (1991). Most of these models were developed within a specific discipline to serve a specific purpose. For example, Mezirow's transformative learning model (1991) seeks to describe how adults in general learn and is foundational to contemporary adult learning theory in Adult Education.

Brookfield's model also springs from Adult Education, but it was developed around the experiences of educators, specifically, and with the purpose of sensitizing educators to the power dynamics of their classroom and institutions at large (Brookfield, 2005; Merriam, 2017). Brookfield notes that reflective practice theorists converged on the conviction that educators should do more than convey the thoughts and ideas of experts–they should "develop their own contextually sensitive theories" (Brookfield, 2002, p. 32) and challenge the ideologies of institutionalized classism (Brookfield, 2005).

Critical Reflection: The Four Lenses

The Critically Reflective Practice Model identifies four sources of experiential input. The four "lenses" of the model encourage faculty to examine how and why they think and feel the way that they do (Brookfield, 2017). These four lenses were aptly named by Brookfield (2005) as "Critically Reflective Lens One: Autobiographical Experiences of Learning" (p. 32.); "Critically Reflective Lens Two: Learners' Eyes" (p. 33); "Critically Reflective Lens Three: Our Colleagues' Experiences" (p. 34); and "Critically Reflective Lens Four: Theoretical Literature" (p. 35). Brookfield (2002) explained that the research of the time supported inclusion of each of these lenses in his model. Contemporary research supports the continued use of each lens for critical assessment of instructional practice.

The first of the four lenses, the autobiographical lens, serves as an exercise for faculty to reflect on how their student experiences impact their current instructional practice (Brookfield, 2002). Brookfield notes that these early experiences in the classroom are "profound" (p. 33) and reflecting on them is likely to elicit a strong emotional response. Processing information that carries a heavy emotional load is challenging but can result in particularly significant self-discovery (Brookfield, 2004). This lens is particularly relevant in the ongoing and contemporary racial justice movement prompted by the killing of George Floyd. Faculty must examine their personal biases as they are "helping learners identify and counter racists ideas and actions they detect in themselves and others" (Brookfield, 2014, p. 89).

The second of the four lenses, the student lens, prompts faculty to see themselves "through learners' eyes" (Brookfield, 2002, p. 5). Brookfield (2002) notes that considering how students perceive them may be among the most "surprising elements in any community college teacher's career" (p. 33). Brookfield reports that practitioners in the late 1980s and 1990s gained

useful insights from students using informal in-class assessments. Both Flodén (2017) and Madouit (2018) found that informal and formal student feedback is valued by faculty in providing insights to improve their instructional practice. Brookfield (2002) notes that "seeing their practice through learners' eyes helps teachers teach more responsively" (p. 34). Regular reflection through this lens has the potential to help faculty develop the capacity to be vulnerable and authentic in the classroom, enhancing their credibility with students (Brookfield, 2006),

The third lens of the four lenses, the colleague lens, guides faculty to consider the influence of experiences and interactions with other faculty (Brookfield, 2002). Teaching is a solo activity for the most part. Brookfield notes that feelings of isolation make faculty feel vulnerable. In *Redesigning America's Community Colleges*, Bailey, Jaggars, and Jenkins (2015) remark that isolation among community college faculty is particularly problematic because it diminishes their opportunities to learn from and gain support from one another. Brookfield (2002) explains that an antidote to this isolation is interaction with other faculty—this solution is particularly resonant post-pandemic with the extreme isolation faculty across the nation have felt.

The fourth and final lens, the theoretical literature lens, directs faculty to access reputable sources of information to gain understanding on their reflections from the other three lenses as well as to gain new information on which to reflect (Brookfield, 2002). Brookfield notes that faculty often do not seek help in any form as they suffer from imposter syndrome–an abiding impression that they are not prepared to do the work which they value so highly (Brookfield, 2002). This lens is more intimately affirmed in Brookfield's most recent book, *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher* (2017). Although his writing and scholarly contributions to Adult

Education continue to be relevant through the decades and are prized across many disciplines,

Brookfield reports that even he has feelings of "impostership."

Age Distribution

Although enrollment reports and their interpretation presented in the literature in this next

section indicate that half or more of all students in community colleges are non-traditional

students, there are also indications that this group has higher rates of attrition and a more

precipitous drop in first-year student enrollment than for traditional students. This trend might be

considered as evidence that understanding the multigenerational classroom is essential to

informing effective strategies to serve the non-traditional student population.

Age Distribution of Students

Community colleges have traditionally served a large percentage of all undergraduates in

the United States, and a disproportionate number of non-traditional students (Cohen et al., 2019).

Recall from Chapter One that, for this study, the definition of a non-traditional student is based

on age. Later in this chapter, it will be established that age is also relative in terms of what

generation(s) a student (or faculty) identifies with. In community colleges, where part time

enrollment and scheduling flexibility support working adults and where high school students are

encouraged to enroll, the percentage of non-traditional students is higher (Cohen et al., 2019). In

Fall 2017, 41% of the nation's undergraduates were enrolled in the nation's 1050 community

colleges (AACC FastFacts, 2020). When public two-year college enrollment is examined by age

group for Fall 2017, 11.34% were under the age of 18, 54.52% were 18-24 years old, and

34.14% were over the age of 24 (NCES, 2019). Combining all students enrolled for Fall 2017

who fell on either the younger or older sides of the traditional student age range of 18-24 years of

age, 45.45% are classified as non-traditional based on age alone in two-year colleges (NCES, 2019).

Following the post-Great Recession enrollment peak of 13.7 million in 2010, all colleges experienced a trough with enrollment leveling off at just under 13 million in Fall 2017 (Snyder, de Bray, & Dillow, 2019). According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC Fast Facts, 2018) the number of students over the age of 22 was 49% in 2016 and that number dropped to 47% in 2018 (AACC Fast Facts, 2020). At public two-year institutions, the rate of decline in enrollment for students over the age of 24 was greater in 2017 to 2019 than for traditional students (Juszkiewicz, 2020).

With the advent of the pandemic, enrollment in all colleges moved from a slowed growth trend which began after the post-Great Recession enrollment peak of 2010 to solid negative numbers (Causey et al., 2020; Floyd, 2021). Undergraduate enrollment across all institutions declined 4.4% with a drop of 13% in first-year student enrollments between Fall 2019 and Fall 2020 (Alexander, 2020; NSCRC, 2021). Community college enrollment was particularly hard hit. Over 40% of households report having a student who canceled all community college plans with another 15 % undertaking a reduced course load or switching programs entirely (Belfield & Brock, 2020; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2021). This is twice the reduction in first year enrollment experienced by four-year colleges (Belfield & Brock, 2020).

In summary, community colleges enroll a disproportionate number of non-traditional students as defined by age, and there is evidence that overall enrollment is declining. Future projections indicate that we may expect to see increased diversity, including age, in higher education. The complexities wrought by the pandemic are

currently being examined and more about how non-traditional students are impacted will unfold in the future (Alexander, 2021; Floyd, 2021; NSCRC, 2021).

Age Distribution of Community College Faculty

Faculty contribute to the complexity of age diversity in the community college classroom as they hale from as many as four of the extant six generations. Given that curriculum faculty are required to have at least a master's degree in the discipline in which they teach, and continuing education faculty typically bring a combination of education and professional experience into their roles, the youngest age a community college faculty is estimated to be likely 24 years old. Rosser and Townsend (2006) listed the average age of faculty to be 50 in their study of faculty at junior colleges. According to Heuer et al. (2004), part-time faculty across all higher education institutions tend to be slightly younger at an average of 49.2 years of age compared to the average 49.8 years of age of full-time faculty. With the retirement of more and more Baby Boomers, the median age for the U.S. workforce is 42, but that of tenured faculty remains at 49 (McChesney & Bichsel, 2020). Thirteen percent of tenured faculty are over the age of 65 (McChesney & Bichsel, 2020). In the state in which this study took place, 9.39% of full-time tenured community faculty were over the age of 65 compared to 15.17% of part-time and temporary community faculty (State Database, 2021).

Reporting a high level of job satisfaction, good health benefit packages, and fiscal security concerns, the number of tenured faculty across higher education nearly doubled between 2000 and 2010 (Campbell et al., 2016). National Public Radio (Marcus, 2015) reported that over 72% of faculty plan to put off retiring beyond the age of 65, prompting some universities to fiscally incentivize retirement. The percentage of faculty delaying retirement in higher education is double that of other industries (Marcus, 2015).

A sudden uncertainty about the national and local economy erupted in 2020 with the COVID-19 pandemic. This open-ended uncertainty is likely to increase faculty concerns about money and increase the level of delayed retirement. A survey conducted by the retirement data service Voya Financial reported that 54% of all employed professionals plan to work in retirement (*Business Wire*, 2020). Forbes reported on a set of polls which reflected that the number of people who are over 50 in the general workforce who plan to work full-time in retirement was 19% as of December 2020, up from 8% in May 2020 (Ghilarducci, 2020). The declining enrollment due to COVID-19 is also likely to influence the efforts of institutions to manage the size of their faculty ranks in response to fluctuations in enrollment and expectations for technology literacy (McChesney, 2020). Prior to the pandemic, in some universities with nursing programs, the opposite had been true with research conducted to learn how to retain the aging nursing faculty who reach retirement age because of the expected wave of retirements which were expected to begin in 2020 (Williamson, Cook, Salmeron, & Burton, 2010).

Interactions and Perceptions in the Multigenerational Classroom

With such a large number of non-traditional students, we might expect a wealth of information coming from scholarly research about the nuanced differences among age groups and the complexities of teaching and learning as learners converge in the multigenerational classroom. Remarkably, that is not the case. Donaldson and Townsend (2007) determined through discourse analysis that there was a relatively low level of research in adult and higher education journals on adult undergraduate students from 1990 to 2003. Barcinas et al.'s (2018) meta-analysis found this pattern of relatively little adult undergraduate research persisted from 2004 through 2017 within the disciplines of Adult Education and Higher Education. In the

Barcinas et al. (2018) study, out of the 7,674 papers identified in 14 top tier Higher Education

journals, only 2.07 % contained references to adult students in undergraduate classrooms.

We can assume that if "adult students" (a.k.a., "non-traditional students") are present,

then the college classroom may be considered multigenerational. Categorical analysis of the

articles touching on adult undergraduate students established these themes related to the

multigenerational classroom:

- Student perceptions of one another and of their faculty with respect to age,

- Faculty perceptions of traditional and non-traditional students, and

- Best practices and professional development for faculty related to intergenerational college

  classrooms.

Student Perceptions of Themselves and Others

The literature reports on the self-identity of adult students and their perceptions of their

traditional peers as well as their faculty. In turn, the perceptions of traditional students of their

non-traditional peers are reported.

Adult Student Self-Identity

A comparison of literature which addresses adult student identity reveals that this meta-

group shares some common attributes with respect to the way they perceive themselves, the

younger students in their classes, and the faculty who teach in the multigenerational classroom.

Common findings across the literature describing self-image in adult students include their

valuing prior life experiences and committing a greater amount of time to learning and being

serious about their studies. They perceive that they may be "out of place" among traditional age

students in the classic hierarchal classroom. Conversely, they are self-directed and have clear

academic goals although these may not always align with those of their faculty and institution

(Bye, Pushkar, & Conway, 2007; Goto & Martin, 2009; Kanter Public Learning and Work Institute, 2018; Lin, 2017). Adult students have rich and varied life experiences and tend to overlay new information onto the life lessons they have learned (Graham et al., 2000; Tønseth, 2018). The reason some adult students return to college is that they encountered difficulty in earlier academic attempts, and these earlier experiences color their current effort (Goto & Martin, 2009; Kanter Public Learning and Work Institute, 2018; Kasworm, 2005). Additionally, they sometimes feel less prepared for college level work because they have been out of school and have not been using academic skills for a number of years (Goto & Martin, 2009; Kasworm, 2005). Among other challenges adult students may experience is establishing a work, family, education balance as many have dependents to support (Bergman, Gross, Berry, & Schuck, 2014). They may find it difficult to pay tuition and then purchase expensive textbooks (Bergman et al., 2014; Goto & Martin, 2009; Ritt, 2008). They may be the first in their family to attend college and lack academic skills or suffer from a lack of direction or institutional savvy (Bergman et al., 2014; Kasworm, 2014; Osam, Bergman, & Cumberland, 2017).

Adult Student Perceptions of Traditional Students and Their Faculty

Adult students tend to compare themselves to what they perceive to be the "ideal student"–the traditional age student 18 to 24 years old (Bishop-Clark & Lynch, 1992; Kasworm, 2005). They recognize they are coming to school later in life and may be perceived as "lesser" performers (Chen, 2017). This may enhance performance in some cases and depress performance in other cases (Jameson, 2020; O'Brien & Hummert, 2006; Serowick, 2017). In early Adult Education studies, adult students were less likely than traditional students to report benefits of being in a mixed-age classroom (Bishop-Clark & Lynch, 1992; Brooks, 2005; Kasworm, 2005).

This may be because they see themselves as "out of place" in relation to the "traditional student" (Allen, 2018; Chen, 2017; Goto & Martin, 2009; Kasworm, 2005; Serowick, 2017).

Despite assuming that traditional students are the "right age" and therefore the "ideal student," adult students report a perception that traditional students do not seem to be as serious or prepared as they are about learning (Bishop-Clark & Lynch, 1992; Kasworm, 2005; Serowick, 2017). They perceive that the teaching and learning in the classroom is hobbled by younger students' inability to grasp the more sophisticated points of a lesson (Brooks, 2005). Adults appear to prefer working in groups with other adults and measure their own academic progress against students closer to their age (Bishop-Clark & Lynch, 1992; Duff, 2010). Antithetical to this, in studies that promoted intergenerational understanding through facilitated projects, adult students reported gaining respect for younger students (Duff, 2010; Frame & Ballah, 2015). In this study, students of all ages reported gaining understanding about how different generations learn and expressed an improved willingness to engage with other generations in the future (Duff, 2010; Frame & Ballah, 2015).

Adult students relate that they became more aware of age-related stereotypes when exposed to younger students (Brooks, 2005; O'Brien & Hummert, 2006). They also reported that they recognized the advantage of being exposed to younger students as they would be interacting with this age group in the workplace (Brooks, 2005; Duff, 2010; O'Brien & Hummert, 2006). Adult students, like their traditional peers, reported that perceived differences between themselves and younger students seems to be based less on chronological age and more on the transitions to independence the younger students had yet to make (Brooks, 2005; Osam et al., 2017). Just as adult students perceive traditional age students as "different' than themselves, the traditional age student also recognizes how different the older adult students are. Each meta-

group brings assumptions and stereotypes about the other that may affect the teaching and learning environment for faculty.

Traditional Student Perceptions of Adult Student Peers

Studies of traditional students (aged 18-24) and of adult postsecondary students reveal both the challenges and the benefits of having a mixed-age population in a single classroom. Challenges appear to arise from perceptions about favoritism of teachers for adult students, undesirable behaviors from adult students, the expectation that adult students know more and are not fully contributing as resources (Bishop-Clark & Lynch, 1992), or that adult students held the class back in technology-oriented classes because of their lack of experience (Brooks, 2005; Frame & Ballah, 2015). Traditional students report a perception that their teacher liked the older students better and suspected that this relationship provided adult students with unfair advantages (Bishop-Clark & Lynch, 1992). They note that adult students sometimes behave in a parental manner, making statements about the inexperience of their younger peers (Bishop-Clark & Lynch, 1992). Newsham, Schuster, Guest, Nikzad-Terhune, and Rowles (2021) found that the traditional age college students in their study had an overall negative opinion about aging unless they had a personal experience with a specific older adult such as a grandparent.

Benefits reported by traditional students of having older peers include the advantage of insight provided by the life experiences older students shared with them (Bishop-Clark & Lynch, 1992; Bourland, 2009) and the motivation to behave more maturely because of the influence of the presence of older students (Brooks, 2005). Some students report enjoying positive social interactions and acceptance by older students (Bishop-Clark & Lynch, 1992; Brooks, 2005; Robison, 2012). The tendency of adult students to "parent" younger students was appreciated in some instances, and some older students were drawn upon as a caring resource (Brooks, 2005).

Still others commented on embracing the example created by the presence of adult students that learning is a lifelong journey (Brooks, 2005; Robison, 2012). Finally, younger students noted that learning alongside older students provided the experience and skills for constructively interacting with people of all ages, which they knew they needed in other life situations (Brooks, 2005). Traditional students reported that they associated most differences between themselves and adult students being related more to life experience than to chronological age (Brooks, 2005). As traditional age students contemporary with this study come from an entirely new generation, Generation Z, their perceptions may not align with those reported here from the literature.

It should be noted that the designation of "traditional age" for a student is reflective of a developmental phase. That student is evolving from being dependent on others for sustenance and structure to being self-sufficient and self-directed. In reality, the generational identity of the "traditional age" student shifts over time and this may affect the developmental process or other facets of the teaching and learning dynamics for faculty.

Student Perceptions of Faculty as Influenced by Age

It should be noted that several descriptions of adult students found in the literature characterized a specific generation at a specific period of their developmental journey while the "influence" of age as an attribute contributing to how a person is "identified" by others persists.

According to Kasworm's study (2005), adult students felt that their teacher preferred the traditional student, whom they perceived to be much more attentive to the power structure which gave the teacher complete authority. As is described later in this chapter, older generations are much more oriented to a power hierarchy in the classroom. Are the Kasworm's findings about

adult students just as relevant for GenX and GenY as they were for the Baby Boomers she was likely observing in the 2005 study?

The age of an instructor appears to influence how they are perceived by their students. Arbuckle and Williams (2003) determined that students who rated the same stick figure animation of a lecture differently based on a change in the given age and gender of the imaginary faculty appeared to be more accepting of younger male professors than older male professors or women professors of any age. This phenomenon seems to have persisted from earlier studies (Levin, 1988; Stolte, 1996) and is cited by Basow and Martin (2013) as possibly dated. It is unknown if this particular phenomenon of age bias persists in students from Gen X and Gen Y.

Faculty Perceptions of Students

Faculty have reported that they perceive adult students' contributions to discussions were richer and more on point (Bishop-Clark & Lynch, 1992; Brooks, 2005). They also reported a higher level of course work delivered by adult students (Brooks, 2005). Some faculty felt that the multigenerational classroom was not as beneficial for adult students as it was for traditional students (Brooks, 2005; Newberry, 2014). Faculty reported recognizing that the integration of age groups seemed to give all students the opportunity to explore and dismantle the effects of stereotyping people from a different age group (Bulot & Johnson, 2007; Brooks, 2005). Faculty also reported benefits for themselves of having adult students present. They enjoyed the stimulating conversation and noted that adult students were more likely to complain about poor teaching and comment on good teaching (Bishop-Clark & Lynch 1992; Brooks, 2005). Faculty thought these particular contributions were also advantageous to the younger students (Brooks, 2005). Yet faculty also report being at a loss on how to teach students who do not fall within the traditional student age range (Bulot & Johnson, 2009).

Just as a student's generational identity is likely to impact their perception of peer students, faculty age is also likely to impact their perceptions of students of different ages. In this survey of the literature, the three age-related topics which focus on faculty across all educational sectors were (1) perceptions of and by faculty related to age, 2) advice for professional practice, and (2) mentorship as a training strategy.

Factors Which May Influence Faculty Perceptions of Students

Inflexible teaching practices and expectations as well as institutional expectations for student outcomes across all age groups of students may influence faculty perceptions of students. Kember and Gow (1994) postulate that student outcomes are affected by how faculty perceive teaching. Royal et al. (2010) add the dimension of discipline, noting that faculty expectations for students are less flexible in the physical sciences and continue to become more adaptable to student development as disciplines approach the social science end of the spectrum. Finally, increasing pressure on faculty to facilitate better student outcomes at the policymaking, governmental, and institutional levels is linked to a decline in the quality of teaching by Fenwick (2001). With this in mind, experts sometimes make professional development recommendations. The summarized literature in the next section highlights practical suggestions for how faculty might improve instructional practice.

Best Practices and Professional Development for Faculty in the Multigenerational Classroom

Best practices for faculty to facilitate the multigenerational classroom was a recurring theme in the literature. Faculty express a desire for professional development so that they are better prepared to teach adult students (Newberry, 2013). Among the recommendations are being aware of the differences between generations and facilitating discourse within the classroom to

articulate the assumptions students of different ages make about each other; a similar

recommendation is providing a civil discourse practicum (Ash & Walters, 2015; Bishop-Clark &

Lynch, 1992; Joshi et al., 2010; Twenge, 2009). Exercises to establish commonalities and

dismantle age-related stereotypes are also recommended (Ash & Walters, 2015; Bishop-Clark &

Lynch, 1992; Wiedmer, 2015). Among these are having the class complete a personality audit

using the Myers Briggs inventory and directing the construction of group work to distribute

decision making and voice (Bishop-Clark & Lynch, 1992). Because college was originally seen

as an extension of the education of youth, little consideration was given for the inclusion of adult

education methodologies to enhance teaching effectiveness (Donavant, Daniel & MacKewn,

2013). Donavant et al. (2013) note that the convergence of more mature students with traditional

students in the "mixed-age classroom" should prompt faculty to adopt situational methodologies

which intertwine with the life-experience honoring principles of andragogy with the more

structured principles of pedagogy. Service learning projects are suggested to support building

relationships between older and younger (Andreoletti & Howard, 2018; Bulot & Johnson, 2007).

Bishop-Clark and Lynch (1992), who are established teachers in the multigenerational

classroom, recommend that faculty engage in peer evaluation to detect possible inequities in the

way that faculty interact with their younger and older students. This recommendation reflects an

expectation that faculty exercise neutral or inclusive behaviors toward all students.

Mentoring, which is inherently intergenerational, has been identified in the K-12 and

four-year college sectors as an effective professional development practice. Generally, younger

faculty are paired with older, more experienced faculty. Generational gaps among teachers in the

K-12 sector of education is a central concern with respect to the retention of new teachers (Edge,

2014; Edge, Descours, & Frayman., 2016; Johnson & Kardos, 2005; Lukacs, 2012; Rinke,

2009). Professional development among faculty in four-year colleges is heavily linked to mentorship (Bean, Lucas, & Hyers, 2014; Bland, Taylor, Shollen, Weber-Main, & Mulcahy, 2009; Boillat & Elizov, 2014; Huston, Taylor, Shollen, Weber-Main, & Mulcahy, 2007; Jeffers & Mariani, 2017; Monk, Irons, Carlson, & Walker, 2010). The lack of formal mentorship among community college faculty contributes to their professional isolation and may be linked to low instructional mastery which has been linked with lower student outcomes (Bailey et al., 2015; Grubb et al., 1999; Outcult, 2002).

This chapter began by identifying two main these in the literature of Adult and Higher Education: age distribution and student perceptions of one another and their faculty. This final section of the literature review necessarily includes the literature of other disciplines in order to collect observations and data characterizing the extant generations as quite different from one another.

The Differences Among the Generations

The call to define and shape effective communication across generational divides seems to be more robust in the fields of Business and Human Resource Development, Gerontology, Adult Development, Adult Psychology, and Sociology, for example. During the search for literature relevant to this study, I came to recognize that while scholars specializing in human resource development appear to be active in characterizing age-related distinctions, those scholars and practitioners who are shaping the current slate of student success initiatives do not appear to be taking age-diversity into account at its richest and most integral levels. It is unlikely that differences between generations are any more impactful in the workplace than in the classroom since the higher education arena of teaching and learning as well as the business arena of collaboration and productivity are influenced by motivation, communication styles, and

personal values. For example, at the institutional level, Wiedmer (2015) advises business leaders as well as school leaders in all sectors of education to be informed about generational differences in order to be more effective in bridging generational differences among their teams.

The variation between the approaches to work by different generations is reported in the descriptions of generations later in this chapter because students are socialized into professional teamwork and problem-solving skills by their participation in collaborative learning experiences in the classroom and by what they see in practice at their educational institutions. Different work attributes can be traced to different learning experiences and, ultimately, to the very different life experiences and worldviews held in common by individuals in each generation. In order to get a sense of how age diversity may be impacting teaching and learning in community college classrooms, I argue that it is important to consider how each generation experienced the world in their formative years and how these experiences shaped them collectively.

Why Look Closely at the Five Generations?

The concept of generational differences is a foundational element for this study. Although the scope of this study focuses exclusively on faculty in the multigenerational community college classroom and does not include their students, there are considerations that support examining the differences between *all* generations–even the youngest:

- Details of the isolation and stereotyping associated with disproportionately impacted populations are studied extensively in Higher Education literature but the intersection of descriptive attributes rarely includes age.
- Age diversity can be defined by generationally situated attributes as well as a wide range of years identifying with a specific generation leads to a tendency to stereotype "others."

- Identifying with a specific generation leads to a tendency to stereotype "others."

- Faculty are situated among four of the living five generations of years and this diversity of perspective may impact their perceptions of their students.

- Faculty may or may not be equipped nor aware of, or even willing to facilitate constructive interactions and communications in the more age-diverse college classroom.

Overarching all of these considerations is the premise that age is not just a number—it is a defining characteristic of the individuals inhabiting the teaching and learning space. Most people can likely discern that younger and older people are different. Older people, having witnessed many of the same world events and technology changes as younger people, may have some sense of how younger people might develop as they are but will not have the same decision-making framework. Younger people who are uninhibited by the internalized constraints imposed by the lessons of and expanse of years of lived experiences are more likely to be visionary and believe their elders to be "set in their ways" (Berger, 2017). Social theorists trace the roots of ageism to the social separation of ages that started in the industrial age when most people, except the very old, worked outside of the home (Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2005). Physiological brain activity is different as well between the very old and the very young (Reuter-Lorenz & Cappell, 2008). For a variety of reasons, it is likely that most people, young and old, simply use their own age group as a referent and do not fully understand or embrace the lived experiences and constructed realities of other age groups. The good news is that when people of different ages spend time engaging with one another, solidarity is established (Cortellesi & Kernan, 2016; Weinman, McPherson, Cobey, McWatters, Woods, Pryor, & Hilton, 2020).

Age Group Identity and Stereotyping

      Although the descriptions below may be considered over-simplifications of generational differences, these differences contribute to a group identity for its members and these differences tend to make anyone who is from another age group an "outsider" (Hale, 1998; O'Brien & Hummert, 2006). Biases and stereotypes result from assumptions made about these outsiders and are so deeply engrained that people are not generally aware of them. Generational identity can be a barrier to understanding and trusting people from other generations, and the sense-making proclivity of most humans gives rise to generational stereotyping. Younger generations may not understand how older generations are opposed to the constant use of personal digital devices, for example. On the other hand, older generations may not understand why younger people do not seem to have the same "drive" they did as young adults. Both of these situations give rise to generational stereotyping. Subsequently, communication and the interaction called for in collaborative efforts such as group projects and developing the learning community of a classroom may be compromised.

      Businesses thrive on the interconnectivity of people; therefore, Business journals have much to say about facilitating collaboration when generations mix in the workplace. In an advisory to business leaders, Buahene and Kovary (2003) explain how differences between attributes such as motivation and values between generations will impact workplace relationships. The authoritarian management style of a Baby Boomer, for example, is unlikely to bring about the highest productivity from the younger generations (Wiedmer, 2015). Conversely, because Gen Z-ers are generally non-stop consumers of social media, there is some concern about their tendency to *not* validate information–a practice that signals danger in business and industry. A contemporary business journal urges managers to develop special training for these

younger workers and exercise controls to protect sensitive communications and information during the learning curve (Stevens, 2010). Higher Education journals do not address the topic of age much beyond the meta-groups of traditional and non-traditional—with the majority of the focus solely on "traditional students."

A primary impetus supporting the consideration of differences in generations is that community college faculty as individuals belong to as many as four of the five extant generations comprising the multigenerational classroom. Because they occupy the role of "leader" in the classroom, faculty perceptions of students are likely impacted by their own experiences as students, by their socialization into their discipline, as well as by the external pressures brought to bear upon the classroom by institutional and governmental forces (Basow & Martin, 2013; Donvant et al., 2013; Grubb, 1999; Heuer et al., 2004; Huston et al., 2007; Royal, 2010). For the Silent Generation and Baby Boomers, they are more likely to gravitate to a hierarchal structure which may translate into the same teacher-centric instructional practices they were exposed to as students (Bailey et al., 2015; Brown, 2017; Grubb et al., 2017; Levin et al., 2006). Faculty who identify with the Baby Boomer or the Silent Generation are depicted as lingering and not wishing to retire as their professional identity is interlocked with their personal identity (Brown, 2017). As Gen X and Y enter the professorate, they may be more likely to accept or facilitate the use of personal devices during class time and to engage through social media and tech-savvy strategies for online education (Brown, 2017; Grubb, 1999; Wiedmer, 2015).

Finally, being well-versed in the differences in generations will help readers of this study understand the depth and breadth of the social concept of age-stereotyping and the possible impact of increased age diversity on the teaching and learning environment which underpins the impetus to conduct this study. Be reminded that other documented barriers to groups of people

exist, as categorized by attributes of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, and ability. The intention of this study is not to suggest that any of these critical attributes be ignored; rather, it is to substantiate that age diversity should be added as an salient and likely confounding attribute of students and faculty in the multigenerational community college classroom.

A Cautionary Tale of Ageism

A cautionary tale of mutual ageism played out nationally in the early weeks of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic through social media and mainstream media. As data began to come in from hospitals across the country, it became more and more apparent that the disease was highly contagious and was far more lethal for people over the age of 65 than expected. Isolation measures became more extreme and protracted. Mainstream media reported out infection and death rates. Social media platforms were alive with social chatter as in-person meetings were banned. As many older people worried about mortality as well as shortages of toilet paper, younger people began to consider COVID as an "older adult" problem (Fraser et al., 2020).

According to a popular online news page called *Insider*, the social media site *Know Your Meme* reported that a person from Gen X posted the nickname "boomer remover" for the deadly virus on Reddit on March 10 because she heard someone say it and thought it was funny. This was the day after the cruise ship Grand Princess, dubbed a "floating coffin," was at last permitted to dock under quarantine conditions to a container port in Oakland California to offload its infected and dead passengers.

The "boomer remover" nickname migrated to Twitter as #boomerremover two days later where it was "liked" and "retweeted" until mainstream media picked it up. There was a public outcry over what was considered the insensitivity of these phrases. Individuals from Gen Z and

Gen Y assured their older relatives that the meme was just a silly joke and that all the attention was an overreaction. The phrase is currently unsearchable across social media, which indicates that it has been removed by platform moderators at Reddit and at Twitter. This early national "moment" in the COVID-19 crisis illustrates the scale at which the widening generation gaps are becoming problematic.

Characteristics of the Five Matriculating Generations

To underscore the significance of the expanded range of ages, five of the six currently living generations are the most different from each other than at any other point in time. To refine this point, it should be noted that the differences between generations are increasing with the passage of time and the increasingly-rapid changes in the world experienced by these groups during their developmental years (Bialik & Fry, 2020). This phenomenon is underscored by fewer designated birth years attributed to each generation (Koulopolous & Keldsen, 2016). The next section provides details about each generation to enable the reader to recognize how much these generations differ and how each might suffer from or give rise to generational stereotyping.

With students as young as 14 and as old as 85 comingling in the same college classroom, a continuum of values and communication styles shaped across 70 years of human history will be expressed. The students currently populating the multigenerational classroom identify with one or more of the following five generations: Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z. The birth years associated with each generation capture the major world events which impacted each generation's world view (Kuppershcmidt, 2000).

Table 2.1. Society Demographics.

Generation	Population Share (2019)
The Silent Generation (born 1928-1945)	6.36 %
The Baby Boomer Generation (born 1946-1964)	21.19%
Generation X (born 1965-1980)	19.85%
The Millennial Generation (born 1981-1996)	21.97%
Generation Z (born 1997-2012)	20.46%

Note: Printed from www.statista.com.

The Silent Generation. Born between 1925 and 1945, the Silent Generation is the oldest living generation (with the exception of their rare and celebrated centenarian parents) yet it continues to make up as much as 11% of the workforce (Bryski, 2013; Wiedmer, 2015) but only 6.36% of the population (Statistica, 2020). Most of the Silent Generation have retired from the workplace, while a small group have decided to take a few classes or to pursue a long-cherished dream of a college diploma (Collman, 2018; Kim, 2017; WFLA Staff, 2018; Yam 2015). The name for this generation, "The Silent Generation," and its alternative names: "Radio Babies, "The Builders," "The Industrialists," "The Traditionalists," and "The World War II Generation" are reflective of the world events they witnessed (Buahene & Kovary, 2003; Kane, 2015). These include silent movies, radio, sturdy and magnificent structures (craftsman homes, vast bridges, skyscrapers), industrial automation, and World War II (Wiedmer, 2015). Having experienced the economic difficulties in the years following the Great Depression and the sacrifices called for

during World War II, this generation values frugality and a strong work ethic. The Silent

Generation have a deep respect for authority but maintain a clear separation between their work

and family life. They describe themselves as loyal and disciplined (Kane, 2015). For the Silent

Generation, education was considered to be a "dream" (Kane, 2015) and when they engaged in

any form of education, they prefer instructor-led methods and morning classes (Cambiano et al.,

2001).

The Baby Boomers. This generation was born between 1946 and 1964 and numbered

78.8 million at their peak in 1999 (Fry, 2019). In 2018, 29% of Boomers aged 65 to 72 years old

were still in the workforce compared to only 21% of their parents and 19 % of their grandparents

when each was in the same age bracket (Fry, 2019). In 2019, 73% of Boomers were still living

and comprised 21.19 % of the United States population (Fry, 2019; Statistica, 2020). The name

for this generation reflects that this age cohort was the largest generation in the nation's history

and is traced to a fertility spike which began at the end of World War II. Currently, they make up

46% of the workforce (Bryski, 2013). Between 2010 and 2050, aging Boomers will double the

number of people who have reached retirement age of 65 years of age.

There was so much turbulence and change during the period spanned by the years of this

birth cohort that they are often considered as two generations, the Early Boomers and the Late

Boomers (Adox, 2015). Early Boomers (birth years of 1946 to 1955) grew up practicing nuclear

bomb drills at their schools during the Cold War era, witnessed the effects of the Korean War,

and were drafted into the Vietnam War. Late Boomers (1956-1964) witnessed the assassinations

of President Kennedy and Martin Luther King, participated in civil rights and war protests of the

1960s as well as the Women's Movement, were not eligible for the draft, and were more likely to

adopt "anti-establishment" behaviors such as illegal drug use, communal living, and "free love."

Sharing the common expectations of their hardworking parents (the Silent Generation) most Baby Boomers do not draw as distinct a line between work life and private life and are goal-oriented in both areas. They are sometimes perceived as workaholics and feel they have earned the positions of authority which many of them occupy (Loretto, 2015; Kane, 2015). Over 70% of current senior law partners belong to this generation (Kane, n.d.). As the wealthiest and healthiest generation, they believe that things will steadily improve with hard work and have strong family ties (Fingerman, Pillemer, Silverstein, & Suitor, 2012). They are likely to describe themselves as hardworking and capable (Wiedmer, 2015). Boomers consider themselves to be "old school" and expect other generations to hold similar values. A significant number were the first in their family to attend college with many enrolling in community college (Thayer, 2000; Tym et al., 2004). Based on the time stamps of the Higher Education literature reviewed in the first two sections of this chapter, it can be deduced that Baby Boomers are the students on which Adult Learning Theory is built.

Generation X. Born between 1965 and 1981, Generation X, or Gen X makes up 29% of the workforce (Bryski, 2013). They are sometimes referred to as the "Lost Generation" because they experienced the largest surge in divorces and were the original "latchkey kids" (Wiedmer, 2015). They describe themselves as "environmentally conscious" and "tolerant" when speaking about themselves but "pessimistic" and "cynical" when describing their generation as a whole (Arnett, 2000). Gen Xers were the first hardy consumers of online education, the first to rely primarily on the internet for information, and are less discriminating about the validation of information they get from the internet (Sacks, 1996). This is the first generation to challenge the hierarchal nature of education and the workplace, yet they crave rewards and recognition

(Brown, 2017; Bryski, 2013). This perspective can lead to disruptive challenges to authority or constructive redesigns of organizational structures (Brown, 2017).

Generation Y. Born between 1977 and 1996, Gen Y is also known as "Gen Me" or the "Millennials" and compete with the Baby Boomers as the second largest generation (Dimock, 2019; Fry, 2020). Key world events which they experienced in their developing years are the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, the AIDS/HIV pandemic, and the death of Princess Diana (Bryski, 2013). Among the more flattering associations central to the Millennial identity is that of true digital native. They grew up with video games for entertainment and computers in every classroom. Less flattering is the perception of older generations that Millennials have a sense of entitlement and lack of respect for authority (Krahn & Galambos, 2013). Tim Elmore (2010) characterizes the Millennials as being over protected and over served which creates an expectation for structure and direction.

The country's increased cost of living and stagnant increase in wages during their developing years contributes to their perception that performance is not linked to rewards. This generation actively participates in the Gig Economy and does not expect to have just one career track (Bryski, 2013; Gibson, 2015). Millennials do not identify as strongly with their age cohort as Boomers do with theirs (Pew Research Center, 2015). The educational practices which worked for Baby Boomers and Gen Xers are expected to fail for the Millennials (Nimon, 2007). They expect a high level of connectivity with both peers and faculty because of their social media habits and are prone to indiscriminate consumption of information (Nimon, 2007).

Generation Z. Gen Z is being described across scholarly disciplines as significantly different than any age cohort which came before it (Priporas et al., 2017; Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Shatto & Erwin, 2016; Turner, 2015; Villa, 2017; Williams, 2015). Born 1997-2020, this

generation is also known as the iGeneration, Net Gen, Gen Wii, Gen Next, and the Uber Generation – all terms that denote the nonstop connectivity through their smartphones and other personal devices (Brown, 2017; Kouloupoulos & Keldsen, 2014; Menzies, 2015; Schroer, 2015). They prefer texting to in-person communication and expect immediate responses to all communications (Bryski, 2013). This youngest generation is just emerging into adulthood and traits are yet to be fully defined. The instability of current times appears to be creating a need for order and stability in this generation (Wiedmer, 2015). They believe that change is constant and are recognized for their resilience (Bryski, 2013).

They demonstrate a focus on problem solving, an entrepreneurial spirit, and compassionate and responsible behaviors that mark them as similar to the Boomer and Silent Generations (Mohr, 2017). Seemiller and Grace (2016) describe them as thoughtful, open-minded, responsible and determined. They are the most inclusive group of people in modern society, embracing all gender and ethnic identities (Wiedmer, 2015). In the "Gen Z Effect," Kouloupoulos and Keldsen (2014) herald this generation as a digitally enabled, visionary, disruptive force which will be the source of "massive innovation" and the "decimation of our oldest learning institutions through open source and adaptive learning. They approach learning as unbounded by the walls of the institution (Mohr, 2016) and may need more assistance in developing critical thinking skills but are responsible in academic tasks and motivated problem solvers (Mohr, 2106; Shatto & Erwin, 2016). As will be described later, this generation is less likely to attend to traditional power structures and may challenge the classic power dynamic in the traditionally managed college classroom where the faculty is positioned as an authority figure (Kouloupoulos & Keldsen, 2014).

Generation C. A new generation, the COVID Generation, may have begun to emerge in the last year and may be defined as the age group that does not remember the pandemic (Yancey-Bragg, 2020). Experts and social commentators disagree about whether or not this is truly a new age cohort and even what the starting birth year might be (Frometa, 2020; Greep, 2020; Rudolph & Zacher, 2020). Those who believe a new generation is emerging postulate on what that generation will become even as there are not enough experiences yet to provide a common developmental experience (DeParle, 2020; Rudolph & Zacher, 2020). At this point in time, it possible that COVID should more simply be considered an "event" that impacts all extant generations (Dickson, 2021).

Reflecting on Literature on Teaching and Learning Literature across Generations

Having looked at the existing literature and the distinctiveness of each generation, it is easier to understand how the conventions of data collection and analysis employed by Higher Education researchers might not be detecting the shift in age demographics in the multigenerational community college classroom. As time moves forward, different generations occupy the category of traditional student as well as the super-category of non-traditional student. It is notable that when the Bishop-Clark and Lynch (1992) study was completed, traditional students were from Gen X. By the time Brooks completed his 2005 study, traditional students were from Gen Y Generation—the first true digital natives.

With faculty ranging in age from 24 to 88, they span the five older extant generations. An extreme example of faculty who remain active in the classroom and in research well past retirement age is Anil Nerode, a mathematician. Professor Nerode was born in 1932 as part of the Silent Generation, the parents of the Baby Boomers. He is touted by Cornell University (Lefkowitz, 2019) as the longest serving faculty with over 60 active teaching and research years

and counting. The year 2022 should see the first of the youngest generation (Gen Z) entering the professorate at community colleges, perhaps just as the last of the Silent Generation retires.

Based on the Human Resources literature which describe the differences between generations, we might infer that faculty of different ages will approach teaching and experience students of generations that are not their own differently. For the Silent Generation and Baby Boomers, this means that they may gravitate to a hierarchal structure which is likely to translate into the same teacher-centric instructional practices they were exposed to as students (Bailey et al., 2015; Brown, 2017; Grubb et al., 2017). Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation are depicted as lingering and not wishing to retire as their professional identity is interlocked with their personal identity (Brown, 2017), so faculty of this age may not retire as soon as those who came before them. As Gen X and Y enter the professorate, they may be more likely to accept or facilitate the use of personal devices during class time and to engage through social media and tech-savvy strategies for online education (Brown, 2017; Grubb, 1999; Wiedmer, 2015). Only with further study can we understand how faculty may experience the multigenerational classroom.

Gaps In and Concerns About the Literature

As has been established, there is very little literature on the multigenerational transfer-level community college classroom. As the reader will recall, two discourse analyses of the top journals of Higher Education revealed that less than 3% of all journal topics touch on adult undergraduate students–an indicator of attention to the multigenerational nature of higher education as opposed to the persistent attention on the traditional age student. dThe literature touching on community college faculty in the multigenerational classroom is especially sparse.

An additional concern that overlays the lack of data is the tendency to lump any student who is not of the traditional age into the meta-group of non-traditional student. Regardless of which definitions are used, the enrollment of non-traditional students across all higher education is significant. As generation after generation matriculate through college classrooms, it seems important to note that the simplistic designation of traditional or non-traditional does not stand the test of time with respect to establishing a clear foundational knowledge of the educational experiences of faculty and students in the increasingly multigenerational classroom. Although we see in the table in Appendix B that institutions are making strides to disaggregate age data, the scholarly convention to treat all students who reach and surpass the age of 25 as non-traditional persists. This tendency originates in the history of higher education to prepare the young for professional life. The resultant "adult student" meta-group of most data sets masks a rich age diversity. Table 2.2 is intended to assist the reader in considering generational shift among students which has occurred over the decades and how this might skew reported data with the passage of time.

Notably, in the most data sets underpinning the studies discussed in the literature, the designation "non-traditional students" is synonymous with "adult students," denoting those over the age of 24 years, and most data sets of "non-traditional students" do not include high school students attending college level courses. While age demographics are disaggregated more in some states such as California and North Carolina, for example, the data groups do not generally capture the *generational* cohorts or even all the age categories of currently matriculating students. As we consider the findings of studies of multigenerational classrooms, we must remember that these were conducted when there were different generations present than in the current day. Consider also that the faculty who were teaching also passed through time and many

were replaced by younger faculty. The findings of past studies may not hold entirely true for a

different set of generations. We might wonder if and how the shifts in time and, therefore, the

shift in generational representation in the multigenerational classroom has impacted teaching and

learning.

Table 2.2. Relative Ages of Traditional and Adult Students' Ages.

Literature Publication Interval by Decade	"Traditional students" comprised of these generations	"Adult students" comprised of these generations	Oldest Silent Gen (b. 1925-1945)	Youngest Silent Gen	Oldest Boomer (b. 1946-1963)	Youngest Boomer	Oldest Gen X (b. 1964-1978)	Youngest Gen X	Oldest Gen Y (b. 1979-1995)	Youngest Gen Y	Oldest Gen Z (b. 1996-2010)
1960-1969	3 generations: Silent Generation, Baby Boomers	1 generation: Silent Generation	50	24	23	6					
1970-1979	2 generations: Baby Boomers, Gen X	2 generations: Silent Generation, Baby Boomers	60	34	33	16	15	1			
1980-1989	3 generations: Baby Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y	3 generations: Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Gen X	70	44	43	26	25	11	10		
1990-1999	2 generations: Gen X, Gen Y	3 generations: Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Gen X	80	54	53	36	35	21	20	4	
2000-2009	2 generations: Gen X, Gen Y	4 generations: Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y	90	64	63	46	45	31	30	14	13
2010-2019	1 generation: Gen Y	4 generations: Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y	100	74	73	56	55	41	40	24	23
2020-2029	2 generations: Gen Y, Gen Z (present as both "Traditional" and "Non-traditional")	5 generations: Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y, Gen Z	110	84	83	66	65	51	50	34	33

Chapter Summary

Although there is research and theory supporting distinctly different needs for the very young, the traditional, and the adult student populations, and there is increasing pressure to attend to the success of all students across every aspect of diversity, there is limited research which teases out the nuances of teaching and learning in the multigenerational classroom. Literature that does exist primarily focuses on how the methods for one age group are not as effective as those for other age groups. There is minimal investigation about the perceived difficulties and benefits of how students from various age groups learn together or how faculty perceive and navigate the multigenerational classroom.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Foreword: Anecdotal Evidence of Age-Related Challenges in the Multigenerational

Classroom

As a dean of a division consisting primarily of "academic" disciplines devoted to programs composed of college transfer level courses, I support both students and faculty when one brings a concern about the other. Sometimes, faculty or students share teaching and learning success stories but the majority of my work with individuals among these two groups is as a mediator or listener when teaching and learning interactions seem to have reached an impasse or when someone feels repeatedly misunderstood.

Categories of "concerns" have emerged for both groups that, in my experience, may reflect the impact of age diversity in the college transfer level multigenerational classroom. Students share perceptions of unfair grading practices, faculty inflexibility, the amateurish use of technology, and the amount of work assigned for the class. Faculty share observations of students using disrespectful communication, repeated plagiarism, students who are not always prepared or who appear to be less engaged, absent, or who fail to see the value in assignments.

In thinking through these experiences, I see some evidence that age and or generational identity may shape experiences of students and faculty who interact in the multigenerational classroom.

Introduction

This chapter begins by refocusing the reader on the purpose and research question guiding this study. Additionally, explanation and support for the research design, research process, data analysis and issues of rigor will be presented. The purpose of this research study is to investigate, describe and analyze how community college faculty experience face-to-face multigenerational classrooms. The research question is, "How do community college faculty members describe their experiences with face-to-face multigenerational community college classrooms?"

Research Design

The study of faculty perceptions of the contemporary multigenerational classroom has been developed as a case study utilizing qualitative methodologies. A qualitative case study methodology was utilized as it seemed most likely to capture unexpected answers to the research question (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002; Stake, 2005).

Positionality of the Researcher

In qualitative research, reporting the researcher's positionality is important as it establishes credibility, relevance, and potential biases of the researcher. Having experience as both a traditional and non-traditional student, a faculty member, and administrator in the community college setting, my experiences, background, and perspectives led me to and prepared me for this topic. I approach my work as a community college administrator and emerging scholar with a passion to improve student and faculty learning experiences and with a belief that instructional mastery is an intentionally acquired skill set and craft that is honed through reflective practice.

My positionality lent me creditability and facilitated building rapport with faculty participants in this study. My long and intensive experiences in community college as a student, faculty, and administrator did, in fact, facilitate the immersive position called for by Denzin (1978), Merriam (1998), and Stake (1995). I was originally drawn to higher education during my second stint in college when I was required to teach as part of my graduate student responsibilities. I discovered that even the most inexperienced teacher can *acquire, improve* and *master* skills and techniques to maximize student learning. As I had witnessed a spectrum of instructional approaches both as a traditional student and later as a non-traditional student, this fascinated me, and I grew to have a deep and abiding appreciation for the *craft* of instruction.

Past professional experiences provided substantive skills for carrying out the work of the different phases of this study. My history as both a community college faculty and a university graduate teaching assistant served to build rapport with faculty colleagues even after I became an administrator. That communication ease supported me as a moderator during the interviews as data was collected. Past experience in communicating effectively through emails with faculty made the work of drafting and managing communications more orderly. I relied on experience with confidential documents and data management to support the storage and analysis of the data.

My experiences as a student and professional in higher education may also be a source of bias. I carefully deconstructed the interview transcripts to avoid omitting data that fell within my blind spots. I also discussed with my dissertation chair possible errors of choosing to feature data that substantiated my personal views and assumptions over those shared by the collective of participants during the analysis process.

As the primary researcher in this qualitative study, I was also the primary interpreter of this data. While this is in keeping with expectations of how qualitative inquiry is carried out (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 2002, Stake, 2010), I utilized organizational "tools" to provide structure as I approached the collection of data. The theoretical framework described in the next section is just such a tool. This framework, careful and iterative sorting of data, and peer discussion and review mitigated possible blind spots and unknown biases.

Attending to Rigor and Ethics

Qualitative data is conducted to tell a story or describe a phenomenon that is too complex to be described simply by numbers. This study sought to examine how faculty experience the unknown dynamics among humans of different ages in a college classroom. The levels of complexity among the humans in this setting may include not only differences in chronological age but also in life experiences, motivations for, and expectations from being in the classroom, academic abilities, emotional intelligence, and communication skills.

The vulnerability of human subjects must be acknowledged by the responsible researcher and research protocols must be examined with critical oversight of how to approach and engage with the study's participants. The researcher's interview protocol and other research plans were reviewed iteratively. First, the doctoral student's Dissertation Committee examined the study design as part of the research proposal review process. The researcher discussed and adjusted elements of the research proposal that were flagged for attention by this group of seasoned researchers. The second was a formal review conducted by the Institutional Research Board of North Carolina State University (IRB, NCSU) where the study was examined for ethics, adherence to policy, best practices, and legality in alignment with the NCSU IRB mission statement to "advocate for and protect human subjects participating in research" (North Carolina

State University, 2021). The recommendations offered by NCSU's IRB were incorporated into the study's protocols. Next, during the informal piloting of the interview protocol among the researcher's faculty colleagues, feedback on how best to show respect and build trust among faculty, and how to create a comfortable, substantive interview was collected and incorporated to further refine the protocol. The final review came from the faculty who agreed to participate in the study. Their feedback on the data collection process was sought at the end of each interview. The feedback offered by both the piloting faculty and study participants served as informal assessments of the study protocol and contributed to the protocol of this and future studies.

Theoretical Framework: Brookfield's Critically Reflective Practice

The study was framed using Brookfield's (2002) Critically Reflective Practice theory. Reflecting on instructional practice is foundational for faculty to become more effective in teaching and involves having awareness of and being responsive to the students who are currently in the classroom. If faculty do not consciously examine their assumptions and challenge their perceptions, they are apt to only see and act on outcomes they anticipate – a self-sustained kind of illusion (Brookfield, 2002). If assumptions are challenged and effective teaching strategies are researched and employed then there is a higher student success rate, and a sense of accomplishment is engendered for the faculty (Brookfield, 1998). Brookfield's Critically Reflective Practice theory is grounded in critical social theory and seeks to describe assumptions people unconsciously make which are biased and do not align with the experiences of others (Brookfield, 2017). The Critically Reflective Practice framework was chosen to guide the creation of interview prompts in order to facilitate faculty self-examination of their assumptions underlying their reported thoughts about and experiences in the multigenerational classroom. Age stereotyping is within this category of assumptions in that simplistic profiling of

people based on their age inhibits effective communication and teaching (Hess et al., 2003; Hinton, 2017). As anticipated, the information shared by faculty within this framework provided insights into the deeper human experience within the multigenerational classroom.

Brookfield's Critically Reflective Practice theory consists of four complementary lenses: 1.) autobiographical, 2.) students, 3.) colleagues, and 4.) theoretical. The first lens is autobiographical in that it examines how the faculty member's instructional practice is influenced by what they experienced during their student days. As anticipated, it was shown that the faculty's prior experiences provided context for their perceptions and guidance for their instructional strategies and objectives.

The second lens encourages reflection about students. In this study, faculty were encouraged to share and reflect on what they believe the student experiences are in the multigenerational classroom. They were prompted to look at the bigger picture and share what student characteristics and learning looks like to them in a rich age-diverse setting. They were also provided the opportunity to relate changes or consistencies over the course of their career that might be related to their own age or the ages of students.

The third lens suggests that faculty examine their practice with respect to the influence and impact of professional colleagues. In service to this research topic, it was considered essential to learn what faculty participants hear, discuss, and observe from interactions or communications with other faculty or administrators, staff members, or counselors about students of different ages. Also considered were the relative ages of colleagues to each other and to their students.

The fourth lens which Brookfield originally intended for reflection on scholarly literature will be adapted to examine how faculty more broadly seek expert information and support their

ongoing professional development. This final lens examined the practical resources community college faculty are most likely to turn to when they are seeking guidance from outside their immediate experience and set of colleagues. For example, if they wished to strengthen a specific aspect of their instructional practice, do they seek out specific readings or gravitate to certain topics in professional development arenas? Did they engage in self-directed learning? If so, they were invited to share more about their experiences. Opportunities were provided for them to share how they prepare, problem solve, and improve their instructional practice generally. Also, among the data solicited was whether or not participants felt any of their observations or experiences might be related to negotiating the multigenerational classroom.

Because the data collected was primarily that of human experience and because there is so little known about what the specific human experience might be in the multigenerational classroom, a qualitative approach was chosen over that of a quantitative approach. The next section explains and supports the choice this research method and paradigm.

Study Design

Context

The study was conducted on several campuses within the commute zone of the researcher which consists of a sprawling megalopolis in the western half of the United States. This densely populated urban area is served by over two dozen community colleges which are supported administratively through a number of districts as well as at the state level. Of the 86 colleges within the researcher's commute zone, 20 are community colleges. The population is comprised of a rich diversity of cultures, ethnicities, religions, sexual orientations, and personal identities. Although it is among the wealthiest regions of the world and many of its denizens are among the

most innovative thinkers of our time, its rampant homelessness and racial injustice are topics of national news.

Site Selection

The criteria used for site selection were: 1) researcher access, and 2) age-diversity of the student population, and 3) a relative number of students in credit bearing courses (both college transfer and career or technical education). During the unpredictable months of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was some anticipation that the days of isolation would come to an end and people could meet face to face again. Therefore, the proximity criterion filtered the candidacy of regional community colleges to identify twenty as reasonably accessible by the researcher. As isolation mandates remained in place during the data collection period, remote Zoom-based meetings were conducted between the researcher and the study participants.

In order to explore the faculty experiences in the multigenerational classroom, campuses with the highest levels of age diversity were chosen for recruitment efforts. The student ages for these colleges were reported in four categories 1.) less than 20 years old, 2.) 20-24 years old, 3.) 25-39 years old, and 4.) 40 years and older. At the time of the study, each of these categories was represented by a double-digit percentage in 15 of the identified proximal 20 community colleges (see Appendix B).

Participant Selection and Recruitment

The primary criteria for the selection of participants was the voluntary participation of faculty who had some level of experience in their teaching. It is generally accepted that after the third year of a professional-level job, a person is comfortable with the complexities of their work environment. The minimum thresholds for establishing the desired level of experience was three years (or six regular semesters) of teaching for full-time faculty (tenured and nontenured) and

five years (or 10 regular semesters) of teaching for part-time faculty. Recruitment was advanced by direct email and through snowballing. Email lists were constructed from publicly available campus directories on the colleges' websites. Three sets of four hundred faculty were contacted via their college email and eligible respondents scheduled interview times according to their availability. As anticipated, faculty from career/technical disciplines, as well as faculty from academic disciplines, were among the participants. Among the 35 faculty who responded to the emailed invitation to participate, 34 agreed to schedule interviews.

Conducting the Interviews

Qualitative research interviews are guided by questions or prompts which are carefully constructed to elicit thoughts, feelings, and recollections about the topic in question (Jones, 2020; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Patton, 2002). The researcher found that all the strengths found in conducting interviews through Zoom as described by Gray et al. (2020) were present for this study of the multigenerational classroom and contributed to successful outcomes during the data collection period:

1) "Convenience and ease of use" (Gray, Wong-Wylie, Rempel, & Cook, 2020, p. 1292): As faculty who had either been teaching online through Zoom in the past or who had recently transitioned all instructional and institutional activity to the Zoom platform, participants were well versed and comfortable in the Zoom setting. Additionally, Zoom's "Share" feature allowed the researcher to display essential documents such as the Informed Consent Form, the Informational Flyer, and the Prompt Matrix (see Appendix A). "Costs savings" was an additional convenience as Zoom also provided recording and transcription features used to capture and transcribe the interviews.

2) "Enhanced personal interface to discuss personal topics" (Gray et al., 2020, page 1292) It seemed that the Zoom setting, which allowed participants to be in their home environment during the interviews, contributed to building trust and professional intimacy between the researcher and each participant. This perception by the researcher is based on body language and the personal nature of stories and reflections shared by participants. The recording feature of Zoom allowed scrutiny of body language and nuances of expression during the transcription checking process - enhancing the researcher's recognition of personal and vulnerable moments.

3) "Accessibility (i.e., phone, tablet, and computer)" (Gray et al., 2020, page 1292): Again, because of the recent need for adequate technology and private at-home workspaces, the participants and the researcher, found that Zoom provided a high level of access to each other. Although none of the participants expressed a disability requiring accommodation, Zoom provides closed captioning - something to keep in mind if considering best platforms to maximize accessibility in the future. An annual subscription to Zoom software was provided to all faculty in the selected community college system.

4) "Time-saving with no travel requirements to participate in the research" (Gray et al., 2020, p. 1292): Finally, there was no need to schedule in transportation time to participate in or conduct these interviews. The researcher suspects that the prevalent use of Zoom in conducting classes and for all work-related meetings freed up enough time for participants so that they were able to support this research. This may be particularly true for the participants who are part-time faculty as they shared during interviews that their commute times greatly impact their workdays.

More on Methodological Tools: Saldaña's Verbal Exchange Coding

To guide the construction of interview prompts and contribute to the building of trust and rapport between the researcher and the participants, Saldaña's Everyday Exchanges theory (Saldaña, 2016) was superimposed on Brookfield's Critically Reflective Practice Theory (Brookfield, 2007). See Fig. 3.1, Faculty Perceptions Revealed in Everyday Exchanges below. Interview prompt construction and the prompts themselves are presented in the next section.

The framework described in Verbal Exchange Coding theory (Saldaña, 2016) is designed to support understanding the lived experiences shared by faculty. Adding this framework proved to be helpful in prompt construction and provided exploration of "the personal meanings of key moments" as expressed by the study participants during interviews (Saldaña, 2016, p. 37). These five categories are: 1) *Routines and Rituals* which capture the day-to-day experience; 2) *Surprise-and-Sense-Making Episodes* which reveal unexpected happenings; 3) *Risk-Taking Episodes* and *Face-Saving Episodes* (linked in this category) which describe conflicts and tensions; 4) *Crises* which are evidenced by verbal exchange or lived experience; and 5) *Rites of Passage* which describe personal epiphanies. By directing the thoughts of participants along the continuum of infinitely varied human experience through the interview prompts it was possible to provide a richer characterization of the dynamics of the multigenerational classroom framework further scaffolded by categories of experiences borrowed from Saldaña's Everyday Exchanges theory.

Critically Reflective Practice

Personal Experience

Perception of Students

4 Reflective Lenses of Faculty Sense-making

Perceptions of Colleagues

Resources for Practice
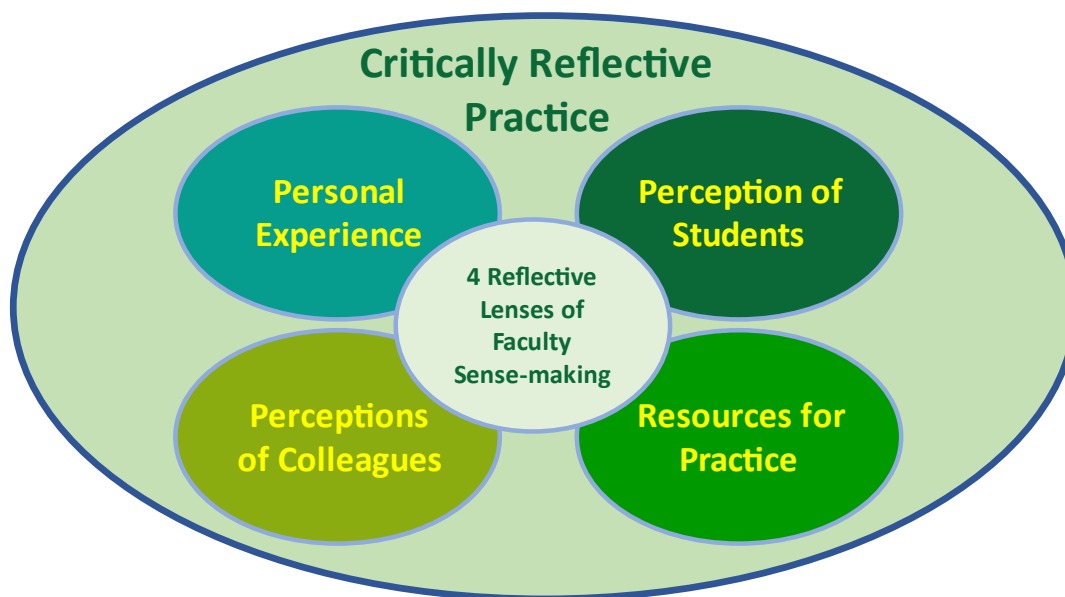
Figure 3.1. **The Four Lenses of Brookfield's Critically Reflective Practice.**

Interview Prompts

Bloomberg and Volpe's (2008) matrix format was used to organize the development of the prompts (see Appendix A) to assure that the information collected aligned with the research question and adhered to the theoretical framework. To set the matrix up, each of the four lenses of Brookfield's (2002) Critically Reflective Practice theory (See Figure 3.1) were arranged horizontally, across the top of matrix, as column "headers." The five categories of "everyday exchanges" described in Saldaña's (2015) Everyday Verbal Exchange theory (See Appendix C) were added to the matrix vertically, as "row headers," to initiate and scaffold the unfolding of thoughts and feelings about faculty observations and experiences in the multigenerational classroom. The five categories of everyday exchanges describe experiences as 1) Routines and Rituals, 2) Surprise episodes, 3) Risk-taking episodes, 4) Crises, and 5) Rites of Passage.

This organic sorting and shifting of experiences into five Everyday Exchanges categories directed the attention of participants across a range of 'everyday' experiences in each of the four areas of reflection set up by the theoretical framework. The authentic and deeply reflective thoughts and experiences shared by participants are evidence that the purpose of including Saldaña's Everyday Exchanges framework was achieved. During the interview, prompts from the matrix were presented line by line, from left to right, top to bottom. The intended effect of the intentional ordering of questions in the matrix was achieved - to guide participant's progression of reflection from icebreaker type of stories about daily routines and rituals to more personal revelations, peaking perhaps with those about crises. To provide closure to moments of trust and vulnerability, interviews concluded by considering "Rites of Passage" as framed by each of Brookfield's lenses.

Data Handling

Virtual interview sessions were digitally recorded, and transcripts were automatically generated through the digital meeting software, Zoom. Transcripts were reviewed and checked against the digital recording for precision by the researcher, assuring that the spoken word was what appeared on the printed transcript and that punctuation and spelling accurately reflected what the participant intended. ATLASti9, as utilized for sorting and coding the data.

Analysis

Transcripts of the Zoom meetings were disaggregated into words and phrases and sorted into categories according to the ideas they expressed. As the data from individual interviews accumulated in the four categories represented by Brookfield's four lenses (2017), some categories became more densely populated than others. These dense and rich categories were

reported out as common themes describing faculty observations and experiences in the multigenerational community college classroom.

Because of the complexity of the anticipated findings, a research journal, adherence to the methodological framework, and regular dissertation chair consultation were employed. Use of a methodological framework provided structure to the first and second coding of transcripts. As categories coalesced during the coding process, the researcher recognized common themes which are reported on in Chapter Four of this dissertation. Thought processes which guided the researcher in the sorting process were recorded in the research journal along with field notes about the data collection. The researcher's coding was checked by peers and the differences discussed and resolved.

Profiling the Participants

As shown in Figure 3.2, among the 34 participants who volunteered for this study, 15 are full-time, tenured faculty and 19 are part-time, adjunct faculty. To protect personal details, their ages were identified broadly in five 10-year intervals with a bell-shaped distribution. There were four 30-40 year-olds and three 70-80 year-olds. The largest category was that of the 40 to 50 year-olds with 12—just over 35% of all participants.
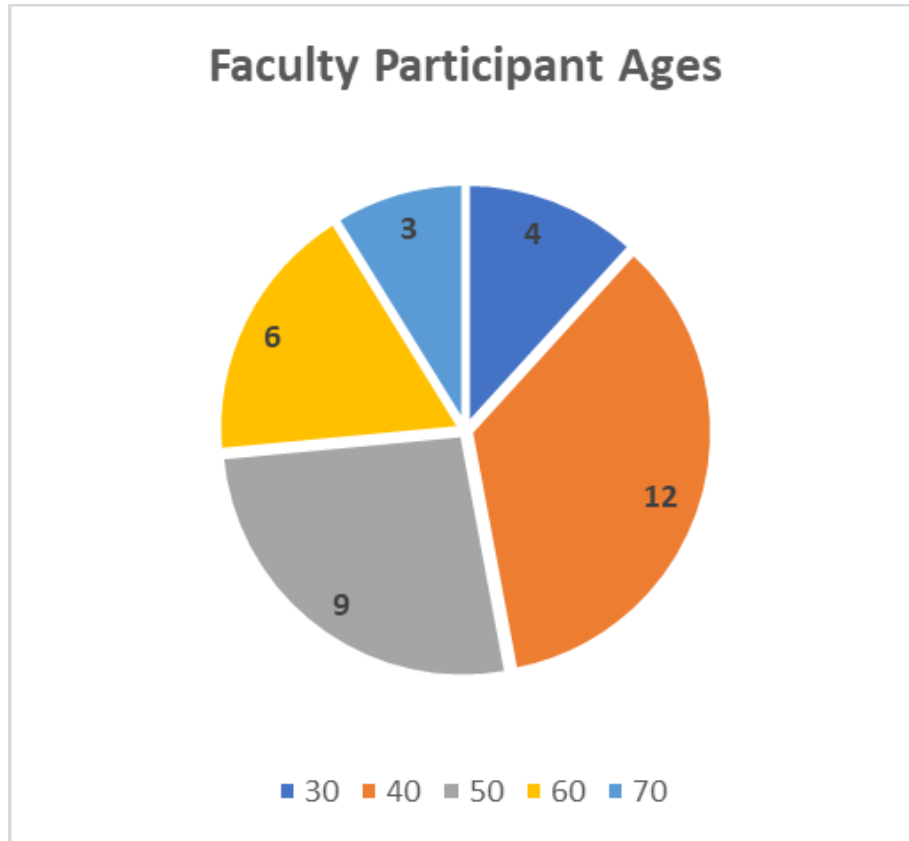
Figure 3.2. **Age Distribution of Participants (10-year intervals).**

There was a positive trend of older people being more likely to have more years of experience. However, faculty from the three oldest age groups numbered among those with the least years of teaching experience. Note a wide distribution of experience with respect to age in Figure 3.3 below.
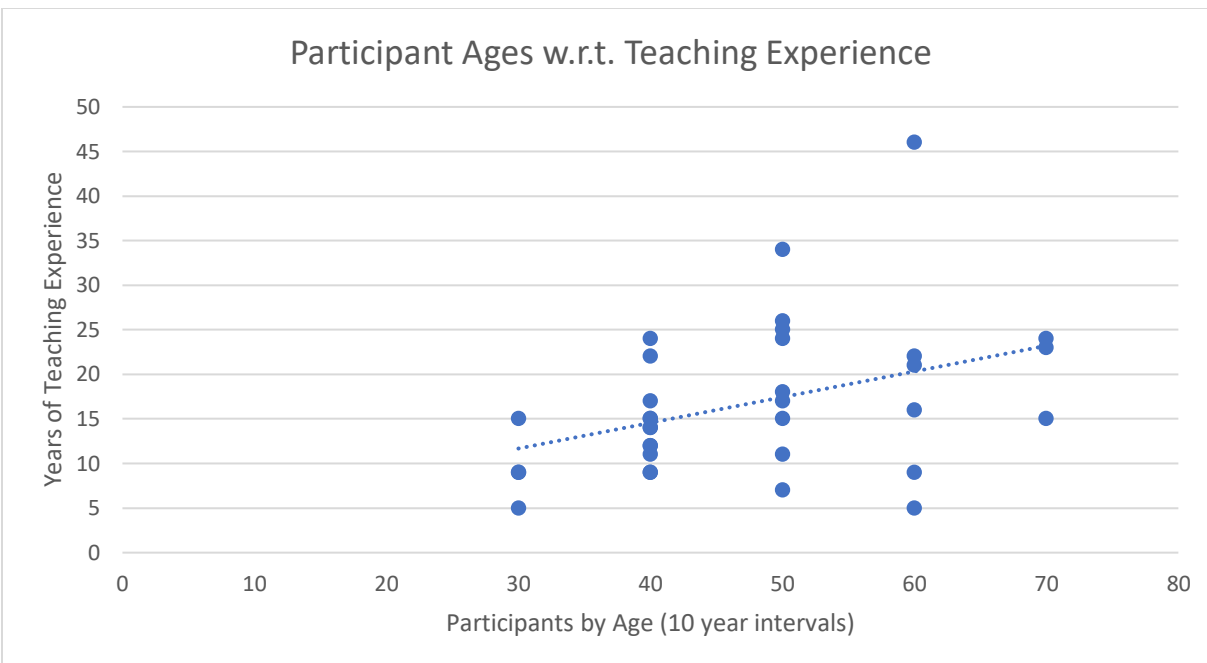
Figure 3.3. **Distribution of Years' Teaching Experience with respect to Age.**

The findings presented in the next chapter identify commonalities among faculty perspectives about teaching and learning in the multigenerational classroom which can inform preparations to support faculty and students in this setting and which indicate a need for further research in this area.

CHAPTER FOUR: THEMES

This chapter presents data relayed by 34 community college faculty participants in response to interview prompts about age diversity with respect to teaching and learning. The study addresses this research question:

How do community college faculty members describe their experiences with face-to-face multigenerational classrooms?

As the themes and subthemes are presented, the reader will note a significant variety of educational pathways and a tapestry of experiences. It is important to remember that the scope of this study is limited to learning about how age diversity influences teaching and learning. Age diversity is examined *in situ* with all the richness of intersectionality of individual identity attributes and situational complexities. This interplay made the analysis process complex, thus unto itself suggesting a need for further research on the topic of the fluid nature of age diversity and its influence in teaching and learning.

Before presenting the data offered by the participants it is important to know that while the participants knew their own ages and reported which ten-year interval they fell into, most were largely unsure about the ages of their students and colleagues. When asked to give the age ranges for their students and for their faculty colleagues, participants offered the estimates presented in Table 4.1 below. The age of the youngest student was estimated to be 10 years old and the oldest as 95. The age of the youngest faculty colleague was reported to perhaps be as young as 21years old and the oldest as 85. At the time of the study, profile information for student age was not available to faculty. Their only way to know the age of faculty colleagues was if that information was shared by those specific colleagues.

Table 4.1. Participant Profiles.

Pseudonym	Age	Status	Students' Ages	Colleagues' Ages
Sofya	30-40	Tenured (FT)	16-65	25-75
Xavier	30-40	Adjunct (PT)	16-65	25-75
Lily	30-40	Adjunct (PT)	16-55	25-65
Nick	30-40	Adjunct (PT)	13-68	24-75
Jared	40-50	Adjunct (PT)	16-65	27-68
Adam	40-50	Tenured (FT)	16-65	27-75
Emmy	40-50	Tenured (FT)	16-75	27-70
Zelia	40-50	Adjunct (PT)	16-65	26-67
Russ	40-50	Adjunct (PT)	16-55	30-78
Marta	40-50	Tenured (FT)	19-56	26-55
Beth	40-50	Adjunct (PT)	10-65	30-70
Finn	40-50	Tenured (FT)	16-75	32-78
Brenda	40-50	Adjunct (PT)	14-55	30-70
Callie	40-50	Adjunct (PT)	16-65	28-78
Tom	40-50	Adjunct (PT)	14-73	25-65
Gwynn	40-50	Tenured (FT)	17-60	30-75
Maya	50-60	Tenured (FT)	15-75	35-70
Jorge	50-60	Adjunct (PT)	16-65	24-75
Haley	50-60	Tenured (FT)	13-60	15-65
Paul	50-60	Tenured (FT)	13-85	28-75
Simon	50-60	Tenured (FT)	16-70	28-78
Jen	50-60	Tenured (FT)	15-73	30-75
Laural	50-60	Tenured (FT)	14-67	28-65
Adam	50-60	Adjunct (PT)	16-55	35-70
John	50-60	Tenured (FT)	17-67	25-80
Victoria	60-70	Tenured (FT)	16-68	25-70
Tim	60-70	Tenured (FT)	12-80	25-78
Fran	60-70	Adjunct (PT)	15-80	25-84
Pamela	60-70	Adjunct (PT)	13-70	28-75
Leigh	60-70	Adjunct (PT)	12-95	21-80
William	60-70	Adjunct (PT)	14-45	30-70
Kathryn	70-80	Adjunct (PT)	15-75	25-80
Hank	70-80	Adjunct (PT)	15-65	26-70
Amy	70-80	Adjunct (PT)	16-85	25-85

Note. Participant profiles were created with self-reported information.

Presentation of Data

The themes of this study are presented in this chapter and are organized around the four lenses of Brookfield's Critically Reflective Practice. The lenses are Self, Students, Colleagues, and Resources. Each category opens with an extended quote from a participant that was chosen to represent the kinds of information shared which contribute to that category's themes.

Lens One Foreword: An Everyday Autobiographical Rite of Passage

The biggest thing which has definitely influenced my teaching is that when I was done as an English major, I went out and worked for like seven years and worked in publishing and things like that. I wanted to be a journalist. I wanted to be a foreign correspondent, but I was really just too scared, you know. I was very young. I was just too scared to do it. And I would have to go to New York at that time . . . and nothing, no computers. I wouldn't be making any money. I'd be . . . I'd be emptying trash cans - which I was all good with, but I was too far away from everybody, and I didn't know anybody, and I wouldn't be making much money. So, it all just seemed like . . . I just I sort of felt like maybe I don't have any courage, you know. It's like you just have to do these things. So I just . . . I just stayed on the West Coast and did that for like seven years. And then took a course in Anatomy and I was terrified.

So, okay . . . so . . . so here's the passage - which is I got into science, not having really had any science. And I hadn't been in school here. I was at a community college in a different region. That was where the community college thing hit me because I saw what they did. And I saw different students who were there. And I was like 10 years older than most of the rest of my class at that time. There . . . there weren't older students than myself. I was the older one. And so that really impacted me in terms of . . . First of all, the teachers were amazing. They were there for you. The doors were open.

The students, even though I was older, they were very accepting. They would like pull me. If I was a good student and I cared about doing a good job, "Come with me!" You know, I mean, they were like . . . they would PULL me in. They were going to nursing school and going to MED school. I would end the same for Physiology. Then I wanted to stick with those majors. I filed in for every single class. It was the same thing, you know, I was the older one which seems funny now because we have a lot of older older students. But definitely - I was like 10, 15 years older than all the other students who are there, who are basically just out of high school, and so they embraced me. They accepted me in with whatever group we were doing. You know that was incredible to me. And the teachers were very embracing and very accepting and encouraging. I mean because my anatomy teacher said, "Pamela, you should go to MED school." I said, "What are you talking about?! I'm too old. I'm an English major." She goes, "Okay, no, no and no. You are not too old. They love English majors because if you can pass the MCATs and you can communicate you're . . . I mean like they're missing people like you!"

I remember, I was not working full time because I was living out of my car. Then I got to know some of the students. I had my one little suitcase, and they were very kind. So for like two or three weeks at a time - because they lived near the College - they would say, "Well come to my parents' house" or "Come to my house. You know where I live." And their parents were awesome. They let me stay there. There were a couple nights I remember. . . it was so late . . . I just went from the College and there was a big park there and I just parked the car right by the park. And I would just sleep in my car because I had to get to be there – be there at like eight in the morning for another class. It didn't bother me. It just didn't bother me. That's so weird. I wanted to do it so much. That was cool. That was.

So, I don't care if it's when I was working at the State University with all the undergraduates in the lab, or in college classrooms either being a fellow student or now. In the later years or teaching in the classroom or even when I was coaching a team and there were all high school seniors or whatever . . . my story impacts them because it's like they're all told you have to figure out right now what you want to do - the career you're going to have. You better be making some money. I mean there's the whole litany that gets in the head about it. And then there's the panic and there's literally a shutting down and so much anxiety. HUGE anxiety. So, I just tell them the story. I use myself as an example that I have had four major careers. And I'm probably going to have another one. And you can all expect that to happen. So, take the pressure off and say this is what I'm enjoying. This is what I have passion for. And I'm going to do it for as long as I have passion for it. And if I need to learn something new to do something else, I can do it. It's just unbelievable to them that this is possible. I say, "This is the truth. And don't let anybody tell you, if you're out of college for like more than two years you'll never go back.

Oh, how many times, I was told back then, "Oh, if you don't go get your masters right away, after your undergrad" . . . or, "If you don't do XYZ or below you'll never get there." I'm thinking, why would I ever go back? I don't know I never understood. Even at that time way back then. You know it's like I just don't get it. I don't want to be a statistic. I am my own person. I know that's because I'm a privileged white person that I had that confidence. I didn't have a bunch of baggage on me saying, "You won't be able to do it because of the way life is." My parents were middle class with their background and with their education and me being able to do things. It got into my mind that I'll always be able to do that. That's a huge thing. ADVOCACY. So, it's okay for me to say that to my students. I have to preface it by saying that

every situation is different. I understand. But keep in your mind that it is possible for you to do
these things – to have careers. One has to believe that it is possible to do. (Pamela, 60-70)

Lens 1: The Self – Autobiographical

The timing and nature of experiences from their student days influenced how faculty participants now think and feel about teaching and learning in a multigenerational classroom. Although interview prompts centered on age diversity, participants' reflections about age diversity prompted thoughts and memories of intersections with other forms of diversity. Race, country of origin, socio-economic status, religion, and gender were some of the topics brought up in discussions in this part of the interviews.

Memories of Being a Student

Past experiences of study participants as traditional-aged students. Most study participants recall sitting in classes as traditional aged students (18-24 years old) at their four-year universities in courses consisting of faculty lecturing to 100-300 same-aged students taking notes. Study participants recollect that this formal lecture hall environment provided little opportunity to interact with their faculty or even with other students. This was true for all ages among the study's faculty participants.

When I first came to college as a freshman, I was taking the GenEd courses. There were maybe 100-150 students in the class. There was a student assistant for every 20-30 students the professor had. We did not really work with or interact with the instructor very much. At that time there were a lot of study groups. That is how I got to meet the other students. (Kathryn, 70-80)

I went to a four-year university, and I went in this major city where I lived. I took a one and half hour bus trip to get there on a daily basis. I would say that what you experienced as fellow students were people that were probably very close to my own age which was 18 at the time when I started there. (Leigh, 60-70)

I had not really considered age demographics back when I was in school. Although you know, looking back at it, I would say definitely we were all roughly the same generation and there might have been one or two older individuals. Not like now where you have a potentially very diverse classroom. (Adam, 50-60)

When I was a student, the normal day to day class was a lot of Monday through Friday classes. Sitting in there for about 50 minutes, writing notes and listening to the teacher lecture. That's that. That's our writing notes on what the instructor would be talking about. (Edward, 40-50)

My classroom back then was still very much a big giant lecture hall. Sit down. Listen. Take notes. Become a human Xerox machine and go do homework. (Xavier, 30-40)

Those participants who attended post-secondary schools in their countries of origin were unanimous in echoing the experiences of same-age cohorts attending classes on the same class schedule with little or no interactions with their professors:

I was groomed from childhood. A normal day would be to go to college, attend lectures, take notes. There was more blackboard teaching, so there was no technology. We were sitting in a classroom of 200-300 students. I did my level best to focus and take notes. College was like 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and then we studied. I tried to seek feedback from my teachers. (Brenda, 40-50, immigrated after graduate school)

When I was a student, the teacher was the authority figure, so you didn't ask a question unless you just wanted to clarify an idea – not to question the idea. In today's community college, students question even science and materials. But at that time, we were just asking the opinion of the professor and that's it. We didn't have the power and we did not share our opinions with him. (John, 50-60)

Noticing older students. Study participants who attended college as traditional aged students recalled early impressions of the few adult students in their classes. Encounters with adult students often occurred only during their graduate years or in the rare evening class:

I got done with Grad school relatively young. I was 25 or 26 when I graduated with my master's degree and there were some older students. All I thought was positive things – that these folks, they built a life and they had children and even grandchildren and here they are also engaging in getting their master's degree. And so, I remember in my 2os there were 40, 50, 60-somethings taking on the challenges of academia. (Russ, 40-50).

When I was a student, I didn't have a lot of students that were older students. Most of the people I hung around with and were in classes with were roughly college age. I also took a lot of day classes. I guess the only time that I sort of remember a couple of times when I did take night classes - then some older students were in there and I noticed. I was impressed by how much they were just very, "Okay! Let's get this done!" in a kind of cut-to-the-chase way. They weren't too chatty like when you get together in a bunch of 18-year-olds, you very quickly wander off topic. I remember being in that night class and having the older students say, "No, no, no. Stop talking about that. The question right here is about this. Let's get back to this because I can't do this tomorrow. I have to work." (Jorge, 50-60)

So I have an anecdote from my own years in community college. I was 20 years of age and there was a 44-year-old woman in the classroom, and I ended up having a massive crush. We became study partners. I remember that she once gave me a ride home and my mother said, "So let's talk." I ended up being a guest at her wedding so that was okay. (Simon, 50-60)

Participants who immigrated from other countries to attend college in the United States (U.S.) described feeling unprepared for group work assigned by faculty in U.S. classrooms. Working with students of different ages in these groups added an additional layer of discomfort to the culture shock:

Group work was something I had never done before. Group work and a more student-centered approach which was kind of new for me even though I came to the United States for my master's degree after working as a teacher for years. I realized I didn't feel comfortable discussing things in groups. I was more individual focused . . . it took me so much time to get out of my comfort zone and experience that switch from faculty-centered to student-centered and from individual learning to group learner. (Marta, 40-50)

I had two types of experiences. One was obvious growing up in [foreign country] and attending very traditional schools and colleges where the professor comes in and just gives the lectures and you just take notes and go. There was no diversity. We were all like 18, 19, 20, 21 years old. We were all the same age group. When I came to the U.S. I was in the master's program in [a private college]. One of the classrooms was very intimidating to me and that was a classroom where we had to form groups at tables. There were administrators and some

teachers. There was a 25-year age gap between the two groups. It was very hard to get into that.
*(*Beth, 40-50)

Participants remember not being ready for college. Some participants who entered college as traditional aged students expressed regret that they did not take a break after high school to mature a bit before attending college:

I've often joked that, "College is wasted on the young." That's primarily from my experience graduating with a 2.4 GPA. That number is seared into my memory because that wasn't who I was. It wasn't how I saw myself, but it was who I had become. Then returning years later I finished my master's with a 4.0. That sort of fueled my idea for some people, certainly not all, that perspective and time matter a great deal for learning. And maybe Europe has it right with so many people taking gap years off. (Emmy, 40-50)

Participants who experienced undergraduate years in "discontinuous" swirling patterns such as stopping out and returning or taking gap years noted that as they matured, their ability to learn improved:

I was surprised at how much going away for those five years made me more ready to be in the classroom and to definitely increase my success . . . When I went back to college in my mid 20s, I noticed a significant difference. I noticed that I was more ready to be there. I was happier to be there. I was enjoying the experience more. When I transferred from community college to a four-year university, I noticed exactly the same thing. Then I was a member of - we'll call them commuter students – and I noticed that the way we came at learning was significantly different than that of the students who are say in the dorms. (Jen, 50-60).

Reverse transfer from a four-year university to a community college allowed some participants to gain their academic footing or special admission access to the university of their choice.

> *In my first post-secondary year at the state college, I took too may classes one semester and that screwed me over. So I got kicked out – I got dismissed from the state college. I had to go to community college – reverse transfer. I stuck around the community college for two years and then I went back to the state college. They readmitted me and I graduated with my degree.* (Bob, 30-40)

> *I did not do really well in high school so when I graduated, I went to a less prestigious state university. Then I transferred to community college to try to get into a specific top tier university with a strong transfer agreement with that specific community college. I went through the community college system. This is part of the reason why I believe in community colleges.* (Jorge, 50-60)

Remembering age differences (as students) with faculty. Participants enrolled as adult students noticed their faculty who were close in age:

> *When I was in graduate school, they hired a new professor and I thought he was around my age. Turns out he was three years older than me, which was a real eye opener because I was only like 33 at the time and he was a tenure track professor. It was a little unnerving. He was a bit shocked. It was kind of an eye opener. I never thought there'd be somebody this young doing this job.* (Finn, 40-50)

I had a young teacher. I remember that teacher and I felt like, "God, he's not that much older than me." And I felt like, wow, he's going somewhere right here, right now. (Teacher, 60-70)

Two study participants shared stories about very young faculty who helped them during their student days to acclimate to unfamiliar instructional settings. Both of these stories are from study participants who are first generation immigrants:

During my undergraduate years it was totally different [than it is today] because it was more faculty-centered. We were in lectures listening to the faculty member, we were taking notes. And that was basically it. But I remember we had a very young professor in my last year and that was the first time I experienced group work. (Marta, 40-50)

In a master's class, there were all these school administrators, there were principals of schools. They were so much older than me. I felt very intimidated just by the age, the experience, and the position of these people. So, even though I was scared, I went to talk to the teacher - the professor in the classroom. After talking to me, he made me sit with a few different people – people I was better able to connect with. Then I was able to be in that class and I did well actually. (Beth, 40-50)

Expressions of gratitude were offered for older faculty who provided a helping hand to study participants during their student days - especially among study participants who immigrated from other countries:

I think back then the teachers who were much older spent a lot of time with you. My piano teacher, for example, was supposed to spend an hour with me and he spends like three hours two times a week with me because he wanted to teach. We would connect sometimes, go to town, and he would treat me and that was really really nice. He passed away several years ago. There was another professor who was really old when we met. He would charge me $10 for a lesson. I would take the bus out to see him and he waited outside his house for me. He would spend three or four hours teaching me for $10 a month. They obviously just wanted to teach, and it wasn't about the money. So in some very good ways I was very encourage by a lot of these older people who so generously gave up their time to try to help shape the younger generation. I was surprised in a good way at how generous Americans were. (Paul, 50-60)

I was surprised that one my professors in chemistry was willing to have my daughter around. She was explaining things to me even though my daughter was with me in the lab. I was shocked that was even allowed because I thought, "Oh my goodness, what if something happens?" They were willing to work with my time and that flexibility was very surprising to me. She was in her 50s and I was in my 20s. (Laural, 50-60)

Participants who, as adult students, were also parents and military veterans. In addition to Laural, who is quoted above, three other of the 18 female participants completed at least some of their undergraduate years as parents of young children. Two additional female participants report being parents of young children during their graduate school years. One female participant had teenage children during undergraduate years. Only two of the 15 male participants mentioned parenting and those references were related to their years as faculty:

When I was going to school, my son was young. It was a lot harder to go to school when you have a young child. I would definitely recommend try to get your schooling either way before you have children or way after. I think it's even harder [to be a student with young children] than when you have a job. (Fran, 60-70)

Once I came out of the army, after four years of active duty, I took a year off just to spend time at home with my son. (Jen, 50-60)

Jen, who is presented above discussing her parent role, is one of three study participants who engaged in college after military service. One of these also took ten or more gap years as an entrepreneur before entering college:

I didn't have a real traditional student thing. I came back after being in the army. I was probably one of those people who is "over 25" for most of my college career. (Finn, 40-50)

I finished my diploma. I went into my country's Army. I fought in the war. I worked in [a service industry] *for almost 10 years, opening two of my own businesses. Then I decided to go back to school.* (Hank, 70-80)

Two participants report taking on leader roles as adult students among traditional age students:

I had said when I came back to school that I am not going to be the leader. I am going to come back and keep my mouth shut and I'm going to help other people. So, we were one or two weeks into this thing and of course everybody has jobs and this and that. They're really good students and they're committed but everything has to pull together at the same time and then you

have to be ready to be the group that's going up there, presenting what you did. So, as it turned

out, I ended being the glue. I said, "Look, send it all to me – everything you've done whenever

you were able to get it done whatever. We'll pull it together and we'll be ready. So, our group

made through the semester and other groups broke down little by little. At one point a group was

literally having a screaming match. (Pamela, 60-70)

I returned to community college at 40 so I was the oldest student in the class. But because

I had children at home, who were high school teenagers, I was able to relate to the younger

students in the class. They were always surprised when I knew some of the slang they used or

when I would use emojis in some of my assignments. They're like, "Oh that's 'lit'." (Maya, 50-

60)

Experiencing age diversity outside of the classroom. Participants spoke of encounters

with age diversity that seemed to them to contribute to their awareness of and ability to interact

with people of other ages. A few participants who experienced their undergraduate years as

traditional-aged students shared influences of age diversity that occurred before attending

college:

There was this old gentleman down the street who became a mentor in interesting life

ways. I would hang out with him in his garage. (Simon, 50-60)

I had the benefit as a teenager of working. My very first job was with people of all ages. I

was a horse drawn carriage driver for a historical museum. The people who also worked in the

barn, some of them were my age and a lot of them were in their 30s and 40s. A good number of

them were retirees who liked working with horses and wanted to come back and do some stuff.

So, I had the benefit as a 16, 17, 18-year-old of working in a diverse kind of place. (Wonder, 30-40)

The influence of parents might also be considered a type of interaction with age diversity:

When I graduated from my university it was a really big deal for me. I'm not a first gen student, so it wasn't like that – which I feel like sometimes it's such a big deal for students to graduate because of that. But it was a really big deal for me because I graduated from a program that my father helped create. He worked on a lot within my department which had its own graduation ceremony. My dad came and faculty knew who he was and it was just a very meaningful thing. (Zelia, 40-50)

I don't think I was ready for college. I did okay grade wise because I've been grade motivated and you know my parents are immigrants. I'm an immigrant. My parents moved to the U.S. when I was 11. They disrupted their entire life for our education - so a little bit of pressure. So, I couldn't totally slack off. But I wasn't ready. I wasn't interested in the courses I was taking or didn't appreciate them as much as I could have. (Haley, 50-60)

In my country, the 11th and 12th grade are like junior college. When I went to junior college, my father also went to college with me. He did his master's in literature. He was a doctor himself. That is why I wasn't shocked with the idea of older individuals attending college later in life. (Brenda, 40-50)

Experiencing discrimination at intersections of identity which include age. Two participants shared memories of older male faculty being disrespectful and demeaning to young female students – a gender/age-based oppression.

I witnessed an experience that I think was related to age, and it has stuck with me to this day. And this was back when I was in college. A student came in. It was her birthday. She was excited. She had on a special outfit. There were many factors at play. The professor embarrassed her. He talked about her clothes. He basically said, "What are you? Where do you think we are? That's inappropriate. We are not in the streets. We are in the university." I was embarrassed. I think a big part of that was due to class but a lot of it was also due to age. I think that in that situation that Professor used his voice of authority to kind of judge a student publicly and his judgement was tainted by his experience as an older professor. (Sofya, 30-40)

If you know what you wanted to be when you grew up when you were very young, you were very fortunate. I did not. . . Long story short, I spoke to professors who were around what my age is now or a little bit older. . . But with this particular one incident - the faculty was older and it's important that it was a male, but it was an older individual who did not give me the respect as a human being I felt was warranted. It was obvious that this individual was talking to me about my age. And from a voice of experience this individual said, "Well, little lady, you really don't need to make such a decision today. After all, you're so close to getting your degree just stay where you are. You're going to get married. It's really not that big of a deal." (Victoria, 60-70)

Several participants added thoughts and stories illustrating impacts of racial oppression. Nick, a younger (30-40 years old) participant of LatinX heritage, shared a time when he was in high school and was racially profiled:

There was a fight that happened after school was over, and it was a pretty big fight that the police were there. I was walking with my textbook and the police were looking for people who were involved in the fight. And when they looked at me, they just kept walking. I was like, "Oh, I thought they would have asked or said something here because I was nearby." The police basically said, "No, no. I saw your book, you keep walking." I'm like, "Okay." So they were looking for a specific group that dress the different way that wasn't in that upper level class and I was like "Okay, that was interesting." (Nick, 30-40)

Maya, a middle aged (50-60 years old) participant of Black/African American heritage was advised against attending college because her community impressed upon her that she was "not college material":

It was interesting when you said you were lucky in a lot of situations and you always expected to go to college. Completely different for me, coming from the inner city. Already had a child in high school. The expectation was super low. And some people told me you better go get that job at Pac Bell because [pause] *and I was a really good student. But still the expectation was different because the people making the decisions and there was a whole generation ahead of me. They were like, "Yeah, with the statistics that you have going on, you're not college material.* (Maya, 50-60)

Lens 2 Foreword: An Everyday Surprise About Students

I did have an older student who, to this day, is now somebody I consider a friend and she is now in her 70s. I knew her when she was younger, in her 50s. She was taking my classes – she decided to go back to school. And then she had a son who was on the autistic spectrum. She actually . . . when he came to get his degree, she sat in his classes with him to help him succeed. He is now, by the way, a graduate student earning a master's degree in counseling to work with autistic students. Now her case, her family was affluent enough to pay for him to get a lot of support which poorer students would not get. But, at any rate, she . . . when she was taking classes and told this she would look around the class and she would purposely identify the students in the class she would want to work with in groups. And she would then literally walk up to them and say, "I want you, you and you."

I don't know if you remember a cartoon strip called Pinky and the Brain. But it was about this extremely intelligent rat who had been . . . a mouse? . . .who had been given enhanced intelligence because they were at the National Institute of Medical Health. It was drugs. And Pinky was theoretically, the less intelligent mouse. And every week, they were . . . every episode they were trying to conquer the world. So it's called "Pinky and the Brain." And you should watch episodes - it's joyously wonderful. [through laughter] Her students . . . her students . . .the young people and they were . . . my . . . this is funny . . . they were always young males. They call themselves, "The Pinky." She was "Brain." That was one of the funniest stories. (Simon, 50-60)

Lens 2: Perception of Students

Analysis followed along to the second lens of the Critically Reflective Practice framework (Brookfield, 2007), sorting data into the broad category of "Students" (see Appendix C). According to Critically Reflective Practice theory, as faculty consider on how their students respond to them, to each other, to the instructional design and delivery, and to the content, insights may be elicited to inform their teaching practice. The Student Category of data evolved to form three major themes. The first centers on how faculty participants perceive their students. The second theme focuses on student feedback as it is recalled by faculty participants. The third describes successes with mixed age learning.

Faculty Participants' Perceptions of Students

Age diversity was conveyed by participants with references to broad age groups such as "younger" and "older" or by thinking of students in terms of the complexities that come with different stages in life might.

Noticing significant age diversity. Participants noted when and where age diversity seems to be amplified:

If I teach a morning class, I might have a much higher number of those [younger] students but just if I take all my students overall, I would say the vast majority of them are on the older side. (Adam, 50-60)

Community college is very diverse. I had high schoolers. I had students who were switching careers. I had students who were coming out of OR staying in a job. They need to get work, get TO their work. I had students like bus driver - think about it - taking [specific career training] because that student wanted to improve their lifestyle. (Gwynn, 40-50)

To make sense of this diversity as they considered it during the interviews, participants grouped their students in broad age categories such as "younger," "middle group," and "older." Work status and high school enrollment also served as parameters for age grouping:

> *I find challenges with younger as well as older students.* (Brenda, 40-50)

> *I think the different generations, you know the high schoolish age – youngish- and the students who are parents and the middle age which is kind of broad. High school, left high school, parenting. So they've got kids and that impacts their responsibilities. Then the last is . . . I've had some students over the past few years the students who are a lot older, seem to be very dedicated.* (Sofya, 30-40)

In addition to the age groupings being broad, when participants were asked for details, the parameters each provided did not align with those described by other participants:

> *I would say that "older students" are in their 20s to 50s.* (Leigh, 60-70)

> *Usually, I have complaints from older students – older like over 50.* (Gwynn, 40-50)

> *. . . older is something like 30 to 40.* (Nick, 30-40)

Sensing increasing life complexity. Almost all participants expressed perceptions that the complexities of life increase with age – the older the student, the more complex their lives. These complexities include restrictions related to work, family, transportation and health:

Older students, many of them are single parents and they have kids. They have jobs. And they are just trying to make it to class on time and sometimes they're not on time. (Pamela, 60-70)

I find that the older students I have now in my classes have had health crises and they are both I would say, 50-plus. The younger students have their specific problems but with the older students, they have more responsibilities in some cases. They have more health issues in some cases. They have more relatives that might have health crises that they have to attend to and this takes them away from the classroom to help who they need to help. (Leigh, 60-70)

Participants noted exceptions as well. For instance, many of their younger students also have economic, family, and work obligations:

In some colleges more students are experiencing economic hardships – even the young students are holding down jobs. (Jorge, 50-60)

I had one student who we just had an agreement that if he dozed off in the front row, I just let him sleep it off and give him the notes later. He was up all night driving Uber to make through. This was on top of two other jobs that he had. So I said, "OK. Look, as long as your grades or okay, we can keep doing this. Your grade starts slipping . . . let's figure something out. He was a younger student – probably I think early 20s." (Tom, 40-50)

Some participants perceived that their older students take classes for enrichment and enjoy a more relaxed perspective:

I think with the older students, they are taking it for the enjoyment and for the kind of critical intellectual engagement. And so, there's less stress involved with a grade or a feedback comment. (Callie, 40-50)

A few participants noticed that there appears to be an *increase* in difficulties for students relative to their own days as students.

The difficulties they face in this day and age it's just something that we didn't face when I was a student. We didn't have these types of students. When I was a student, you either went to school or you did your professional career, but you really didn't do both. In this day and age, it is normal to do both. Its abnormal to have an older student that does do that. (Adam, 50-60)

Remembering age-related physical challenges of students. Participants expressed concern for age-related health and ability levels of their students. In all of these cases, faculty indicated that they had not anticipated or were not prepared for these challenges:

Oh my God! He was 65 or maybe more, I don't know. But he was clearly, like you can tell somebody unfortunate. But we all will get old so . . . The thing is that you can tell like his hands used to shake and his leg . . . He was very slow. Everything was okay but the only thing was his ability to work in the labs, because you're dealing with chemicals and if his hands are shaking too much . . . you know that physical disability that comes with age . . . I think that was really affecting him. The only reason why he was taking those classes was that he wanted to challenge himself. So I did understand and I remember making some accommodations for him. Like he didn't have to push himself. He was just trying to keep himself intellectually engaged . . . that was his purpose in taking the class. (Beth, 40-50)

Recently I had a student that emailed me after taking a final exam after the semester ended that already had extra time. And this was an in-person class. But due to COVID, there's like an extended period while they're getting tested, while they're finding out if they have it or not . . . The student emailed me after taking the exam about wanting to commit suicide. And this was a young student. At first it didn't even click. But then, once I talked to somebody about it, they're like, "Hey, you're supposed to like . . . so I talked to somebody right away. But the colleague said, "Hey, you're supposed to report it." I'm like, "Oh yeah, I forgot about that. Let me get off the phone with you." They are the ones that reminded me like you got to talk to the police. You got to talk to your supervisor. Which is typically the dean. So yeah, even though we have trainings on how we are supposed to respond – that completely slipped my mind because I was in the moment I guess. (Nick. 30-40)

I had a student who was much older, a cancer survivor. She was probably 60. I give 20-minute quizzes and most students would finish them in 10 minutes, and she would have done, maybe 10 or 20% of the quiz at the end of the 20 minutes. And it's because she's not used to this kind of environment. So, I – unofficially, without telling anybody - just gave her an extension on like every quiz because I saw that there was such a difference. That was a crisis for her because she was working so hard. I look at how much time she spent on her homework compared to other students, it would be like three or four times as much time. So, she was clearly working very hard. But just returning to college after cancer treatment, still taking drugs that could very well be affecting her. She didn't have an official accommodation from DSS and just made that judgement call that I need to help her. (Haley, 50-60)

Responding with encouragement and flexibility. As in the quotes above, faculty participants expressed an urgency to be in touch with their students' struggles to balance work, family, and education as well as the intermittent crisis:

You know students have lives outside of the classroom and sometimes those lives do not go perfectly. And so, there is a measure of "grace." I hate saying it because that makes me sound better than I am. But still like a measure of understanding that you know, things can happen, and we work through them as long as you tell me something's happening. (Lily, 30-40)

So when students have an issue, I am not the one to say, "Oh, I'm sorry. You missed the deadline." I mean I don't tell students at the beginning, oh don't worry about deadlines. But then often I've had a student with some issue like needing more time. I've argued for incompletes even when it technically did not meet the criteria. (Emmy, 40-50)

I have a lot of not just respect but affinity for students who are doing this for the first time. Understanding that not everybody in their family is going to be supportive and that they're getting mixed messages. I try to have as much empathy as I can because they're there. It's hard. It's a hard thing to do – to finish your degree. (Tom, 40-50)

Comparing older and younger age students in the classroom. In their roles as faculty members, participants compared older and younger students as they appear in the classroom:

Scheduling preferences. Participants noted that older students were more likely to show up in evening or weekend classes because of work. Some older students who are caregivers do come to class during the day. For those perceived to be among the "oldest" students, it was

indicated that coming to class was a break from their otherwise stressful lives. Conversely, participants stated that there were fewer younger students in the evening and weekend classes:

If I do get an adult student in a day class it's usually because they're caretaking. They're often taking care of a sick parent or something like that. They have a time during the day that they can come in for the class. But I've also noticed that they are also much more impacted in terms of time. Mostly what I noticed is most of my adult students are in the night classes. They tend to have daytime jobs. They come in right after work and they're still dressed in the uniform from work or the suit that they have to go to work in. (Jorge, 50-60)

If I teach a morning class, I might have a much higher number of those [younger] students but just if I take all my students overall, I would say the vast majority of them are on the older side. (Adam, 50-60)

Rising to the challenge of college-level work. Participants shared that they believe students of different ages approach the work of learning in college classes differently. While older students seem highly organized and motivated, younger students have trouble transitioning to taking charge of their own learning:

I certainly have a lot of examples of students who seem to be more together than others, even among their peers. But if you want to just spread them out on a generational timeline and if you look at the scatter diagram for the younger ones, they're all over the map, mostly not very good at some of these life skills and lifelong learning skills. Whereas the older ones, they're here for a reason and they get it done. (Amy, 70-80)

The older you are, the more mature and more, much more seasoned you are, the more you realize that you have to give your all to what you're doing, especially education. You realize how important it is. If you're really really really young and just starting out you think that you're invincible and everything's gonna be okay and do things at the last minute. (Laural, 50-60)

I do think that the older student is typically more prepared. They have done more preparation before they come to class than the younger ones. Younger ones seem to just show up and I'm supposed to tell them everything instead of prepping. (Finn, 40-50)

One faculty member, quoted below, shared an observation echoed by many of the participants - older students appreciate directing their own learning while younger students expect a highly structured classroom experience in which they are told exactly what they need to produce and what they will be tested on:

Recently I started using the concept of text sets where students have a choice between reading this text or this text. All texts are about the same subject; all texts are writing by people from different socioeconomic, cultural, racial, and/or some kind of background. The students have the choice, and then the students tell each other what they learned from it. The only reason I am there is to fill in gaps in their knowledge. So, if a student says everything they know, and it's on my mental checklist, then I don't need to get into it at all. I have heard YOUNG students say, "This is bullshit. I feel like we're just teaching ourselves" and I have older students say, "This is wonderful. I feel like I'm in charge." (Jen, 60-70)

Participants also shared experiences with older students who had a methodical approach to mastering the material and doing whatever is asked of them in order to learn deeply in contrast to younger students who seemingly prefer a faster pace and who project resentment or resistance to spending additional time on a topic -- especially when older students ask questions:

For me, I'm expecting an older student, based on my previous experiences, I'm expecting them to be more methodical, to access the resources, to follow instructions everyone is given, to follow up on communications. (Sofya, 30-40)

A few of my students gave me surprising feedback - you are spending too much time explaining things to us. If people don't get it, they just don't get it, move on! That was interesting and I was really surprised. I believe they were all a younger generation; I still remember. They were just so ambitious so motivated to learn more than just giving more examples and elaborating on things. The middle-aged students felt comfortable asking questions. (Marta, 40-50)

Coping with pressure. Faculty participants shared observations about how students of different ages appear different capacities to coped with pressure while developing academic skills – especially in classes where a daunting amount of material must be assimilated to excel. Interestingly, these age-related perceptions were sometimes at odds with those of other participants:

Exams are very stressful, but I do think a lot of younger students now have difficulty dealing with that stress. I think it does manifest in ways that are like part self-fulfilling prophecy and part like horrible downward spiral of like, "I'm so anxious about this exam that I can't focus

on the exam and now I got a low score on the exam so now, the next exam I'm even more anxious about. . . I think that a lot of the older students have learned tools for how to deal with those sorts of tendencies and still do what they have to do. (Lily, 30-40)

One of the problems that I've noticed is that older students get really frustrated with any difficulties they feel like they are experiencing and that they don't see their younger classmates experiencing – whether or not those younger students are experiencing those difficulties. Older generations, Boomer students, they're the ones that are getting really frustrated and they end up dropping or kind of shutting down. (Jared, 40-50)

Older students in my classes are kind of defensive. And in my first year I was not prepared. But in my second year I was like, "Okay. Whenever I see an older student, I know they probably feel defensive because she's going back to school." I believe encouraging language is so important because they don't feel confident going back to school after many years. So, I realized that when I use encouraging language, they kind of feel good and they don't feel like, "Oh my God! Why am I here? Everyone is so young in this classroom." They don't say that. And the other thing is sometimes they feel hesitant to raise their hands in class. And again, encouraging, I say, "Yes! You're so close!" I mean, even if they are not saying the right thing because if you say something like, "No this is not the correct answer", they will never come back to school. That's how I feel. I believe language is so important because they want to feel their work or effort is appreciated among all their peers. (Marta, 40-50)

Faculty coaching strategies. Just as in Marta's observation above, participants shared strategies and philosophies about supporting older and younger students. Participants stated that coaching is a practice they use to address the different kinds of self-doubt expressed by older or younger students:

I have had older students who spent a lot of time saying, "I can't. I have not been in school for a while." Self-deprecating. They have to have their confidence supported. So have to constantly remind them. "As an older student you actually have advantages that these younger students do not have." An so I have to support the older students to find their sea legs again – whereas the youngers students may make similar comments but they're not blaming their age for it. (Simon, 50-60)

I find challenges with younger as well as older students. They always try to blame it on their age, saying I can't remember. I can't retain more. I tried to dismiss that. I say, "I don't think it has to do with your age. I think it's the way you study that's very important and how much, how smart you study. What are the small things you can do to make adjustments to get that extra hour of study in every day?" (Brenda, 40-50)

Age influencing student-faculty interaction. Several participants shared that older students seem to see the entire educational experience as deserving of respect:

There are some students with children who have already grown, and they are adults. And they tend to look at the school day with the kind of respect that maybe you would have expected from someone who went through the public school system in the 50s, 60s, 70s. (Jen, 60-70)

Some students are older still - enough to still talk the language of having respect for their teachers. (Simon, 50-60)

A few participants remarked that some older students may challenge faculty who are younger. Even Simon (see quote directly above) notes that the respect older students generally offer a faculty member may not be conferred to younger faculty - especially if they are female:

I was always OK with working with students not my age. What I noticed, now more than when I was sway 10 years younger, is that when I was working with older students, then I think some of them were more standoffish, just because I was a younger person. Whereas as now that I am older – even if they are older than me – they see me more as someone on their level. (RK, 40-50)

I had some younger colleagues, also in my cluster. Through the years, younger colleagues who were women - or what we call AFAB, assigned female at birth – they would share how sometimes older students wouldn't take them seriously – which is also sexism. Because I would not necessarily hear that from younger male teachers. So, women, older women AND men would treat the younger women faculty with less respect than they would treat the older faculty. (Simon, 50-60)

In the case of Jared, below, a *series* of encounters with students of a specific age category prompted a higher degree of watchfulness toward that specific age group as a source of challenge:

A student was trying to join after the beginning of the semester and just not doing it. Then eventually almost tried to accuse me of discriminating against her because of her disability,

which I actually did not know about because she'd not given me her DSPS information. That was strange. I think she might have been slightly younger than me so not your typical college student. Maybe I expected her to act her age a bit more than she did. Not that I expect students who are returning to be a little bit more responsible. As far as her: "I gave you an add code two weeks ago. You still haven't used it. Why haven't you?" or "Hey, maybe you shouldn't' squirt me with a squirt bottle in lab. I reflect back on that incident so often because I had never had a student squirt me with a squirt bottle or do any sort of horseplay in lab like that. I did not respond how I would now. And now that I have that experience to look back on I know how I would respond again. It's a short script and it is, "You need to leave." (Jared, 40-50)

I had a student who was maybe in her 60s - and this was a period of time where I was trying really hard to learn my student's names. I would take a picture and make a flash card and have it on my phone. I would go around the first day in lab and say, "Hey! Can I take your picture? I'm going to add it to my flash card thing just for like that, like I sue it after that, I'll probably delete the data later in the semester. I got to her, took her picture, and moved on. She came back to me very angry that I <u>made</u> her let me take a picture of her and she had no idea what it was going to be used for. Very hostile and was not really . . . I wasn't able to talk her down. And then she ended up dropping shortly after that because again, she got so frustrated with her understanding of the material . . . and was not cognizant that I couldn't give her all my time. (Jared, 40-50)

I think for older students, when they get frustrated, my negative experiences have made me more wary than I probably would be in the past. But other than that I don't . . . maybe I'm

just not reflective enough to think about this but . . . In my first couple of semesters teaching, I

had a student who was significantly older than almost everyone in the class, including myself.

And that person was having real difficulties with the material and was not receptive to

assistance. He seemed quite angry about it. This is what I mean about a lot of older students

seem like they're getting really frustrated. (Jared, 40-50)

Student feedback. When prompted to reflect on student feedback that surprised them, every faculty participant was quick to respond, indicating that they were attentive to this feedback. Student feedback includes the formal feedback during course evaluations and the informal, often face to face feedback which comes from directly conversing with students.

Student feedback is collected formally during faculty evaluations which occur in three-year cycles rather than at the end of every semester and course as for many four-year college faculty. The collection instrument used is a scantron with Likert scale rankings. There is a place for students to write in open-ended commentary. The handwritten notes are typed by a confidential employee and shown to faculty only after grades are posted. These measures to ensure confidentiality are not consistently followed.

Faculty participants felt they could detect the age of the student given feedback content. The element of teaching most commented on by students which surprised faculty participants were their students' reactions to the level of organization faculty employed in instructional design. In addition to being surprised by feedback in a negative way, many faculty took comfort in feedback that indicated they had a lasting positive affect on their students.

Detecting the age of students in anonymous formal feedback. There were specific responses that some faculty assumed came from students of a specific age based on what they perceived those students were thinking at the time.

I usually have complaints from older students about technology. (Gwynn, 40-50)

Older students take it seriously and their approach shows it. The way that they question, the way that they come to office hours, the way that they attend. Whereas the younger ones . . . I think those experiences you gain during the years of adulthood, they make you somehow serious about what you want and that changes your approach to the classroom. I think I can easily classify, even if you close my eyes, just by listening to people, I can tell you how old they are just by the type of questions they ask, by the type of jokes they may tell. I can tell you with really good certainty if they are under 30 or above 30. (John, 50-60)

I primarily teach classes that are for students going into health professions. Of course, it's gonna be hard. You're going to be asked to be in a position where someone's life is in your hands, this is not an easy field. And so, a lot of the older students that I've gotten the feedback from – there's been a lot of, "It's hard and I have to study a lot and it's difficult but it's fair." And you know on the flip side, sometimes from some the younger students, it's been, "This is an unreasonable amount of stuff to expect us to do." Well, I mean it's probably more than they had before. But this is college. This is what colleges do. (Lily, 30-40)

Several faculty participants related stories of older students who shared strong negative feelings about the course material which sometimes manifested as strong feelings about the faculty:

I have one older student specifically . . . and it always seems to be this one specific course that things come up in because we do touch on you know race and evolution and all these kinds of issues. But she told me that she really thought she'd hate the class, "I was sure I was

going to hate this class because I knew what it was going to be, but it's required for health

sciences. You have to take this class." And she said, "I didn't hate the class, just I still don't

believe you. But I didn't hate the class." And that actually kind of made my day a little bit. Back

to that who learning system, she did the work, she took in the information, she did the analysis, if

she didn't come to the same conclusion on the other side. But she went through the process, and

she didn't hate me. To me, that's success because you're not gonna have everyone agree. (Zelia,

40-50)

Some of them will say, "Wow! In the beginning I was overwhelmed, and I didn't realize

that you cared until almost the end. I did get a card from a mature student once who said they

wanted to take my eyes out with a fork in the beginning, but they learned that I loved them and I

thought that's borderline. Goodness! You know it's a little sick. (Laural, 50-60)

Being motivated by feedback. Participants engaged in the most sustained smiles during

the portion of the interviews in which they recalled student feedback that was affirming. Most

participants expressed a belief that older students were more likely to formally thank them:

Students of all ages will appreciate you for what you do for them. A lot of them you don't

ever see again or never hear from. But there are a FEW that come back to you and . . . I think

that those that do come back to you tend to be a little bit more mature. Or at least they can learn

to present, then thank you for the things that you do for them. But you know they do things for

you too. So, you can appreciate that part of it. I think the older adults, maybe I should way, not

just necessarily age, but the more mature students tend to come back to you and thank you.

Thank you for the memorable experience that they've had. (Mr. Paul, 50-60)

There are some students who write back to me - after a few years, after they transfer,

after they do this, when they hit milestones. I hear back from them, and it is such . . . these tend

to be non-traditional students. They tend to be so appreciative of the experiences they've had.

And you know it's and its these students who help me feel like, "Wow! What an honor to be part

of your journey." (Haley, 50-60)

Success with Mixed Age learning

Many faculty participants talked about how group work is impacted by age diversity.
When left to arrange themselves into groups, younger students appear to gravitate to others in
their age range. Older students are more apt than younger students to engage in group work
without the instructor orchestrating it:

When I would implement some type of learning activity, an active learning activity where

we're going to group and we're building something or working on something like that . . . I find

that the older students accept working in groups much more readily than the younger students.

The younger students, for them, unless they're with their friends, they don't want to do that. They

want to just have their stuff, get this class done, and go on. But the older students are much more

open to working with other people. Discussing with other people both that topic and also

personal issues. This is so much so that when I make groups I would subconsciously - it's really

amazing realizing it now with this discussion with you - but I would try to mix ages in there. I

would make sure that they weren't all one age because then you had a lot of young students that

didn't want to communicate with each other, and it was just a big silent circle. Then the other

circle was fantastic. But if you intermingle . . . that sometimes . . . that was able to bring more

discussion and activity out of the younger student. Not always. (Adam 50-60)

Sometimes on the first day of class I organize an icebreaker kind of moment so we get to know each other. From my perspective, as an instructor, I want them to feel as comfortable as possible. . . I feel that usually mature students that are way beyond high school, or are quite a bit beyond high school, they're more open. They're less inhibited. I would say in that in a class of 40 students, maybe some of the younger generation - like 19, 20, 21 years of age - maybe 15-20% are eager to participate. The younger generation in general, from my experience, in the first week or so are very quiet. (Russ, 40-50)

Participating faculty communicated that intentionally mixing the students of different ages for group work nurtures collaboration skills and makes a broader range of perspectives available for consideration. Their perception is that older students often model methodological problem solving in these settings:

Older students are very focused as opposed to other students. In other words, they will plan things out. And I find it's kind of nice- their interactions with other students. They tend to take on a leadership role. Whenever I have students break into groups, I noticed it's the adult student who will say, "Okay you do this, I'll do this." And they get people organized. I think it's because they've been out in the real worked and have seen what it's like to collaborate to get projects done. (Jorge, 50-60)

You really cannot work well in the Tech sector if you don't know how to be a team player. I incorporate that in the courses that I teach. The maturity of an older student really helps the younger students. Younger students who are more astute with the technical terms, share that information. So I think it's been really wonderful. (Kathryn, 70-80)

Popular culture and audio recording technologies from different time frames becomes more understandable to students when younger and older peers take time to explain it to each other:

Some of the music, for the most part, everybody would be like, "Okay, I get it." Like if you just break down song lyrics, and I do this in my class all the time . . . The older students – it's going to mean something different to them based on their lived experiences. This is opposed to the younger students who just basically . . . its' the same thing when they're analyzing poetry. They just look at the basic things. They don't look at the underlying messages. So, I think that's always a surprise to me IN A GOOD WAY because you know we don't know what the perspective is going to be or what lens we're all looking through. So, it's a surprise to see, "Oh, you arrived at that from reading that passage? My experience was completely different, and I didn't see that, but now I could get your point." (Maya, 50-60)

I teach a selection of biological anthropology and cultural anthropology classes. The experience that I'm talking about specifically right now deals with a cultural experience in a specific timeframe. I was talking to people who were relatively young, and I targeted them to ask their earliest audio sort of memories. They said they did not know what a record player was and they did not know what a gramophone was, of course. But there were other people in the room, who did and that led to some wonderful intergenerational conversation about "How did you entertain yourself?" (Victoria, 60-70)

Faculty who regularly employ group work reflected on special circumstances they have noticed that may need faculty intervention:

I do active research on teaching methodologies. It doesn't affect me as much working with other age populations, cultures, and all that. But if I were doing it and it involved younger students working with older students . . . I would have to think about that because . . . these subjects are bringing back things now . . . I'm thinking about times where I've noticed in my classes where there might be an older student and they're working with a younger student and the older student will feel intimidated or embarrassed because they feel like they should know something - and they don't. I do try to be mindful of things like that. (Edward, 40-50)

Augmenting teaching through involving older students. Several participants shared that they intentionally call on older students in class discussions to air their perspective to put these students more at ease and to share special knowledge:

I see a lot of these older students . . . I really appreciate them. I really enjoyed the older students in classrooms because they bring a sense of perspective that the younger students don't have. And they can share it with them and encourage them too. So, for example, I'll just say, "Hey John, what is your feeling about this and then he goes and tells his story about what he has done in the past. And the students listen to him. And this kind of gives this older student a sense of importance, I guess. A sense that they could share the stories and the students learn from them. And it's really really helpful. I had a PhD English student in my class who was older. And she's a grandmother. She says she's probably, . . . I don't know . . . she looked great for being a grandmother. And she would write this . . . I would assign papers and her papers were just OUTSTANDING. She wrote really well, and her term papers were so fantastic. I said, "Wow! Do you mind if I share your paper with the current students so they can see what a good paper

could be?" I tend to use older student and their experience to share with the younger students.
(Paul, 50-60)

Others noted that the level-headedness of adult students can avert disaster in risky lab settings:

There have been moments where unpredictable things happen. Let me just say that people could get hurt. Fortunately, no one has gotten significantly injured in a lab with me. We had one or two first aid injuries and they're always because people try to pick up broken glass. I tell them that's my job, but they still do it. We didn't have any serious injuries, but we had a couple of incidents where people could have gotten hurt or something – actually spilled their beaker or caught it on fire. Maybe it was supposed to be on fire .. . but still, yeah, it just made me aware of the fact that different students reacted differently even though they didn't have enough experience to be thrown into this situation necessarily.

In one case, there was a student who was a little bit older and had some experience. Evidently a lot. They just dealt with the situation right there. And there could have been a problem. Something that was very hot and dangerous. Yeah . . . and they just knew what to do. They shut off the burner and picked up the thing that was hot with tongs. No one was hurt. But they knew what to do and they just did it. It was someone who was not old but mid 20s and was coming back to school after some experience and I guess was just used to staying calm in a situation. (William, 60-70)

Participants shared memories about older students being recruited by a younger student to advocate on their behalf. One participant shared a story of an older student coaching a younger student in what to expect in college level work:

I had a young man who was not doing well in class and this individual involved an older student to come and mediate between us. Because the younger student did not feel that I, as an older person in the classroom, understood what the younger student was going through. (Victoria, 60-70)

I had a student take the exam the other day. They were like, "So much to learn. There's so much you asked. This is so difficult for me!" She was obviously very overwhelmed and started crying. But then I had another student who was a little older and had already been through the experience. She's like, "You know, the instructor is very fair." She's [the older student] not trying to gain points with me or anything like that. "She doesn't have too many instructions. These subjects are very challenging." To begin with, that has a very different tone coming from a peer, as opposed to me. I can say that a hundred or a thousand times but coming from your own pers it has a . . . I can't substitute that. (Brenda, 40-50)

It's typically older students that are standing up for just any age group. (Nick, 30-40)

Lens 3 Foreword: An Everyday Surprise about Colleagues

RESEARCHER: *Describe a time when you and a colleague worked on or discussed a situation that involved communication with someone of a different age group that felt risky or uncertain.*

MAYA: *I don't know that it's 'age group', but it's more like tenure. Like the folks that have been teaching for 30 years versus someone who's newer like me who has been teaching for 10 years . . . A lot of times we disagree on how things are done.*

So, it can be challenging because some people really dig in their heels. And they don't want to hear this new wave progressive stuff. And we deal with that all the way up the hierarchy. Because everybody says, "I want change and more equity and inclusion. But at the same time, I won't change anything that I've bee doing for 30 years." That doesn't work. So that's weekly.

And then it comes down to communication. Because sometimes we get caught up where, "I just wanted to make sure that you hear my point." And then I shut down when you are sharing your point. That can be a bit of a challenge . . . risky for sure because everybody is not always listening. (Maya, 50-60)

RESEARCHER: *OK, Let's look at the 'Rite of Passage' questions next. Please share stories about what you felt were rites of passage or ceremonial special moments in your own learning. How have they influenced you in your teaching in the Multi-generational classroom? Are you aware of any rites of passage traditions ceremonies that your colleagues practice within their classrooms. If so, how do you believe the age of learners or faculty members may influence those situations? Feel free to bring back in anything you may already have said, if you like. If so, how do you believe the age of learners or faculty members may influence those situations, you can also harking back to things you've already said, if you'd like.*

MAYA: *When it comes to my colleagues . . . definitely a rite of passage for me was getting hired full time. So I'm part of the tenure track now. And that's also cliquish [laughter]. But the whole age thing . . . it's experience. Folks that have been there longer, they're going to tell you the ins and outs and some are going to steer you in the right direction. So my ears are*

always open. I'm always listening to what folks have to say and it influence how I approach things at times. Whether it's how I interact with my colleagues . . .

I always want to be somebody they can come to because I've had those people be there for me. (Maya, 50-60)

Lens 3: Perceptions of Colleagues

This third category of data corresponds to the "Colleague Lens" of Brookfield's Critically Reflective Practice (Critically Reflective Practice) theory**.** Responding to interview prompts structured around Critically Reflective Practice, the study's participants shared observations about instructional and administrative colleagues with respect to age. Participants had much less to say about colleagues than they did about themselves and their students. Three major themes evolved upon analysis of the Colleague Category of data: 1) Perceptions of older, tenured faculty, 2) Perspectives of adjunct faculty, and 3) Perceived benefits of mixing older and younger faculty. This section presents the data contributing to these three themes.

Perceiving Older, Tenured Colleagues

Participants from every age bracket and from both full time and part time ranks shared perceptions of older tenured faculty as complacent in their content knowledge and rigid in their teaching methodologies:

How has a normal day of learning changed since I was a student? I don't think it is very much different . . . I don't feel that many classrooms have gone to being totally learner-centric. There isn't a huge amount of difference, and it is just kind of a sad thing to say because that's a 40-year span . . . between the first day I stepped on a community college campus and today. (Jen, 60-70)

Some participants expressed a belief that these tenured colleagues teach as they were taught.

I think a lot of professors in my discipline are very traditional. They're still following a very traditional format. I see them. A lot of them just believe in just coming in, giving lecture and quizzes during a very rigid schedule. (Beth, 40-50)

A few full-time tenured faculty participants drew a clear connection between faculty being tenured and their loss of professional urgency to evolve with their disciplines and to remain responsive to their students:

Just because you're seasoned doesn't mean that you really have an open mind. A seasoned person has seen it all, but it doesn't mean that he accepted it all . . . I have people that I keep trying to tell them, "Look - yes, you are tenured. Yes, you're untouchable. Whatever you think about yourself but . . . but the thing is it's not about the security of your job. It is about if you really <u>care</u> *about your job. Then* <u>this</u> *is the reality we are dealing with. So, let's find a way to deal with this and stop ignoring the change and define the change." They are DEFYING it- that's the problem.* (John, 50-60)

We're constantly bumping up against the establishment. It's not even a difficult situation, it's challenging. Because you're going to have folks that have, again, like I said before, been there for 30 years, and "This is how it works." But then when you look at the numbers, like, "No. It works for <u>you</u>*. But it does* <u>not</u> *work for the* <u>students</u>*." They are older. They have been there longer . . . And it* <u>is</u> *generational because, as far as they're concerned, "This* <u>is</u> *what education looks like." And we know there are ways, we know that this is* <u>forever</u> *changing. And to meet student needs, you need to be flexible.* (Maya, 50-60)

In keeping with the perception of professional stagnation, participants noted that older tenured faculty were slow to adopt instructional technology. Technology is also touched on in as a Theme in the next and final category, "Resources."

I have some colleagues that I think I align with a lot. We teach very similarly. And those tend to be colleagues of my generation - for lack of a better word - the ones that kind of came

through their pedagogical and curricular training with me. And then I have kind of new faculty

coming up. Kind of the bread on the sandwich, so to speak, you have very different methods.

Older colleagues don't implement as much technology, media, some of those types of things.

They're still kind of more traditional in their classroom structures - in their classroom

hierarchies - than I know I am. And then there's new faculty coming up using technology that

I'm like "You did what?" and, "How does it work?" and, "I don't get it!" And I feel like I have

a basic decent understanding of technology, but I still can't get a handle on some of the things

that are now possible in the classroom. (Zelia, 40-50)

In direct contradiction to assumptions about the professional decline of older faculty,

several participants—who themselves could be classified as "older" given that they identified

their ages in the more advanced age brackets (50-60, 60-70, 70-80)—shared that they feel that as

they have aged, they have matured professionally with respect to being more in touch with

students:

I am more likely to be tolerant now. I have learned. As I say, my first 20 years of my

career was working with people that were my age or older - because I worked at night, and I

worked on Saturday. I learned from there - from them - they were mature, and it was to my

advantage in many ways. I had to be 50 years old to like *to work with the student age group of*

19, 20, 21. At one of the colleges I work for, you had students coming from the same high school

that were like chatting in the middle of the class because they know each other from high school

- and that kind of thing. I was more intolerant of that kind of immaturity when I was younger. I

just set down the rules. I walk around the back of the class, and I sit on those problems right

away - any phones or any anything like that. And I don't have *to be demonstrating all the time*

now. I think that's what's interesting now that I'm older. Not only am I not demonstrating as much, but I CAN'T demonstrate as much if I want to teach multiple classes. In some ways I'm a much better teacher because I am watching THEM more. And I feel like as I've gotten older, I think I've gotten to be a better teacher. (Leigh, 60-70)

Relatedly, both part-time and full-time participants who might be considered as belonging to the "older" category shared how they, like Leigh above, have worked to stay current and suggested a continuing education requirement for faculty to maintain currency in the discipline:

I've had a vast experience in dealing with different kinds of colleagues. I first taught at the state university as a part time instructor. I've taught technology courses at two different universities and several community colleges. I am very disappointed with the community colleges. I don't really feel instructors there really tried to keep up with the preparation and what they need to do for the classroom in keeping up with the subject matter and understanding how the Tech Sector is changing. Or how to prepare students, where the technology is going in the workplace. I've been very disappointed with the community college system. I truly love to learn so I'm always taking courses every summer and sometimes even during the time I'm teaching. They're not even interested in exploring new things.

Some of the newer and younger instructors who are actually working full time positions and maybe only teaching one class, <u>they</u> apply what they learn on the job in their classrooms which makes it a good experience for the students – for their routines and for the learning process and how it influences them to move on and learn more. I feel like the four-year institutions, they somewhat require instructors to do this, to write so many papers, or to participate in some of the faculty activities - even as a part-time instructor. Where it's more like,

"If you feel like it" at the community college. It's not something that you're really rewarded for in the long run. You know it's not going to make any difference if you do it or not. I really do believe that colleagues have similar routines at the community college, but they are not to the advantage of students. (Kathryn, 70-80)

I have three primary disciplines and numerous unrelated academic interests. I am immersed in the primary literature of a wide range of disciplines enough so that this informs my thinking on a regular basis. In fact, all of them do- they interweave completely. I go back and forth and that informs all my teaching. But in my primary discipline, we are required to have continuing education every single year for licensure. So, I got in the habit. I have even spoken in teaching conferences. I think that teachers should be held to the same standard. That they will lose their license if they do not keep their disciplines current. (Simon, 50-60)

There were reported perceptions of older tenured faculty congregating and excluding or disrespecting non-tenured or younger faculty. These perceptions came from participants from all age brackets. Recall that having adjunct status or full-time status does not equate in the study's context to being younger or older, respectively.

I would have to put colleagues into two camps. ONE is colleagues who developed their courses and teach those courses, and that is the way that it is, and that is where that it will always be. As well as colleagues who feel like their course content is driven by the textbook they choose - as opposed to the textbook they choose to augment their courses. So, with those colleagues . . . We might talk about some things but we, you know . . . we . . . I would say they

don't . . . we don't generally have like pedagogical conversations. I had tried, as a young instructor and there was so much resistance to change that I chose to let that go. (Jen, 60-70)

At one college that I work at, it's typically just the full timers that are there {for department meetings}. And technically those are the only ones that are welcomed to the department meetings – or those are the ones who receive the invites. If you are a part-timer, you have to like really ASK to be a part of it. They're all close to retirement there. At the other college there's four to five people that attend the department meetings regularly . . . I am one of the four or five that go to department meetings, our ages are spread from the 20s to the 50s. (Nick, 30-40)

In the eyes of some participants, some older tenured faculty appear unwilling to fully engage with students:

There is one professor, a bit older than me, who tends to run a very tight ship. He tends to be a very strict disciplinarian. Very tight in his classroom. I tend to be much more free flowing. I tend to ask questions a lot. I tend to try to get my students to think for themselves and to think out of the box. I try to engage them, so my teaching sounds a little bit different from him. (Paul, 50-60)

For other participants, these older tenured faculty seem unresponsive or unsympathetic to the changing needs and special needs of students.

What I have experienced, personally, is that the older generation wants to keep things as they were – in the time when they were studying. So that is face-to-face, not much technology

and lots of exercises, drillings, homework, discussions, etc. Like the way it was - what is familiar to them. Versus the younger generation who wants "canned" technology to make information more graphic – like using technology just makes a big difference. So, the problem with the older generation, they don't want to switch their ideas – don't want to recognize that new generations learn differently. (Gwynn, 40-50)

There was a student at this college a long time ago, and she was my student also. But the way I guess I treat people in the classroom there's some level of, you know, a barrier somehow between us. Because you don't come to me and admit crazy things but . . . An older colleague who had the same student came to me. He told me that she started sharing her lifestyle as an escort. I said, "Wow. We have students in that?" So, he just went on and on. She was an escort lady on the website, and she was missing the class because she was going to New York or Florida. And that was a shocking story. She was my student also and she never came to me and talked to me about those types of things. He said, "I cannot accept her in my class." And like this and that . . . I told him he <u>had</u> to accept her. What I'm trying to say is just because you have seen it all doesn't mean you accept it all. (John, 50-60)

I found that many of older colleagues are not very flexible with the students. And I mean that discipline is good, but we also have to see that the students who are coming to the community colleges, a lot of them are working. Some are 18, 19, 20 years old and we can label them as "working it out." They are still young people and they're still doing some jobs they have to maintain. There are many other things. There are people who are disabled – no matter what age group – they are disabled people. Some of them do not even have the opportunity to be

successful because of their disability. They are trying to mainstream. They're trying to work very hard to go somewhere, to get a skill set so they can get a job, or a better job. But I find that some of my colleagues are not very open or very accommodating. They are very rigid. I wish I could change that. (Beth, 40-50)

Reported Benefits of Mixing Old and Young Faculty

Faculty participants shared that they benefit from interacting with both younger and older faculty. Several of the stories shared previously also illustrate this subtheme:

Most of my experience has been in community colleges. I have had the privilege of working with many different colleagues of many different ages and many different disciplines. I tend to talk to people and set up interdisciplinary investigations. Yes, they have different routines than me perhaps, but I have had wonderful experiences in cross discipline approaches – learning from other instructors and the way they do things - especially generational differences. There are routines I would never have thought of for preparation. For example, for some of the younger instructors, they use technology in ways that I was not prepared to do until I thought about and then . . . "Oh my goodness, yes! Please! We can do that!" And they had not used some of the old-fashioned methods of student engagement – actual physical learning as opposed to writing on a board. So, we learn from each other, and it has been a very rewarding career. (Victoria, 60-70)

With my younger colleagues, and not necessarily younger age, but definitely younger in experience . . .They tend to reflect more the way that I work in the classroom. And so, I would say that . . . Oh! I can give an example . . .I have two colleagues that I spend rather a lot of time with. We spend time . . . social time with family . . . so our partners are together. . . in my case,

my grandchildren and their children were all together in a social situation. And the conversation consistently flows back and forth between personal . . . and you know. . . I guess personal interest and classroom interest. And those classroom interests tend to very much to jive. I think that there are students who would come into very specific classrooms and say hey I did that assignment in somebody else's class. Because we do share that much. And our subjects are quite diverse. I have very good friends in the STEM faculty as well as friends in Social Sciences and then also in Liberal Arts. (Jen, 60-70)

Lens 4 Foreword: An Everyday Story about Routine and Resources

How does a normal day of learning in the classroom look when I was a student and now? Well, if I refer to COVID, obviously everything is different. And this is a conversation that we are very hotly engaged in among myself and my colleagues, of course. That two years ago, we had all sorts of hypotheses about what the future of education might look like at the at the intersection with technology. Now, two years later, many of those hypotheses have been demonstrated to be verified. That, "Yes indeed, we can do this." And I must say that I, myself, may have had some doubts.

But I always did say that distance education without face-to-face contact was inferior. the only thing Zoom does not allow is the . . . I happen to be aware of a lot of research that suggests that there are in fact fields generated by living bodies in the presence of one another. In my licensed profession, I use those interactions and that's missing. And I'm not sure what to do about that. But if there are . . . there are advantages . . . like now, you can't be this close to your students in a physical classroom. And this actually is kind of. . . this is kind of a fascinating experience. And so, we're experiencing an awful lot of . . . we are experimenting with a lot of . . . excuse me - we are PROPOSING a lot of experiments such as giant screens in classrooms to allow some students to be zoom while some students are in person.

But my fear - and this is actually a fear – that the current administrators are going to try and get back to a normal pre-2020 when they should actually be proposing creating a new normal post-2022. And that's an issue. So that's the technology Zoom piece. Then the classroom experience . . . frankly, I honestly can tell you, as somebody who at who was in community college in the late 70s and early 80s . . . the actual classroom experience itself, frankly . . . the only difference is technology in the classroom. You replace the overhead projector – the venerable overhead projector - and perhaps the film projector - which was still available in the late 70s – with technology in the classroom and the screens . . .and that actually made teaching easier . . . so the difference was all technology.

Frankly, other than that - professors still come in "carrying a stack of notes" and lecture from them. Again, technology changed because we have everything up on the screen. But the actual arrangement of the desks is the same as when I started out as a student - which actually annoys the crap out of me - but that's a function of having to have X number of students in a small classroom. And so, the physical experience of a classroom in a community college did not

actually change, in my opinion, from when I was a student to when I was a teacher to when I . . .
until the onset of functional technology . . . to the onset of Zoom. Zoom is what changed it
FUNDAMENTALLY.

Technology did make it better. Yes, it did, in my opinion. IF you know how to use it.
That's a giant IF . . . especially for older professors. I have, I happen to have one colleague who
is a distance education coordinator and she herself, I think, is now in her late 30s - I honestly
don't remember - but she made the comment that, in my age range, among faculty, I'm the most
technologically advanced. (Simon, 60-70)

Lens 4: Resources

Aside from personal experience, information, and satisfaction gained from interactions with students and colleagues, faculty can grow professionally by reflecting on the theories and philosophies of teaching itself. Last among the four lenses of Brookfield's Critically Reflective Practice, the "Resource" lens calls on teachers to investigate the theories and physical resources behind the profession. The fourth and final lens of the Critically Reflective Practice theory was adapted here as the final category of data which collected everything faculty participants shared about resources they reach for when they are prompted to address something about teaching and learning. Two age-related themes coalesced from these recollections and reflections about resources: 1) Expressions of wanting to know more about the impacts of age diversity on teaching and learning, and 2) Technology as a resource.

Expressions of Wanting to Know or Do More

Many participants indicated interest in learning more about how to craft educational experiences that would be effective with respect to age diversity in their classrooms:

I would be interested in knowing what are some activities that one can do in a math class to take into account and exploit the benefit of having different generations. (Sofya, 30-40)

I just want to say that I love that last prompt . . . Have I ever tried to learn about how to create a memorable pivotal learning experiences and incorporate them in your classrooms? How do I believe age may play a role in how everyone receives or experiences the environment? You know what? I haven't and like maybe I have created some inadvertently, but I like the idea of consciously doing that. (Haley, 50-60)

Yeah, you know, that that's actually a really good question. I think that's something that I probably don't do enough. But to create a memorable thing with the learning experience in classroom would be great to try to do every semester somehow. (Paul, 50-60)

A few participants framed reflections about designing instruction with age diversity in mind around their assumptions of what different age groups would or would not respond to:

I have not created experiences specifically for a mix of ages, but I would love too. I mean I do have various activities and things, but I don't really have them there. I would like to talk with some coworkers to come up with some ways to do that. Then again, it would be more impactful on the younger half of the student age demographic. Again, the older students have either already gone through something with whatever we come up with or they already know what they need to know so they're not 100% invested. I just think that being you have students that have had many many experiences, if can come up with, make something memorable for them 0 that's almost key for them be successful in that class. I mean if a younger student has a memorable, pivotal experience in your class, that can be life changing for them. I wouldn't expect, you know I could be wrong – but I just wouldn't expect the older students to get quite as much out of that. (Adam, 50-60)

Another participant indicated that age-related resources might be useful but were not currently being used:

I don't know. I don't know what I don't know. Who is researching this? I don't know where to look up things that are age-related. I would probably look for someone who's doing research on the topic. (Jared, 40-50)

A few of the participants embraced the concept of age diversity to the point of suggesting it should be considered at the institutional level:

> *Students are ranging in age from 15 to 75 in my classrooms. And I know a lot of decisions that are being made about college that does not include that demographic. So, it's really Pillars of Guided Pathways and policies don't address the older student. I would like to be in the classroom right now, just so I can see the interaction between a 15-year-old and the 75-year-old. I have students that are in high school right now and some that graduated in the 60s. So that's a wealth of knowledge to hear. I would just love to see those cultures cross paths.* (Maya, 50-60)

> *I noticed a little bit of complacency. So, we are losing students. Enrollment's going down, but no real sort of like, "Oh, we need to do something to reach out to the older students and bring them in." I was watching a PBS news hour show where they were talking about the future. But I don't hear any of talk about them preparing for that. They're sort of like, "Oh well, I guess we'll have fewer part-timers." It's just terrible for me just because of this last semester. I've actually felt the impact of it. I had six classes that I was assigned and all of them were canceled. I didn't fill any of them. And so, I ended up taking over somebody else's classes who had to get a full-time position somewhere else. And I took over a couple of classes, but otherwise I wouldn't have any classes this Fall. And I was beginning to think about maybe I need to find another career or something like that because it's been getting tougher. Just before COVID I started to have trouble filling classes and never had trouble before. And so, I think that this is an issue. Attracting the older students is probably – if they want to sustain sort of where community colleges are at, I think that seems maybe an option for them in the future. But I don't think*

people are thinking about that at all right now. At least I haven't heard about that sort of focus. I think there's probably different ways of doing it. (Jorge, 50-60)

Technology as a Resource

Most of the resources participants shared during interviews were common to faculty in this region: institutionally supported days for short professional development sessions, summer reading, conferences, internet searches. There was no mention of age-diversity training and no noticeable trend in how these common resources might be used differently by faculty from different age groups. The one element among resources which participants did link to age was that of technology. The collection of shared observations about challenges and opportunities related to technology before and during the pandemic grew to stand on its own as a theme in the Resources Category. The Technology Theme's data is organized into subthemes according to who's technology experiences were being offered – those of the participants' students, of their colleagues, or their own.

Observations about students and technology during and after COVID. As in the rest of the nation, the pandemic's isolation measures came 6-8 weeks into the terms at the colleges constituting this study's site. Anecdotes from participants highlight a key difference between how older and younger students show up in the online environment:

My classes are asynchronous, but I hold synchronous office hours in a discussion group format. Usually, it is the older students, right, but they have the time. And the younger students might be at work, or if they do show up, they won't turn the cameras on. That's a big, big thing between the older and younger generations. My older students always turn the cameras on. My younger students – I'm always thanking them if they DO turn the cameras on. Like, "Thank you! I get to see your face! Thank you! Appreciate that!" (Maya, 50-60)

One of the reasons I like to have them on cameras, it can help them focus. And my youngest students, the ones who are actually in high school, this is like fish to water. And my 'somewhat' older students . . . later 20s . . . are a little slower with it. But they're still comfortable with it. Now what's interesting is my older students - when you get into say the 40 range and above - they're the ones most likely to have their cameras on. (Simon, 50-60)

However, according to a few participants, students of all ages appeared to struggle when they come from backgrounds where they had limited exposure to digital technologies. In a few cases, participants focused on describing computer literacy struggles only in young students, tracing the lack of exposure to high schools with fewer resources and which serve populations which have more socioeconomic challenges:

Some of the colleges where I have worked, or even without it getting too crazy - even in my own district - there are differences in computer literacy, especially if the students come from a more challenged urban environment. I used to work in another school in this district and those students - often versus these students – you can see there's a big difference in their abilities with computers. High school preparation is probably a big part of what's behind that difference. (Finn, 40-50)

A different participant from the same discipline noted a general resistance to using technology presented by students who signed up for a face-to-face class. This participant followed this observation with a recognition that each age group seemed to have a different perspective about technology:

When I brought in technology to my face-to-face classes before the pandemic . . . I don't know if it's so much as an age group thing as perhaps an economics thing. Some students complain that they're not taking an online class. Or, they don't know how to - they don't know how to work technology. I think every specific age group has a different outlook or way of interacting with technology and computers than others because we are part of the transition where no one had a computer at home to everyone's carrying a computer around with them. (Jared, 40-50)

Observations about younger students and technology. Remarkably, post-COVID, high school students were perceived by a few participants to be *more* unprepared for face-to-face environments since they had recently spent so much of their pandemic years in high school in the online environment:

Preparation wise . . . I'll be honest, this pandemic, although we expected the students to be very prepared and comfortable or whatever . . . but I am teaching hybrid classes now, some face-to-face – I already see they are just behind. There are a lot of things contributing to this. Online learning can only help students to a certain level. But they're definitely not prepared, especially the ones coming from high school and now getting into college. The last two years high school was done online. And now, they are coming in the college and are not in face-to-face and hybrid classes. Their performance is very, very, very low. (Beth, 40-50)

As indicated in the quotes below and several that follow a bit later in this section, younger students appeared to some participants to be more ready than older students to embrace novel instructional technologies and integrate these to gamify their studies or simply to remove slower, more manual forms of gathering and recording information.

Well, I can say right away those 14-year-olds want to try something new every week. In fact, they put together a good game for our class and just brought it in. And we played for a good while. So yeah, that's what you would expect if you think about, from the youngest group. They want to try something new, and they have something they think is gonna be fun. (William, 60-70)

Rather than take notes manually, the young ones type them in or take a picture: My class is very lecture-based. They're expected to come in and take notes. But there is a difference in the age group. If they have an iPad, they can take notes electronically. Somehow, they are finished quicker. With an iPad you can also just take pictures, so you don't have to write everything. Whereas an older student, who might not have that, is taking a lot longer to write down the same notes a younger student takes down quicker - this gives them a lot of free time in a lecture-based class. (Nick, 30-40)

With technology you access books, but you don't have the read them - they are narrated to you. You don't have to struggle with penmanship - you just type it. Information is accessible through YouTube, Google - you don't have to the retain information because you can always find it on your phone. (Gwynn, 40-50)

However, according to participants, there is a gap in the ability of younger students to use more advanced technology. This includes software that requires raw input and manipulation by users in order to perform complex calculations:

When they encounter a program like excel where you can do a lot of stuff with it, and sometimes you're asked to do a lot of stuff with it, they freak out. Like, "Oh! This is the hardest

thing ever. I can't believe you would require us to do this. And so, I have to talk them through it.
I think the younger, the very young students, that's something particular with them. This
dependency on user-friendly software among the very young has been evolving slowly over the
past ten years. (Jared, 30-40)

Observations about older students and technology. Older students were reported as
being sometimes less familiar with technology to the point of complaining about it.

A few years ago, I was trying to use the Clicker technology when it first came out. I also
tried using the cell phone for real time surveys. Younger people were just "Easy! Okay! Let's do
it." Many older people, they were not super comfortable during these experiments. So, it depends
on the type of experience you are supplying. (John, 50-60)

I usually have complaints from older students about technology. Older generations don't
want to use technologies. Like, "Oh my god! Sign into this website to get an eBook. Can we just
order a hard book?!" I can't get past this. (Gwynn, 40-50)

Older students were perceived by several participants as struggling with the technical aspects of
learning management systems (LMS) such as Canvas:

Most of the students, as far as I know, they tell me, "I'm a mature student." And I don't
know what they mean exactly by "mature." They say, for example, "I'm a mature student. I am
coming back to school and I'm not really sure how to operate Canvas." So that's how I know
they're not fresh out of school. Okay, they're a little older and they are having challenges with
technology somehow. (Russ, 40-50)

Sometimes I do get older students who have a harder time with the technology. So, they haven't been in school for a while, and they often tried a class earlier and they weren't ready for it then for whatever reason. And now they come back and now we're . . . every classroom now is . . . you have to have an LMS that you're on and you're posting things on these discussion boards. And especially now that we're fully online, it's like there's all this other stuff you have to learn that the younger students pick up fairly quickly. Sometimes if you are an older student and haven't or don't have the kind of job where you're sort of dealing with those kinds of things all the time, here, for you, it's completely new. In that aspect, in those early times, they're sometimes overwhelmed. And that is when I sort of reach out and say, "Hey, let's come to office hours and I'll walk you through it. It's not that hard. Once you sort of pick it up, you'll see it's not hard." So, I think older students are actually fresh. (Jorge, 50-60)

Other participants noted that older students may struggle with virtual social learning functions such as 'Discussion Boards':

I think when I started incorporating like video responses and some of my discussion threads, I could see age coming into play, because the younger students had less difficulties and the older students felt almost shut out of the assignment. Once I got that information, I knew what to do and to like expand it and just say you can do text or you can record audio. But when I first started that I was just so focused and so sure that everybody living in this age would already know how to do the video stuff that it did surprise me. So, it's an interesting experiment. (Callie, 40-50)

Participants reflected that older students bring a sense of willingness to master technology. Despite their lack of familiarity, many participants reflected those older students seem to thrive in learning technology given a supportive environment:

It can be challenging for some of the older students to navigate learning management systems. Overall, I think that older and younger influence one another in discussion boards when they get up to speed. Like some of the younger students will talk about some of their blogs or podcasts that they have. And some of the older students will be completely interested and say, "Share that and let me check it out." And some have posted to their box. I was actually a guest on one of my student's podcasts. So, I don't know anything about "Black Ass." I don't listen to them, but the student brought that to me and they were super excited about it. So, I wanted them to know, I'm going to support you. I'm going to check it out. And so, I think that interaction . . . that's why I do so many discussion board groups – because it is the only space where we interact with one another as a class. (Maya, 50-60)

I've always been pleasantly surprised that the older generation students get the job done. Whereas a younger student might say, "Oh I'm not . . ." or "I don' know if . . ." Whereas the older students will say, "What is it that I'm supposed to learn? I don't use this 'what's it called'?" They'll share how they enlisted help from a family member, "So I got my granddaughter to show me how to use snapchat." And I say, "Good for you! Now more people are learning about this subject!" (Sofya, 30-40)

Still other participants described older students with a high level of computer literacy because they are returning to college from the modern workplace to upgrade or add to their skills

or to retool for a new career. It was also noted that with advance preparation and support, students in the "older student" group can experience success with technology.

The older folks have to work with computers. They have more practical experience with computers so if I show them something, they're like "Okay. Well, we'll just work on this." Then the younger folks, its new to them. (Tom, 40-50)

Despite difficulties with technology, some participants observe that there is an increase in the number of older students present in their classes. Mature students with families appear to prefer taking online classes. This is especially true for recently immigrated women who assume their culture's traditional role of homemaker and mother.

I would love to see the dynamics of them in an in-person classroom because I've never had this many older students before this online space. (Maya, 50-60)

I believe most of my students work part time or full-time, but they are refugees or immigrants generally. We have just a few international students who are there to complete their studies. I believe most of them are working or taking care of their children . . .generally they are coming from traditional families . . . that the woman takes care of all the house, homework, and everything, while also taking care of children. So, I believe it depends on gender. My female students seem to have more to do both at home and as part time workers vs. my female students like they're going to work and going to college and being less likely to be the only ones taking care of children and other things. This influences their experiences, I see that. Many of my female students, they say, "Oh, I love to learn online because I can take care of my children. I can cook. I can clean, I can!" So, that's my understanding, that for my female students its better

to be at home and take care of all their things while male students prefer to go to campus.

(Marta, 40-50)

Observations about faculty and technology. According to several participants, instructional technology and distance education is a topic of discussion among colleagues when they are able to get together. These reflections were accompanied by a timbre of voice and body language that indicated the fervor of early adopters of technology and often were delivered with a note of humor:

I think that when it when it comes to the students who are at home taking a class . . . I think their routines are pretty much dictated by the realities of having to pay attention to a computer screen. So, whatever it is they're doing eating or snacking or playing with . . . a lot of pets in classrooms . . . lots of pets. In fact, I had a colleague who reported that, you know . . . "Show me your cat!" and before long, everyone was showing their cats and she made the comment, "Then I had a screen full of cats" So . . . a classroom full of cats. (Simon, 50-60)

One of my younger colleagues was brainstorming with me about how to make students actually be engaged and not fall asleep on us. He's like, "Oh! You've got to use zoom surveys." I'm like, "Oh god. What's this?" And he's like, "You know on the spot survey thing." And I was like, "Sounds OK." So, you set it up online and they go to their cell phone, and they put in this code and it's a game to play on the spot and you get points, and it is all of this. (Zelia, 40-50)

Since I've been back on campus, one of the older members of the department . . . I run into them in the halls a bunch of times. And we bounce stuff off of each other like what things from the pandemic times we're still incorporating – what things we still found useful. (Lily, 40-50)

As inferred in a few of the passages shared by participants in the preceding section which focused on students and technology, faculty participants report learning to navigate instructional technology along with their students:

I love trying new things in my classroom and sometimes I don't think of the consequences. One time I was using new technology in my classroom to engage my students more and I didn't even ask if they had a cell phone. Older students did not have a smart phone. I had to ask myself, "Why did you to this? Why did you assume that everyone has smart phones and can join activities?" I felt so bad for them because I should have thought about that. But since creating groups of mixed ages I have fixed that problem. (Marta, 40-50)

More time required to prepare the youngest students to use data-essential software. Participants who teach in disciplines requiring a level of proficiency with calculators and data processing remarked that they must put in a significant effort to give their youngest students the basic understanding and skills to utilize this software - perhaps because it is more sophisticated than what these new community college students are exposed to in high school:

The requirement for operating computers is higher now than for maybe the preceding or subsequent generations because we understand things like file structure, like the deeper parts of the computer, things that aren't just the user interface. I think that's a lot of it. I probably should be a little more receptive to that. I'm getting better at realizing that not every student knows how to work the programs I'm asking them to. I make videos about how to graph and how to use Excel and that type of thing. I think they're pretty receptive to that. Especially the younger students who expect computers to be very user friendly. So much so that the program is not able to do a lot because it has to be so user friendly. (Jared, 40-50)

Technology connects faculty colleagues. Connections between participants and their far-flung colleagues are enhanced by technology:

I have a cadre of faculty with whom I have stayed in touch. We've been in communication for this whole time, man! You know we kind of stick together because we've been through all of this long before it was quite fashionable. (Amy, 70-80)

When we do get together it's either a meeting and or the occasional cocktail party of which I'm the one who organizes them . . . And even the cocktail party is actually fun, because more people show up because they CAN . . . And I've noticed that it's not a bad thing to sit there on Zoom having a party. I found that to be interesting. I mean, as an aside . . . talking to people I haven't talked with in decades now. You know, a colleague of mine who's worked {in a far away state}, I haven't talked with him before zoom in like over well over two decades. So, Zoom is zoom is connecting the world. (Simon, 60-70)

Suggesting distance education awareness for administrators. One participant expressed exasperation at college administrators who refuse to recognize that higher education is moving toward distance education and that is likely to expand enrollment for working students who depend on flexibility for access:

I am nothing but annoyed with people who are, you know . . . they used to say of generals: generals are always fighting the last war - well it's not . . . it's true about leadership in an organization and . . . So, we need to look forward to distance education expanding globally and we may have to get somewhere beyond the notion of nonresident tuition and just charge the same tuition everybody . . . but that's another issue. (Simon, 50-60)

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Foreword: Feeling the Challenge

RESEARCHER: *If you think of your classroom as a microcosm where students learn to engage with people of different ages, what kind of professional development or training do you think would be appropriate for faculty if we're heading down the road of keeping them together? Who do you imagine would best offer that support?*

JOHN: *I think . . .this is a wild proposal. I know.*

It's not practical. I know.

But if you want to just hear . . .any proposal . . . I would say . . . students who are younger need a different set of teachers. Students who are older, they need a different set of teachers. I think teachers need to be trained on how to deal with younger ones. Teachers need to be trained to {deal with} older ones. Each one needs a different set of skills, for sure.

Now, because we don't have that luxury, we expect that our faculty cater to both groups. Some people, they are great at doing that. Some people . . . they are not. Maybe that's why there is a lot of conflicts in the classroom.

I think of the majority of these conflicts are because our faculty . . . they are not equipped to deal with all these generations that they have in one class at the same time. And people . . . they . . . they need to be catered to differently.

And if you're not willing to, or you are not able to, then . . . you have one group succeed in your class. The other one is going to fall behind. Some people, they're going to drop your class. Some people are going to stay with your class. And it's just throwing darts in the dark . . . you don't know what sticks, what is going to fall, I think.

Again, it's not practical. I understand that. So, I'm not an idealist, but I think either we have to separate these people in different classes and let different people deal with them, or we have to train our faculty to be able, because they need different things. Their needs are different needs -different sets of skills [are required]. And the approach must be different. You cannot treat an 18-year-old in your class, with the same way that you treat a 45 or 50 year old in your classroom. There's no way you can be successful.

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain understanding about how faculty experience the phenomenon of the multigenerational classroom and it was guided by one research question: "How do community college faculty members describe their experience with face-to-face multigenerational community college classrooms?"

Findings

Participants described a consistent and expanded age diversity in their current classrooms and noted that, for most of them, this is very different from their own college student days when older students appeared rarely and often only in evening classes. The four primary findings discussed in this chapter are:

1) Tacit awareness of age: Faculty are tacitly rather than specifically aware of age groups associated with generational characteristics.

2) Intuitively responsive instructional practices: Elements of teaching and learning practices for adults of mixed ages are present but are not explicitly underpinned by adult learning theory.

3) Best practices for age diversity: Instructional practices that support learning for every student.

4) Organizational structure matters: Impact on age diversity among students and faculty.

Finding One: Tacit Awareness of Age: Faculty are tacitly rather than specifically aware of age groups associated with generational characteristics

This finding describes how faculty perceive and make sense of age diversity within the context of the many facets of diversity.

Faculty Care

Perhaps one of the most evident as well as the most promising findings in this study is the affirmation that community college faculty care about their students' learning experiences. They care deeply for their students and commented repeatedly on how they notice their student's struggles, recall their own, and flex to accommodate their students. The study data indicates that community college faculty frequently and repeatedly connect life complexity with "older students." This echoes one of the defining elements of the broader definition of *adult student* (Choy, 2002; Chung et al., 2014) which appears in Chapter 1. Consequentially, faculty alter their expectations and practices to accommodate what this means to students in their classrooms. Faculty participants in this study spoke the language of care and empathy. They curate resources to support their students' academic pursuits that include mental health and housing resources. The student crises they work through are evidence that they are cognizant of adult learner situations and care enough to take action, to give their time, to be authentic and human for their students.

Responding with Flexibility and Empathy

The struggles faculty participants experienced during their own student days appear to be more defining in shaping how they support their connections with students than the construct of age itself. Several faculty members were adult students and juggled children, jobs, and at times experienced housing and food insecurity. They have adapted to disabilities or have experienced health crises. Many have family obligations and understand the unexpected demands of caring for others.

In other words, faculty participants' previous concrete experiences with struggle prepare them to relate to adult students, particularly if those previous student experiences were related to

navigating multiple life responsibilities or adversity. Their carryover of this awareness as faculty members is seemingly without mental reference to age or generational issues. This finding suggests that perhaps age is not front and center in diversity awareness, even if age-associated factors are influencing multigenerational community college classrooms.

In this study, 19 of the 34 interviewed have non-white identities, or are first/second generation immigrants – factors that are associated with challenges to completion for students. These faculty spoke of oppression and discrimination related to their identity or of memories of a period of struggle as they adjusted to their new country. They reported that the pressure to succeed and the high expectations of their families added an extra layer of responsibility. Participants spoke of these experiences influencing their teaching practices to reach out and meet student needs. At times, this meant that they altered their expectations of what '*a good student'* is. To illustrate, one faculty member came to understand when she moved from a university setting to the community college setting that often students cannot be on time because of unexpected or overwhelming challenges. She stopped equating that with being disrespectful or not caring. Several faculty members stated that they stopped setting firm deadlines so that students can submit work late without feeling shamed or being penalized. The story of the Uber driver from Chapter Four is an easy one to remember and it clearly illustrates faculty recognition of how difficult it can be for community college students to complete their studies and how willing they are to reshape their expectations and practice.

An analysis of the data in this study suggests that many faculty clearly see individual students - especially those with challenges - with a bit more interest than it may appear. The significance of this perspective and decisions to invest may be explained by how some of the faculty participants felt that they were 'rescued' on their educational journeys during their time in

community college classes. However, the data also indicated that the burden of faculty care in support of student struggle may actually deflect them from being more finely attuned to the more academic adult learner literature framed in a formal sense – through the study and application of adult learning theories. Ironically, many faculty participants were unaware of the rich potential that adult learning theory might offer to intentionally facilitate mixed age adult learning environments.

Vague Definition of Age Diversity

Although significant age diversity was recognized by the faculty members in this study, students were grouped by their faculty into the broad categories of "younger" or "older". Notably, few faculty members seemed to display an interest in knowing the specific ages of their students, other than perhaps the extremes – young high schoolers or senior citizen students. This is quite interesting in its own stead. Faculty did not seem to recognize that there is a flow of generations through these "younger" and "older" supergroups and did not recognize that the age groups have multiple distinct generational identities – perhaps creating a static set of expectations of 'young,' 'normal {*aka traditional*},' and 'old' for the students and learning context.

The word 'generation' is part of the study's title, "Multigenerational Classrooms" and nearly all of the questions during the interviews used this word as an anchor point. Even so, references by participants to specific generations only came up four times in approximately 50 hours of interviews and the word "generation" in some form or another about half a dozen times. Perhaps this indicates that the concept of "generation" is invisible when connected to 'seeing' adult students – and may offer some explanatory power for why much of the adult learner literature similarly does not analyze or consider adults in more specific age groupings, or the

scant study of multigenerational experiences in adult settings. Inherently, this finding suggests that further research and reflection is needed to consider why age diversity may not be in the explicit consciousness of faculty participants. Of additional interest is understanding why age is not recognized as a learning influence when other identity and contextual elements are freely acknowledged as impactful and relevant.

Although faculty members became highly engaged with the topic, quickly recounting age-related experiences, the information they shared about age was framed in the most general terms such as "older" or "younger" with sparing references to "really young" or "really old". Participating faculty were unsure of their student's ages for the most part and were reluctant to guess the boundaries of student ages (youngest and oldest). This was true also when asked about the ages of faculty colleagues. One study by Bahr et al (2021) explored how adult students of various ages were influenced by math and English course contextual features in their learning. They found that adult students were at a slight advantage within courses with active participation and in face-to-face formats, and that surprisingly students over 30 fared quite well even in large section sizes, as opposed to smaller section sizes. The researchers theorized that the increased diversity rich environment of a larger class was a learning enhancement for adult students, including offering opportunities to develop and participate in study groups. They also determined that adult students in math courses had a slightly higher chance of passing their course when their fellow students were close in age.

An example of generational difference. As an exception of the blurring of ages, faculty participants relayed significantly clear observations that younger students are different today. Participants attributed classroom behaviors of the youngest students to deficiencies in the high school experience or to the time spent online during the COVID years. While some of that may

be accurate, participants didn't appear to take into account more overarching generational shifts for young learners around digital/online learning, or social engagement and social media. Perhaps the negative feedback faculty received about the level of course organization can also be traced to changes in Gen Z's expectations around scaffolding and structuring of information. Dalton and Crosby's (2013) study on social media influences on college student learning theorizes that college students from generations with high social media usage experience differential identity development including expectations of instantaneous communication and unique problem-solving approaches to learning.

Participants did discuss their observations that students of different ages seemed to have different learning styles. For instance, participants noticed high school students are different from recent graduates who were traditional students but did not make age-related distinctions in the actual student differences they observed - perhaps because both these groups come from the same generation. Younger student groups were noted as preferring to work only with each other if forced to work in groups, for their digital skills, a desire for novelty and gamification, and a tendency to be ready and willing to assist older students with technology. Both of these closely clustered age groups were perceived to have difficulty and confusion with plagiarism and also with being openly engaged during class sessions.

Participants did share their observations that various student ages do appear to influence or connect to learning styles. This data finding is consistent with the community college literature addressing early college or high school student concurrent community college studies, and some of the instructional and maturity challenges this presents (Mohr, 2017).

Finding Two: Intuitively-Responsive Instructional Practice

Teaching and learning in the multigenerational classroom appear to be congruent with the literature in terms of faculty and student perceptions and adult student identity but diverge from classic andragogical practice. Community college faculty demonstrated awareness of age diversity among students to include a significant number of adults but do not appear to be practicing in the multigenerational classroom from a foundation of adult learning theory.

Data supported that faculty believe adult students enrich classroom content and environments by sharing lived experiences. It also conveyed a recognition that adult students have unique learning perspectives and have a set of unique expectations and learning needs. However, faculty participants do not exhibit knowledge of or report *intentional* action based on the tenets of adult learning theory, as opposed to general affinity or flexibility. This concept supports that of Heffernan, Cesnales, and Dauenhauer (2021), who report that " that faculty members expected benefits from including older adults in their classroom, and then reported positive experiences, yet they themselves did not change their teaching style to facilitate intergenerational learning" (p. 502). Gouthro (2019) describes a trend among faculty in universities to rely less and less on theory to ground their teaching practice, largely because of professional time constraints as a barrier to professional development. The participants in this study, particularly adjunct faculty who spend significant time commuting from college to college, expressed feeling constrained by time limitations, thus were either unable or limited in capacity to engage in teaching related professional activities or even to spend substantial time on any one campus to serve extra student needs.

Theory is Part of Practice but Not Necessarily Adult Learning Theory

While most participants remarked on how older students convey respect and appreciation for the experience of education, enrich learning in the classroom for everyone, and can be relied on to show up and do the work, few demonstrated understanding of how those attributes translate into learning expectations and how that should or could potentially impact instructional practice. Work of Graham et al. (2000), Knowles (1980, 1984), and Tønseth (2018) establishes that adult learners' lived experiences define their understanding of the world and can serve to motivate learning. New information is filtered through the lens of these lived experiences and, if considered relevant and useful, will be woven into the fabric of these experiences (Knowles, 1984).

There were a few faculty participants who spoke about having students share information from their lives as part of class discussions. One of these faculty has a practice of asking all students to introduce themselves on the first day of class in an icebreaker. Two faculty offered examples of planned student learning activities which directly engaged age diversity with one of these featuring the inclusion of adult students' lived experiences.

Paul's regular practice of calling on older students to share pertinent lived experiences during content discussions and his comments about those stories reflects an intuitive understanding of the importance of lived experiences to advance student learning – for students of all ages. This habit of shining a light on adult student experiences prepares younger students for new information, advances content learning for all, but despite Paul's approach, most of the larger study data indicated that it appeared to be incidental rather than intentional faculty practice.

Conversely, faculty members demonstrated a capacity and willingness to apply theory and evidence-based practices to undergird their teaching practices related to other forms of diversity. For example, several participants spoke in the language of building equity into instruction and used phrases such as "giving voice" and "being inclusive." Others shared strategies that are central to universal design such as "multi-modal" and "accessible content" and "scaffolding and chunking". Not surprisingly, a range of highly successful to disastrous classroom activities were described by participants. In all cases, the activities were initiated in response to something a student told them or something they noticed about their students. For example, faculty who teach English shared that they offer students the opportunity to choose the literature that they will critique. This framing of literacy learning is central to culturally sensitive practice (Lee, 1995). There were several mentions of integrating personal devices in classroom activity and this is considered age-appropriate learning for the two younger generations (Gen X and Gen Z). Awareness of the age-related theory underpinning the practice was not evident for those examples. Although faculty valued the successful learning dynamic these activities set up - they simply did not recognize that the activity was supporting adult student learning proclivities.

Generational Tensions and Dynamics

The expansion of age diversity among both community college students and among community college faculty contributes to intergenerational tensions as well as supports constructive dynamics for students and faculty. The presence of senior adult students and high schoolers brings representation from 5 generations (70+ years). Age diversity among students is reported as normalized to the point of being expected by community college faculty. The age distribution of the faculty participants in this study notably spans over 60 years (4 generations).

In some cases, interactions among these various groups plays out to everyone's advantage, in others tension arises and at times detracts from constructive outcomes.

Paradoxical identity persists for adult learners. Even though the community college classroom is more multigenerational than ever, the ideal of "traditional learners" still appears to be an invisible standard - an internal tension that reveals itself. Adult students are described in the literature as also ascribing to the notion of the ideal college student being young, full-time, and centrally oriented toward academics (Bishop-Clark & Lynch, 1992; Chen, 2017; Kasworm, 2005). Further, the studies suggest that assuming the role of leader is a central feature to adult student identity. Their findings were based on faculty perceptions of adult student behaviors in the classroom. By assuming the role of leader, adult students, who may feel uncomfortable to find themselves back in a classroom and among younger students establish for themselves a sense of purpose (Kasworm, 2005). Their lived experiences have established their credibility with their younger peers and with their faculty.

Even though the faculty participants in this study generally thought of adult students (25+ years old) as more mature, more experienced, and more responsible than younger students, they noted that at times adult students measured themselves against that traditional ideal, believing against all evidence that discontinuous or older students are "lesser students." Several faculty members spoke of coaching students who expressed self-doubt about their performance relative to this perceived ideal.

At the same time, numerous faculty participants shared recollections of adults taking on the role of peer leader in the classroom. They expressed appreciation of the behavior as enhancing learning for everyone as well as providing more ease in overall classroom management. These observations were often offered with a degree of surprise, indicating that the

behavior of an adult learner assuming leadership was unexpected. The perceived *novelty* of adult

students as leaders perhaps indicates that faculty also subconsciously intuit that adult learners are

perhaps underdogs or unable to fully engage due to multiple responsibilities, as opposed to

viewing adult learning, or adult students assuming leadership, as a natural part of their studies,

just as it may occur with traditional age or early college students.

In examples where younger students are mentioned, faculty participants inferred that the

younger students appear to appreciate the older students' presence. This was the case in the story

of Pinky and Brain in which an older female student handpicked younger students in order to

craft a high functioning group for collaborative learning. In the story Pamela shared about

resisting and then giving in to a drive to be the leader in a recent college lab class, her group

succeeded in delivering their assignment while other groups, presumably without an adult leader,

"fell apart" and devolved into a shouting match at the end.

The data clearly indicated that faculty observed numerous successes with group work

among students of mixed ages which supports existing research on adult students. Student groups

with a mix of ages appeared to thrive and interact well with each other in keeping with findings

in earlier studies (Duff, 2010; Frame & Ballah, 2015). While some past research reports an

aversion to group work with younger students by adult students, this study found that they are

often among the first of their classmates to form groups with students of different ages (Allen,

2018; Bishop-Clark & Lynch, 1992; Chen, 2017; Goto & Martin, 2009; Kasworm, 2005;

Serowick, 2017).

Age dynamics between students and faculty. One of the student-originated tension

dynamics in the data appears to be generated by older students who offer covert and overt

challenges to younger faculty. In one case, three different adult students challenged a faculty

participant during three separate instances in their early years resulting in that faculty member developing a general sense of being 'on guard' among older students. This tension left a lasting impression.

Younger students and faculty. Another type of student/faculty dynamic originates with younger students. Community college faculty participants perceived that younger students expect a high degree of structure and "to do" lists, rubrics or detailed plans for learning. When the content or pace become too much, younger students tend to blame their faculty rather than shift learning expectations. Some faculty do not consider it to be part of their job to manage the transition to college level work for these young students and label them as underprepared or in need of a different skill set if not a different teacher. As described in the data, this dynamic disrupts an authentic mentoring relationship between young students and faculty, putting younger students on the defensive and leaving some faculty resisting "the drama" of engaging with younger students. Presenting an alternate perspective, findings by Day Lovato, Tull & Ross-Gordon (2011) indicate that faculty in their study reported that in their experience older learners also prefer a high degree of structure, and also of more actively engaged learning activities in the classroom.

Many faculty also shared expectations to be treated with deferential respect. The preferred use of a dearly earned title such as "Dr." may signal to some students that a faculty member is too far apart from them in knowledge and therefore also in social standing. Younger students are more apt to forget to use the title or simply to not know the significance of the title and to not use it appropriately. The data suggested a cycle where faculty may handle this by correcting a student in class, resulting in a particularly embarrassing moment which further distances the faculty from all students.

Power hierarchy inserts distance between faculty and their students. In the classroom, if power dynamics are not checked, faculty, by virtue of their position, wield all the power and students are expected to acknowledge this power by complying with instructions and by addressing the faculty 'appropriately' as the wise sage. Some faculty may persist in situating their professional identity in a traditional relationship structure based on this positional power. When faculty insist on an ultimate authority in making decisions about teaching and learning even in the face of student disagreement or push back, the faculty feel disrespected. When students make attempts to engage faculty with issues outside of the content, some faculty described feeling threatened and not being able to empathically engage. Students who feel this disengagement may push back harder, leading to a cycle of mutual rejection and power struggle. These tensions result in lost opportunities for authentic learning. In robust student-faculty relationships, students can be coached toward learning outcomes and holistic growth.

Power hierarchy among faculty. Perhaps the most prevalent tension in this study was that among faculty. Young adjunct faculty reported being left out of meetings by older tenured faculty. Newly tenured faculty were rebuffed by older tenured faculty when they suggested instructional innovations. Older adjunct faculty were critical of those older tenured faculty who they viewed as being stagnant in their content and unresponsive to students. There were several references among participating faculty of all ages and in both the full-time and part-time status to older colleagues who "continue to teach as they were taught."

Adding to the mix, community college faculty in the large urban area of this study were siloed from one another more so than in other educational venues with the exception of, perhaps, faculty in fully online programs and colleges (Johnson, Hewapathirana, & Bowen, 2019). An opportunity to exchange institutional knowledge and the perspective of a long and storied

practice is lost to younger faculty when they are not embraced with collegial inclusiveness. The "stagnation" of older faculty is further sustained when they miss out on the *updated* content and *currently* effective teaching methods their younger colleagues are likely more in touch with. It is important to note that the flow of information in the rapidly changing context of a technologically advancing world as well as the 'ways of being' which shift with generations, unless addressed, might be considered a particularly destructive deficiency as it impacts students as well as faculty.

Finding Three: Best Practices: Instructional practices that support learning for all ages

Among the threads tying themes together was that of best practices for age diversity. This finding is structured around two tangential sets of themes: 1) Different learners have different needs and, 2) Strategies to support mixed-age learning. This theme considers students <u>and</u> <u>faculty</u> as humans, learning together and growing holistically in the multigenerational classroom

Different Learners Have Different Needs

Community colleges have an integrated age dynamic and cannot cater specifically to adult learners although they currently do cater, by tradition, to traditional students and more recently to high school students. Faculty also belong to a body of adult learners with its own distinct age distribution and learning objectives. Between both groups are subsets of different kinds of learners.

Themes from the data regarding student learning illustrate participants' observations that there is a lack of college readiness among high school students and recent high school graduates (Adams & Corbett, 2010; Florence, 2017). Faculty report that these students do not take charge of their own learning and complain when they believe the material is too difficult. This finding

supports descriptions of traditional students across higher education (Adams & Corbett, 2010; Bishop-Clark & Lynch, 1992; Bourland, 2009; Brooks, 2007; Florence, 2017). It is interesting to remember here that traditional students are often considered the 'ideal' by adult students (Kasworm, 2005). Faculty did not express strong concerns about this issue among other age groups of students.

Several participants shared stories about group activities in which students of all ages engaged with each other in active learning. As mentioned above, adults were quick to organize the work and keep their classmates on track. This may be an example of how the 'self-directedness' of adults plays out in the mixed age setting (Conway, 2007; Goto & Martin, 2009; Kanter Public Learning and Work Institute, 2018; Lin, 2017). The leadership tendencies of adult students benefit everyone (Robinson, 2012). In the case of younger students, they have the opportunity to learn from older students how to internalize the drive for learning (Robinson, 2009). Group work benefits adult students because it facilitates building community which is integral to their identity as learners (Kasworm, 2014).

Faculty preparedness. Information shared about teaching did reflect an ethos of a student-centric approach, with elements of universal design. A few faculty members commented about teaching in a way that belied an awareness of informed instructional design and there were many creative and masterful techniques shared by those who gave no indication of awareness of theoretical foundations. Proven best practices such as flipped classrooms, scaffolding, and self-directed learning were discussed by participants. Most instructional activity developed through a trial and error implementation of an activity. In several of the examples offered, the step of preparing students on how to use the technology or even checking that the technology was present and working was not part of the implementation or planning. The impromptu, organic

approach to student learning activities in the classroom was the predominant approach faculty used, whether it be to address age diversity or other aspects of instructional design at the community college level.

Finding Four: Organizational Structure Matters: the impact on age diversity among students and faculty

Organizational and institutional structures of community colleges affects the dynamics of age diversity among community college faculty and their students through processes and systems that dwarf the individual.

Findings of this study suggest that adjunct faculty may be the hardest hit in this enrollment decline as they are the first to not be assigned their usual course load. Participants who are adjunct faculty spoke of having to be very careful about what they say and do around colleagues and administration not to anger or offend anyone and, in so doing, lose their usual course assignment. Several adjunct faculty members spoke of the competition to get assignments as enrollment shrinks. Tenured faculty are guaranteed their teaching load each semester. Adjunct faculty assignments are based on seniority within the discipline in which they are credentialed but when enrollment fluctuates, their loads are in jeopardy.

Enrollment has been steadily declining since 2010 in the study's region and dropped steeply when the pandemic struck. A surprising result reported among participants is that there is an increase in adult students subsequent to the pandemic. Adult students are present in online classes more that they were in face-to-face sections and formats. Traditional students who were surveyed at one of the colleges reported preferring a mix of face to face with 100% online classes. In a recent pre-pandemic study by Iloh (2018) the strengths of online learning and its' appeal to adult learners were examined, and despite the trade-off of potentially less engagement

or higher attrition, adult learners on the whole place a significant value on the flexibility and ability to have more control in managing their competing time demands while attending college.

Although colleges and universities began recruiting and supporting adult learners over 10 years ago, community colleges in the study area do not tailor course formats or other supports to target adult students. Instead, community colleges in the study area sought to bolster low enrollment by offering more and more dual enrollment options to the local high schools, something which is informally understood to be a national practice. This results in a short-term source of increased enrollment, however, as a steep drop in high school graduates is projected, it may create future pipeline issues.

Implications

Implications for Theory

The findings from this study of faculty experiences in the multigenerational community college classroom suggest that there is much work to be done for those who work with or are interested in the study and practice of adult learning and multigenerational classroom dynamics.

Theoretical framework recommendations. Based on this study, Brookfield's Critically Reflective Practice Theory (2002), should be considered a strong foundation where faculty practice and experience is being explored. The four lenses of the theory - Self, Students, Colleagues, Resources - are constructed to encompass elements of the instructional environment. This theory evolved from its original purpose as a self-guided reflection exercise to a discursive learning opportunity (Nardi, 2005). By framing the interview questions as prompts for reflection within the scope of each of the four lenses, faculty participants were led to reflect on their experiences systematically. In this case study, Brookfield's Critically Reflective Practice Theory

(Brookfield, 2002) proved to be an especially apt framework, eliciting unexpected depth of reflection and evidence of changes in perspectives among faculty participants.

Brookfield's theory, used as a coding framework, also provided a robust initial structure for the varied experiences shared by the participants. The four lenses proved to be a comprehensive set of categories for both analyzing and reporting the data, with relatively little open coding occurring. The lenses provided a 'home' category for every faculty experience offered - even as follow up questions moved further from the matrix of scripted questions. For researchers interested in qualitatively studying the faculty or facilitator perspective, I would recommend employing this framework.

The interview prompts were designed in a matrix format crafted by overlaying Brookfield's (2009) Critically Reflective Practice theory with Saldaña's (2009) Everyday Exchanges theory. Everyday Exchanges (Saldaña, 2009) was incorporated as a coding tool but proved to be unnecessary after the initial coding using Brookfield's four lenses. The data about the multigenerational classroom as framed by Critically Reflexive theory did not code appropriately using the Saldaña model in this instance (Thompson & Pascal, 2012). Still, the interplay of a theory of reflection with one of discourse analysis was useful in the weight that data was given during the coding process. More planning for integration with the coding software is likely to contribute to nuanced and integrated findings.

Advancing a more fluid Adult Learning Theory. This study springs from scholarly interest in adult student experiences and the findings suggest some shifts in adult learning proclivities from those described by established adult learning theories (Kasworm, 2003, 2005; Knowles, 1984). Although the referenced theories served to direct the literature review and to focus the review of themes into findings providing insights about adult learner, there appear to be

some elements which may be evolving. This implicates that a new adult learning model should be developed which includes some fluidity to account for the flow of generational perspectives through the adult student role in the multigenerational classroom. The generational-diversity among adult students has expanded since the time adult learning theory was first proposed and refined from two generations to four generations. Among the nuances observed in the data which refute certain literature-based characteristics of adult learners and challenge the learning environment are:

- The myth that older students are not as good at technology as younger students (Lambert, Erickson, Alhramelah, Rhoton, Lindbeck, & Sammons, 2014). Although some instances of difficulty with technology were reported, it was also noted that adults are more capable of using software as a tool while younger students are more comfortable with user-friendly platforms.

- The myth that adult students do not like group work (Bishop-Clark & Lynch, 1992; Duff, 2010). Adults were among the first to step forward for group work and no aversion to working with younger students was reported.

- The perception that adult students do not need faculty support (Kasworm, 2006; Knowles, 1984). Adult students were reported to seek out faculty assistance in times of academic struggle and outside conflict with class obligations. Considering the dissonance with past theory which the findings of this study sound out, the concept of "adult student" as a static state analogous to the early stages of human development appears to be flawed.

Perhaps development of a new lines of adult learning theory could begin with mapping adult student preferences based on generational identity rather than age to find out if a spectrum

of preferences aligns with the different worldviews and learning proclivities of age cohorts. This mapping might begin with a meta-analysis of the findings of past studies with consideration of which generations were populating the "traditional student" group and the "nontraditional student" metagroup under study (see Table 2.2. Relative Ages of Traditional and Adult Students' Ages). Future studies which use current Adult Learning Theory, in the meantime, should consider the expanded age diversity among adult students and the temporal nature of generational identities.

Implications for Practice

Implications of the findings of this study suggest that caring for and training faculty may be central to supporting teaching and learning in the multigenerational classroom. Preparing students and drawing the attention of administrators to the nature of age-related dynamics is anticipated to produce better student and institutional outcomes.

Caring faculty. For faulty who work in community colleges, the needs of students are evident and persistent. These needs range broadly from academic support and accommodations to basic needs and on to trauma intervention. Faculty are compassionate and are drawn into a position of caring or into a position that walls off the constant demands of the needful student population.

How are faculty prepared to manage the care for academic, basic, and trauma-induced needs? All of the faculty participants reported curating resources for their students, so we know that they are invested in serving their students holistically. Building better bridges between the Instructional and Student Services sides of community colleges might serve faculty and students alike. Benchmarking some of these practices which are currently in use *and* following through to make sure the intention of bridging is actually met might be helpful:

- **Survey faculty about student needs.** Instructional faculty know their students and can contribute vital information to shape student support planning. Student voices are essential, but faculty can help guide the qualitative research that draws out those voices.

- **Assign specific counselors to serve in specific instructional areas.** This service should include holding advising time in the physical locations of the disciplines served, attending instructional departmental meetings, and informing the department chair and/or instructional dean in general terms of issues that might be of concern. Counselors hear many things about instructional faculty that might be useful in reshaping classroom practice and behavior. This bridge building must be supported by instructional faculty as well with making time to know and to invite their counseling faculty colleagues to pertinent meetings.

- **Craft a Care Council.** Faculty should not have to curate resources. Bring all resource leaders from both Student Services and Instruction together to learn about each other and include representatives from the Faculty Senate. Sharing information makes everyone a counselor. Web-based information is often too many clicks away for a stressed student or busy faculty to find (Brown, et al, 2016; Jackson & Jones, 2014). Faculty can and will point students in the right direction, maximizing the effectiveness of Student Services efforts. This Care Council, with support, could evolved into a triage center for at risk students *before* grievances are filed and before the need arises for interventions from the Behavioral Intervention Team, Campus Safety Officers, Disability Services, or emergency interventions.

- **Student Support Page.** Craft a *single* page that can be inserted into every syllabus containing every resource the college offers and links to those in the community.

Students do not care or need to know which services are offered by who. Identify

common services and hurdles, and eventually reach a point of shared knowledge so they

can design a resource package which faculty (and Care Council members) can

disseminate.

Caring FOR Faculty. Community College faculty, like their adult students, have limited

time and attention to balance all of their needs. The burden of care is tremendous which faculty

take on by simply being in the same room with these students who bring with them competing

complexities based on the obligations and trials of adult life. The work of faculty has a high level

of eustress, but this flips quickly into distress when personal resources are depleted (Allison,

2004; Cassara, 1983). During my years as a community college administrator, I began to wonder,

who is caring for faculty? Other professions - public safety, counseling, military - with

predictably high trauma encounters have interventions and services to support the mental and

physical health of their members. Services and interventions are in place here and there in

community colleges, but community colleges rarely channel resources to fund an Office of

Faculty Development or similar faculty-centric functions. It might be beneficial for policy

makers, administrators, and faculty leaders to consider intentional implementation and

assessment of a select few of the support elements below. State system and college-level

leadership must assign responsibility for caring for faculty as a critical resource and consider it a

direct investment in improving student outcomes (Adams-Johnson, 2020; Killian, 2022). These

features should have their own program review process to maintain visibility and funding.

Although there are many innovative faculty supports in practice, here are a couple that are

already in place but which could be refined to be more effective:

- **"Self Care"**. Train faculty on Professional Development Days and stage regular reminders to engage in self-care. Self-care is different for every individual but the universal element is that it is needed and should be scheduled and prioritized. Surveying faculty about their needs and what kind of care would be meaningful as well as who among them could contribute to the welfare of all is a good start. For example, Kinesiology faculty can record just-in-time yoga breaks and Math faculty can sponsor online faculty chess matches.

- **Employee Assistance**. Amplifying the visibility of Employee Assistance Program services is more and more critical. Listing in the Employee Handbook and showing up in regular Health Fairs is not enough. We know that professionals may feel stigmatized if they engage in counseling so there is a need to better inform them of the benefits and examine how the field of psychiatry approaches counseling as a reflective practice (Charles, 2020; Myers, 2019). We should consider a more "intrusive counseling" approach.

- **Ask faculty.** Faculty know what they need, what they can and are able to do, and what they want - ask them.

Preparing faculty for instructional excellence. Faculty, like the adult learners in their classrooms, do not have the luxury of uninterrupted blocks of time to devote to remaining current in their field AND in instructional practices. This shines the light on some remarkably effective approaches to teaching and learning in the multigenerational classroom. Victoria's orchestrated classroom discussion about technology or entertainment or personal use was designed to chronologically inventory age-related experiences - from all generations - to illustrate how societies evolve. This format may serve as a model for instructional design in the

multigenerational classroom. Certainly, the valuing of lived experiences is used more broadly as a tenet of equity and inclusion design principles. What if we prepare faculty with theory and best practices? What if we frame their trial-and-error habits as action research and teach them to report outcomes to avoid duplication of efforts and errors?

- **New faculty orientation.** Administrators should partner with faculty senates in preparing new faculty with a mandatory best practices bootcamp that includes the basics of good instruction as well as the student supports mentioned earlier. Any orientation or bootcamp should be carefully scaffolded and coordinated with other colleges in the commute zone so that adjunct faculty receive transferrable credit for attending training at one college and can also collect the curated resources for *each and every* college where they have assignments. Asking faculty at each college to contribute to the training is a good way to keep extant faculty current in their practice.

- **Connect faculty**. Collectively, all of the trial and error and experimentation of invested, authentic community college faculty adds up to a shining compendium of best practices. This scattered resource should be gathered and assessed: 1) Make time and space and pay faculty to be together, 2) Design and align a statewide repository and a local digital repository and tag each entry to a searchable list that addresses a teaching and/or learning objective, 3) Include a discussion of how student outcomes are tied to instructional practice and what other factors may be at play in annual performance evaluations.

- **Time and Space Redefined.** Current faculty centers vary in effectiveness. COVID reshaped how we think and accept working synchronously in a defined space. Again, ask faculty how best to shape communities of practice that will meet their *current* needs. Ideas include virtual Friday afternoon discussions of topics common to all faculty and

quick lunch jam sessions among faculty of a single discipline. Develop mentoring

expectations and structures for new *and* established faculty to provide peer feedback and

keep practice fresh and their drive to teach invigorated.

- **Leverage the Brilliance.** Many campuses and state systems have online course shell

  repositories. Faculty who have refined their practice can be connected to those who want

  to try new methods in a methods repository. I made it a point to know and understand the

  instructional practices of faculty colleagues and connect them with each other as

  appropriate. This vital information should not reside with an individual, however. If a

  simple "teaching resource" inventory were designed for a college, new faculty would

  know who to call on to learn how to address an instructional issue. Those who feel

  isolated and want to connect would have a broader field of colleagues than those they run

  across (or miss) in the hallway. Perhaps a "Craigslist" approach to instructional needs and

  services would provide the fluidity required in the shifting multigenerational setting.

- **Examining Student Outcomes.** While student learning outcomes are a culmination of

  many factors such as the student's demographic profile and the availability of student

  support services, instructional practice has a large impact. Administrators and

  Department Chairs can introduce the topic informally into faculty performance

  discussions. Collective bargaining agreements may limit what is recorded on the

  evaluation form but reframing this moment as a point of reflection and learning about

  how professional practice is reflected in the data is likely to stimulate genuine personal

  assessment of that practice (Fenwick, 2001). At this point, faculty who do not already

  know how to informally assess their teaching can be given a tip sheet describing the 'One

  Minute Paper' or anonymous polls like 'Poll Anywhere.' Faculty care and want to do their

best and when presented guideposts, are generally willing to consider examining and tweaking their teaching.

Connect faculty to the administration. Faculty inform each other and, given the chance, will inform the administration. The regular operations of a college rarely include formal and open consideration of instructional excellence as tied to student outcomes. Administrators are warned enough times that instruction belongs only to faculty that they are hesitant to engage in discussion about anything related to teaching although the majority come from the faculty ranks. This taboo creates a deficiency and although I have no intention of challenging the notion that the classroom in the province of the faculty, I do believe that administrators should encourage the conversation about instructional matters and then *listen*. They should be present to offer support, to impart institutional value to the effort, and to honor those who do the central work of college - the teaching. Administrators can facilitate lunch and learns, Friday coffee and tea chats, breakfast meetings, chat rooms and Facebook groups. By being present, they *may* be invited to participate but most certainly will be informed about the very current challenges faced by students and faculty. In turn, administrators can add this valuable qualitative data to the quantitative data pouring in on reports to inform decisions and administrative practice.

Connect the pipeline. The findings of this study imply a disconnect of community colleges with K-12 who are immersed in upcoming generations and also with employers who rely on intergenerational productivity. Faculty participants in this study report that students come to them from high school unprepared for college level work or with expectations of directed learning. Although transition to college has long been a challenge for college faculty, generational differences may be at play. Connecting community college faculty to K12

colleagues will support understanding of the new generations coming through the educational pipeline.

The findings also imply that intergenerational communications may not be recognized by educators as an essential workplace skill as the nation seeks to expand the talent pool of workers not only across cultural identities but also across generational cohorts. Connecting community college faculty further with employers *and* with university faculty will inform them on how their most recent students are faring as they move on. Career and technical education programs rely on advisory boards comprised of employers in the industries their students will enter upon graduation. What if transfer and academic programs could also call on advisory boards as a resource to know how current their content is and what ancillary skills and knowledge will equip their students for success beyond the classroom? What if advisory councils for K12 and Higher Education intercalated efforts on a regular basis? The kind of real-time examination of complex information and sophisticated problem-solving is not beyond the abilities of today's community college faculty and their administrators. The rapid changes in today's society call out for us mutually pull down the walls siloing efforts and work together to bridge generational divides among ourselves and those we serve. There is evidence that early college high school students have the best retention and success rates for college completion (Berger et al., 2013). This might be considered the proof that the efforts to facilitate such interaction across educational agencies has merit in terms of improving student outcomes.

There is a need among educators for accessible and easily understandable information about what intergenerational communication skills the changeable employment market is seeking. Model employee profiles, industry forecasts, and labor market information are readily available to anyone who looks but who among the emotionally burdened and time constrained

community college faculty have time to look? It is suggested that Departments of Labor contribute to a digest of current and salient findings and resources to Departments of Education in a form that can be shared with faculty and administrators. What does the research tell us that is helpful right now, this year, in how to prepare students of all ages to work in the multigenerational workplace? The framing and dissemination of this up-to-the-minute stream of workplace data reporting might be carried out jointly by the Office of institutional Effectiveness and a Faculty Researcher-in-Residence.

Inform students of their responsibility. We cannot expect students to know what is expected and how to make the most of their education. We must describe, in clear, unadorned terms what students must do *for themselves* to succeed in college. Even those with parents who went to college will soon be at a relative disadvantage to those who entered college as second-generation students ten years ago as teaching and learning evolve rapidly with our changing society. We should provide resources to bolster areas where students might need help. Just in time, targeted training in specific academic and personal management skills is delivering better student outcomes (Berger, Lampe, & Caruccio, 2015; Gavrin, 2006). I wonder if we can design a diagnostic inventory to help students of all ages understand who they are as learners, where they are now with academic skills, and what they need to develop in order to go the distance? If these things already exist, practitioners like me, who work on the instructional side of the house do not know about them. Faculty can administer the inventories on the first day of class and insert prepared academic skills modules as support assignments for every class. We might consider adapting the reading and writing apprenticeship model (Kellogg, 2008; Schoenbach, Greenleaf, & Murphy, 2012) to be iterative training during the early weeks- the "review" weeks of every

course. Insert resource reminders as pop-ups in course shells in distance education and just-in-time emails for face-to-face courses.

Measure institutional effectiveness through the multigenerational lens. Among the implications for practice that arise from this study is a reminder that organizational culture and structure can supersede individual faculty and student situations and hobble the need for flexibility and autonomy. This is certainly true in Higher Education as the statistical descriptors continue to refer to a traditional student model and do not track the discontinuous pattern of adult student enrollment (Kasworm, 2014). It is also true that the fiscally-mandated shift to using more and more adjunct faculty has measurable indirect consequences in diminished student outcomes and under-measured human capital losses. It is ironic that the institutions which have the greatest capacity to be nimble and flex with the broadest array of learning needs are pressured by diminished funding then further penalized when they fail to deliver better results.

When colleges and systems recognize the adult student majority and equate that with the added enrollment potential, perhaps then they will embrace a more broadly defined 'ideal' student. The mission of community colleges has always been to serve all students. If the majority of students are adult students and they are rendered invisible by institutional conventions, these colleges are side stepping their mission. Yet if they target serving adults in a discontinuous pattern, they may be punished based on outcome expectations that place inordinate value on traditional student trajectories. In practical terms, the governmental agencies, the scholarly studies, and the everyday practice of delivering higher education on community college campuses contribute to a culture which shapes instruction and services around traditional students. The tendency to combine nontraditional students into a large homogenous category, creates a barrier to responsive, student-centered teaching. Additionally, given the projected

future demographic shifts in students, invisibility of age diversity may contribute to weakening institutional capacity to be responsive and attractive to multigenerational audiences. With appropriate supports and instructional methods, adult students might be more persistent, contributing in greater numbers to the much-needed enrollment at these institutions.

The data in this study suggests that adjunct faculty, in particular, are unable to participate in meaningful professional development. With decreased funding, community colleges have shifted to using more and more adjunct faculty (Eagan, 2007; Gonzales & Ayers, 2018). This has created a contingent workforce that spends much of its time on the highway between assignments rather than serving students and supporting the institution (Gonzales & Ayers, 2018). These faculty do not feel valued by their colleges yet still care for the students they serve. This may magnify the burden of care for this particular subset of faculty.

Full time faculty, in turn, are left to bear a heavier burden since much of the extracurricular work falls on fewer shoulders. Community college faculty approach their instructional practice with compassion and care. The constraints of time and additional institutional duties weighs on their professional identities and adds tension between them and their institution and between each other. The study findings suggest that shifting the ratio of adjunct to full time faculty or shifting teaching loads would provide release time for professional development.

As demonstrated in this study, faculty have the interest and the capacity to approach their work as scholar practitioners. Their institutions do not provide the kind of in-depth training opportunities that would advance their theoretical knowledge to the benefit of students. They see the needs and struggles of their students but are often left guessing what might work and proving methods by trial and error. This might be mitigated by offering faculty asynchronous modules on

theory and "just in time" training on effective instructional strategies. It is recommended that professional development supporting mixed age learning be developed for faculty, perhaps starting with non-threatening topics such as how best to facilitate group work (Svinicki & Schallert, 2016). A self-paced, competency model coupled with faculty community of practice building strategies is recommended to imbue faculty with appropriate and evolving theory. It is strongly recommended that a body of faculty be engaged to pilot methods known to advantage adult learning and to then provide cascade training for those things they find most helpful as paid mentors.

Implications for Research

This was a purely exploratory study, and the findings suggest a need for deeper investigation.

What is the student experience in the multigenerational classroom?

Among the approaches to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of multigenerational dynamics would be to map student experiences with faculty perceptions in a two-pronged qualitative investigation. We should examine completion metrics based on age of the faculty. There is a need to disaggregate student outcomes and faculty demographic information by age and anchor those ages in the time intervals for which they are being used - e.g., generational identity matters when considering human dynamics.

When I think of the 45-year age range of the faculty in this study layered on the 70-year age range of the students in their classrooms, I wonder how much the age of the faculty - regardless of their age-related responsiveness and authentic style - affects the learning of students of different ages. Research which examines how to prepare students of all ages to learn

from teachers of all ages is in order to shape the multigenerational classroom into a place where content and human interaction is mastered.

Noting that adult students engage with higher education in a discontinuous pattern, what kinds of data and intervals should we expand our databases to include? Bergman et al. (2014) identified ways that adult students can be better supported to complete: 1) coaching for aspirational attainment, 2) having a responsive faculty, 3) appropriate placement, 4) financial assistance, 5) family supporting the effort. What we don't know from this study is how age dynamics in the multigenerational classroom play into aspirational goals and perceptions of responsive faculty. We know that faculty are delaying retirement - expanding the age diversity of the faculty body (Fang & Kesten, 2017; Leslie, 2020; McChesney & Bichsel, 2020). We also know that Gen Z began expanding the generational identity of the faculty body in 2020 as the first cohort emerged from master's level studies. We know that younger and younger students are introduced to college classes taught by these faculty. Researching what has worked in the Business sector to prepare their multigenerational population and applying that through action research in a community college setting might provide a starting point for formally introducing age diversity training as a cultural competency in community college settings.

There are deep seated reasons that age diversity is not tacitly acknowledged even as institutions grapple with building equity for other types of diversity. Further research may illuminate how best to involve policy makers and administrators with faculty in how to best to integrate age diversity as an essential aspect of equity action. It is recommended that we begin to carefully collect and disaggregate age data. Institutional researchers have been discussing and redesigning age metrics over the past several years. This is important for not only to examine teaching and learning from a generational identity perspective but also to facilitate how student

identity at the intersections of age and other forms of diversity may correlate to measured outcomes. The age interval of disaggregated should be uniform so that local, state, and federal databases align. It is also recommended that the generational identity of age cohorts be flagged as a critically defining metric associated with the student experience.

Visibility of adult learner and multigenerational literature continues to be one of those things where there is an acknowledgment of the presence of adult learners (of all ages) but perhaps not of the importance of understanding and addressing the dynamics created by age diversity and its intersections with other forms of diversity (Barcinas et al., 2018). If we tie enrollment growth among adult students to exploration and attention to the discipline of Adult Education, will that discipline be better recognized as an essential facet of Higher Education research and discourse?

This study began with a survey of Higher Education literature in search of what is known about the multigenerational classroom. As the study progressed and a plethora of terms was gathered, I began to discern a growing recognition of the value of recruiting and educating older students among Higher Education scholars. Perhaps current work around nontraditional students is masked by a tagging schema that is an artifact of a traditional student focus. Among the quickest ways to mitigate the siloing of information among disciplines is to refine the tagging schema. If a common terminology catalog for most human-based research was developed the search process for related literature would be improved.

Among the many things scholarly pursuit brings is the sure knowledge that more we know the more we recognize what we do not know. So many questions have surfaced during the course of this study. It was difficult to remain narrowly focused on answering the research question: How do community college faculty experience the multigenerational face to face

classroom? We can say that they experience it by recognizing there are many student perspectives which vary with age. They respond to the complexities with compassion and empathy. They strive to support student learning. They need more support and training themselves than they are getting. The work of supporting such a complex community of learners (students and faculty) should be reimagined by policy makers, administrators, and faculty leaders to include age-diversity within the scope of diversity, equity, and inclusion objectives.

Finally, we must *continually* strive to understand and meet the needs of all learners as these evolve over time. The advent of rapid change has been long forecast. There is no time to rest on today's successes. This means we must recognize that we have moved beyond the point of constant change and into a period of rapid change. We must prepare faculty, administrators, staff, and students to recognize the phenomenon of constant and rapid change and adjust expectations and efforts to collaborate on mutually beneficial outcomes accordingly.

Chapter Summary

Community college faculty are uniquely positioned to support students of all ages in the multigenerational classroom. Their level of commitment and care prompts them to be flexible in their instruction and expectations in response to student learning needs and struggles. As learners themselves they also experience learning and social impacts among their age-diverse peers. This study produced findings that support the need for further research about the multigenerational classroom.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Prompt Matrix

Research Question: How do community college faculty members describe their experience with face-to-face multigenerational community college classrooms?				
1st Lens	**Autobiographical**	**Colleagues**	**Students**	**Theoretical**
Routines and Rituals	When you look back over time to when you were a student, how does a normal day of learning in the classroom look then and now? What has changed and why/how?	Do you believe that you and your colleagues have similar routines and approaches to your daily classroom activities? How much and in what ways do you influence each other?	If you had to describe a typical day from a student's vantage point, what would that look like? How do you believe your students' various ages (generations) may influence their experiences, if at all?	What kind of self-directed or professional development is built into your academic year on a routine basis? How do you seek out learning if you encounter an instructional issue and wish to address it?
Research Question: How do community college faculty members describe their experience with face-to-face multigenerational community college classrooms?				
2nd Lens	**Autobiographical**	**Colleagues**	**Students**	**Theoretical**
Surprises	Thinking back to your days as a student, describe a time when you were surprised in a good way or shocked in a bad way by issues you would associate with generation/age.	What surprises or stories have your colleagues shared with you about their experiences with working with students of different ages?	What do you believe your students would say about you or your teaching which might surprise you? What surprise feedback have you gotten in the past from students of different ages?	Through a lens of multigenerational learning, if you are caught off guard by a student because of a concern they had and you were having trouble figuring out how to handle it, what do you do?

Research Question: How do community college faculty members describe their experience with face-to-face multigenerational community college classrooms?				
3rd Lens	**Autobiographical**	**Colleagues**	**Students**	**Theoretical**
Risk-taking	Are you more or less likely now than when you were a student to reach beyond your comfort zone in working with someone who is not the same age as you? What changes do you see in your taking risks?	Describe a time when you and a colleague worked on or discussed a situation that involved communicating with someone of a different age group that felt risky or uncertain?	Share a time when you took a risk and tried something new in your classroom. How did various age groups seem to respond? Could you read how the students' felt about your experimenting with pedagogy in the classroom?	If you wanted to try something new to support students of a certain age group, how would you learn about best practices and how would you go about implementing or refining this new approach?
Research Question: How do community college faculty members describe their experience with face-to-face multigenerational community college classrooms?				
4th Lens	**Autobiographical**	**Colleagues**	**Students**	**Theoretical**
Crises	From your point as a learner, did you ever experience a crisis or something you viewed as an extreme situation? How do you believe that presence or absence of experience may have shaped your approach in multigenerational classrooms?	Without "talking out of school" [smile], please recount a time when you and a colleague talked or worked together to resolve a crisis or difficult situation one or both of you were having with a student. Did any aspect of age (yours or the student's) complicate the matter at hand? How?	Do you believe or imagine that your students may interpret certain learning situations as a crisis or exceptionally difficult situation? Do you perceive any age or generationally related patterns or influences?	What can or do faculty do to prepare for a possible crisis or difficult situations in learning – particularly surrounding multigenerational dynamics?

Research Question: How do community college faculty members describe their experience with face-to-face multigenerational community college classrooms?				
5th Lens	Autobiographical	**Colleagues**	**Students**	**Theoretical**
Rites of Passage	Could you please share stories about what you felt were rites of passage or ceremonial, special moments in your own learning? How have they influenced you in your teaching?	Are you aware of any rites of passages, traditions, ceremonies that your colleagues practice within their classrooms? If so, how do you believe the age of learners or faculty members may influence those situations?	What do you perceive to be important pivotal moments from your students' points of view? Do you perceive any of their preferences to be age related? How?	Have you ever tried to learn about how to create memorable, pivotal learning experiences and incorporate them in your classrooms? How do you believe age may play a role in how everyone receives or experiences the environment?

Appendix B: Age Distribution of Students in Nearby Community Colleges

Colleges in Researcher commute zone	Total Enrollment 2018-19	FTES Full Time Equivalent Students	% Less than 20 yo	% 20-24 yo	% 24-39 yo	% 40+ yo	Reported Transfer Pop. (2015-2016)	Transferring: less than 20 yo	Transferring: 20-24 yo	Transferring: 25-39 year old	Transferring: 40+ year old	Distance from Researcher's home in miles/travel time
College A	9,935	4,788.23	24.1	31.6	28.9	15.3	525	433	53	25	14	41-miles 45'
College B	20,189	9,817.06	25.9	34.3	29.0	10.8	1,445	1,234	134	63	14	15-miles 23'
College C	33,179	13,895.55	16.9	26.6	37.6	18.9	1,485	69.96 (1039)	17.5 (260)	10.77 (160)	1.75 (26)	20-miles 25'
College D	9,597	3,539.00	22.6	24.0	26.8	26.4	304	249	39	12	*4	27-miles 33'
College E	13,823	8,157.16	35.0	30.9	22.5	11.6	1,033	934	70	25	*4	31-miles 36'
College F	28,520	5,050.64	28.3	40.1	24.8	6.8	2,823	2,532	205	74	12	19-miles 25'
College G	31,346	18,246.76	31.7	36.6	22.7	9.0	2,256	2,004	160	78	14	50-miles 51'
College H	28,613	13,072.30	33.7	34.9	21.7	9.7	1,623	1,391	137	73	22	25-miles 30'
College I	31,565	10,627.00	22.2	36.2	28.9	12.6	961	827	89	33	12	53-miles 49'
College J	12,755	6,602.00	31.7	34.4	22.6	11.3	1,193	1,086	6	35	*7	33-miles 36'
College K	12,626	6,796.70	34.0	33.6	23.3	9.1	1,109	962	87	39	21	37-miles 36'
College L	15,208	6,122.20	21.0	24.8	27.3	26.7	605	87.02 (472)	12.4 (75)	6.28 (38)	3.3 (20)	41-miles 45'
College M	9,056	5,364.10	28.5	31.9	24.5	15.0	772	670	69	27	*6	43-miles 47'
College N	16,996	8,240.00	35.3	25.4	23.6	15.9	992	861	82	39	10	35-miles 39'
College O	15,198	6,884.20	31.5	35.4	24.1	9.0	820	716	69	31	*4	27-miles 33'
College P	13,944	6,485.00	32.8	30.5	25.1	11.6	1,069	868	120	55	26	41-miles 43'
College Q	11,227	3,284.90	27.6	35.3	27.0	10.0	572	423	102	39	*8	5-miles
College R	9,741	2,977.70	28.1	32.1	28.7	11.2	397	289	66	34	*8	1-mile
College S	17,927	5,957.50	25.0	27.9	31.6	15.5	609	397	128	60	24	2.5-miles
College T	10,936	3,561.00	22.0	27.1	33.6	17.3	292	195	58	29	10	7-miles

Appendix C: Saldaña's (2015) Everyday Verbal Exchange Theory

Faculty Perception Revealed in Everyday Exchanges

Personal Experience	Perception of Students	Perception of Colleagues	Resources for Practice
Routines & Rituals	Routines & Rituals	Routines & Rituals	Routines & Rituals
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Surprises	Surprises	Surprises	Surprises
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Risk-taking	Risk-taking	Risk-taking	Risk-taking
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Crises	Crises	Crises	Crises
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Rites of Passage	Rites of Passage	Rites of Passage	Rites of Passage