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Nontraditional Approaches with Nontraditional Students: Experiences of Learning, Service and Identity Development

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NONTRADITIONAL APPROACHES WITH NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS:

EXPERIENCES OF LEARNING, SERVICE AND IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

A Dissertation Presented

by

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ABSTRACT

NONTRADITIONAL APPROACHES WITH NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS:
EXPERIENCES OF LEARNING, SERVICE AND IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

June 2012

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Nontraditional students are a growing population in higher education, yet our

understanding of the unique factors that predict their success have not increased.

Economic challenges, changing work demands, and the desire for personal and

professional advancement fuel the nontraditional student's return to school (Kelly &

Strawn, 2011). Their isolation and lack of social networks lead to poor academic

outcomes as defined by retention, graduation and degree attainment. The classroom

offers a beacon of hope for the engagement of nontraditional students, an opportunity

to strengthen student identity and draw connections across the multiple worlds where

these students reside. This phenomenological inquiry examined the lived experiences

of highly nontraditional students enrolled in credit-bearing, undergraduate higher

education courses, that used pedagogy related to service and learning and the effects

of this pedagogical intervention with attention to civic and student identity, reflecting

the extent to which students perceive these identities as marginalized. The central

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question explored was : To what extent did experiences of learning and service contribute to the civic and student identities of highly nontraditional students? Using Saddington's (1998) dimensions of experience in adult learners' lives, the learner's life experience is utilized for integration, not only as a source of knowledge but also as the content of the curriculum. This research added concepts from Weil and McGill's (1989) Four Villages of Experiential Learning and from Identity Development theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Adult learners' Outgroup and Ingroup identities produce experiences related to personal perceptions, societal power, and validity in roles. Adult learners have vast cultural and contextual experience, as well as pre-constructed meaning schemes (Knowles, 1998, 1990) and service connects to community role identities, and can trigger the exploration and redefinition of identities (Mezirow, 1997; Hogg, 2004; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Adult learner identity is drawn from multiple sources, past and present, and shaped by beliefs that are contradictory in nature (Kasworm, 2005). Findings include the inherent challenges for this student population related to their Outgroup status, the advantages of pedagogy that uses service and learning, the importance of opportunities for intergroup exchange, and the need for specific faculty roles.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Nontraditional students have been adjunct to the institution of higher education. Their presence within the ivy-covered walls has been met with tremendous challenges, including limited course offerings, part time faculty, and a lack of student socialization. This situation, exacerbated by complex home and work demands, frequently results in a lack of persistence to graduation with only 11% of highly nontraditional students attaining a Bachelors degree (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). These challenges are coupled with higher education's inability to define the population. "Professionals and volunteers who are confused by the public conversation concerning the definition of adult education will not find the discussion of who is an adult student much more helpful (Long, 1983, p. 268). To add complexity to the situation, nontraditional students are largely uncounted by institutions and missing completely from (IPEDS) Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data Systems (Complete College America, 2011). Higher education defines these students in myriad ways with varying terminology. Some of the literature refers to them as adult learners, yet a twenty-four year old, traditional age student, is also considered an adult. Most times these students are referenced as nontraditional or adult students and learners using multiple definitions that vary in age and characteristic. For the purpose of this study, the term nontraditional student and adult learner will be used interchangeably. Although it is insufficient and

represents an even larger issue of defining the problem, this research will show that the NCES Characteristics, rather than age, are the most comprehensive method to both identify and understand nontraditional students. I define nontraditional students as any student holding one or more of the NCES (2002) characteristics. Participants in this study are highly nontraditional, holding 4 or more NCES characteristics, and are between the ages of 30 and 50 years old.

Advocating the definition of nontraditional students not by age, but by using the NCES characteristics, allows for both counting as well as revealing the specific needs of this adult learner population.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has defined nontraditional students as having one or more of the following seven characteristics: delayed enrollment in postsecondary education, part-time enrollment, financially independent of parent, work full time while enrolled, have dependents other than a spouse, are single parents, or lack a standard high school diploma (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, 2000). NCES further defines nontraditional students on a continuum of minimally nontraditional, who present one nontraditional characteristic; to moderately nontraditional, who present two to three characteristics; to highly nontraditional, who present four or more characteristics (NCES, 2002). Using this NCES classification system, nontraditional students comprise almost three-quarters of all U.S. undergraduates (NCES, 2002). These criteria, however, could be applied to a twenty-four year old, minimally nontraditional, student who hold the one characteristic of enrolling part time or a fifty year old highly nontraditional, student who has a GED, is a single parent, works full time and is financially independent.

Figure 1: A Representation of the NCES (2002) Nontraditional Student Classification
Nontraditional Student Continuum
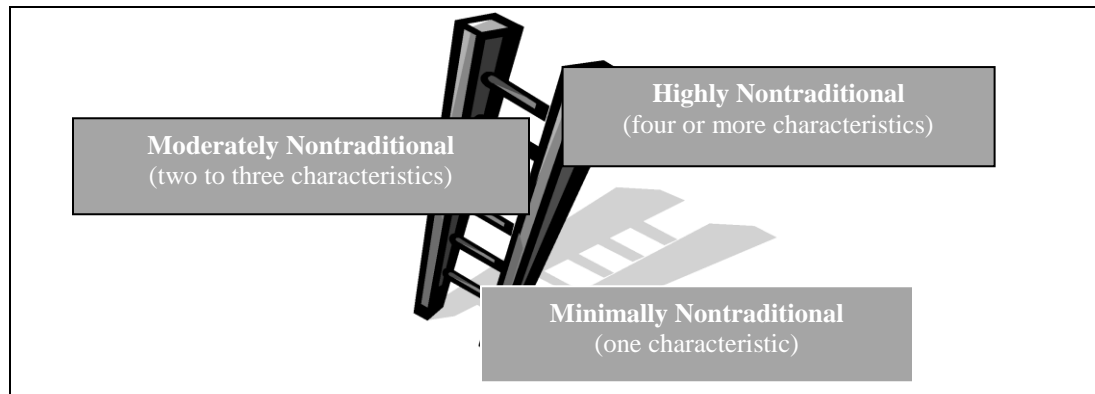
This population is increasing in numbers. In 1995, 40 percent of all adults [25 years or older] participated in postsecondary courses; in 2001, the number rose to 46 percent (Selingo, 2006). Of the almost 6 million postsecondary students aged twenty-five and older in 1999, 69 percent were enrolled part time.

This is highlighted in the converse as projection data is examined about traditional students. From 2011 to 2021, there will be no national growth in the number of high school graduates (Kelly & Strawn, 2011). In Massachusetts, as in thirteen other states, the number will be 5 to 10% lower over this time period than what it was in 2011 due to population changes. Conversely, college enrollment for adults ages 25 and older is projected to be at 22.6% by 2019, surpassing adults ages 18 to 24 years, at 9.7% (Kelly & Strawn, 2011). It is projected that in 2012, 6.6 million college students will be members of this nontraditional age demographic (Anderson, 2003). "Nearly half of all Americans over the age of twenty-five take part in some form of continuing education" (Selingo, 2006, para. 8). This postsecondary continuing education may be work related, degree seeking, or related to personal interest.

This is a growing population. The enrollment of students aged 25 and over increased 17 percent between 1990 and 2004. NCES's longitudinal analysis reveals that in 2005: 1.3 million students age 30 - 34 were enrolled at degree-granting postsecondary institutions, and projections reveal that by 2015 that number will have increased to 1.7 million (2006). For students ages 35 and older, enrolled at degree-granting postsecondary institutions, NCES identifies them at 2.7 million, with 2015 projections of 3.3 million (2006).

Problem Statement

Despite the hope that these projections offer for engaging nontraditional students in higher education, these students continue to struggle. Nontraditional students are twice as likely as traditional students to leave higher education without attaining a degree, and half as likely to complete a degree (NCES, 2002). Forty-seven percent of nontraditional students seeking associate's degrees leave higher education before completion, as compared to 37% of those seeking bachelor's degrees (NCES, 2002).

Nontraditional students, by nature of NCES characteristics, are over-represented in lower socioeconomic groups as demonstrated in their report of financial challenge (Act on Fact, 2006). Walpole (2003) examined traditional students of lower socioeconomic status and found that they have been shown to engage in fewer extracurricular activities, work more, study less and have lower reported Grade Point Averages than students from higher socioeconomic groups (Walpole, 2003). Nontraditional students rarely participate in campus social activities. These students often move through their coursework and programs outside of a cohort model (AOF, 2006). Nontraditional students rarely

experience orientation programs or socializing courses, further impeding the development of social networks (Bowl, 2001).

The literature reveals that adult students have a unidimensional experience as they engage in college: the classroom and the classroom only. While traditional students are wrapped in services and support - residence life, health and counseling services, co-curricular activities – nontraditional students are not likewise engaged. Inconvenient hours and the demands of work and family conflict with the resources offered to traditional students (Bowl, 2001). These disadvantages prevent nontraditional students from becoming a real thread in the fabric of college life. Act on Fact (2006), presents the recurring theme of the classroom as the place of prominence for these learners. The report identifies that while 45% of community college students have worked on a project with other students during class, only 21% have done so outside of the classroom.

The classroom, the single opportunity to become a part of the academic community, presents challenges of its own. Full time faculty members perceive adult programs to be inferior to the regular offerings of a college (Selingo, 2006). Programs for this population are constructed based on what faculty members are willing to teach or in response to what the local competitors, largely for-profit and distance-education institutions, offer. These for-profit and distance-education institutions, which often offer courses and pedagogy that is more conducive to nontraditional students' needs, are often inaccessible to adult students of lower socioeconomic status (Selingo, 2006).

Data in this section reflects one aspect of the problem in the emerging numbers of nontraditional students, despite higher education's challenges in defining these learners. Another aspect of the problem notes the personal factors or characteristics that contribute

to their challenges with academic success. The third and final aspect of the problem

reflects higher education's inability to understand and respond to the needs of

nontraditional learners effectively. The myriad complex challenges faced by

nontraditional students, identified here as the problem, are represented in Figure 2 with

NCES (2002) characteristics represented in the oval shapes; learning characteristics,

drawn from the literature, represented in the triangles; and other identity characteristics

represented in the rectangles.

Figure 2: A Representation of the Characteristics of Nontraditional Students

Universe of the Nontraditional Student
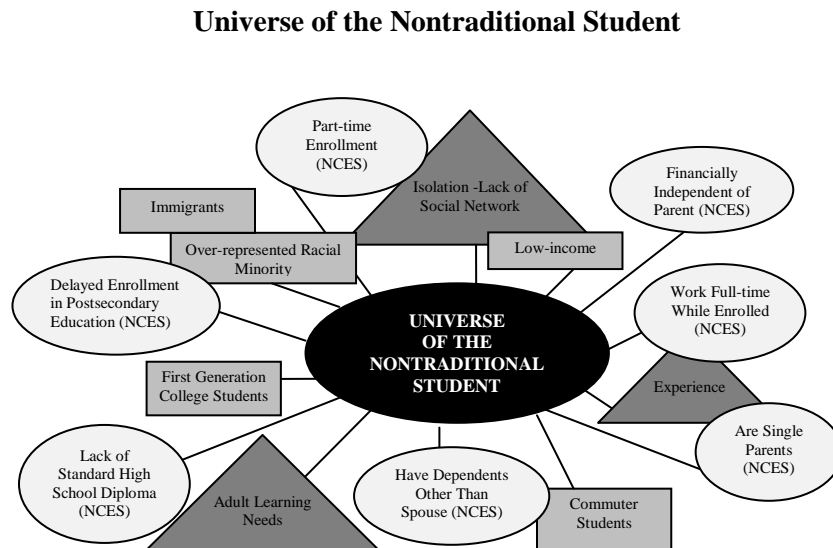
The problem is clear: "While nontraditional student numbers have increased, our

understandings of the unique factors that predict adult student success have not increased

likewise." (Lundberg, 2003, p. 665). The gap in our understanding of this problem is

ironic as college resources are used to recruit the children of this increasing population,

rather than to engage the members of this population themselves.

In summary, nontraditional students remain disconnected from higher education. They are challenged by the characteristics that define them and the associate socioeconomic consequences. Their isolation and lack of social networks lead to poor academic outcomes as defined by retention, graduation and degree attainment. In the classroom, a beacon of hope for engagement, nontraditional students continue to be met with challenges. Yet despite this disconnect, they are projected to increase in higher education enrollment.

Purpose

Given the complexity of the problems in higher education related to nontraditional students, and their singular experiences in the classroom and classroom only, can particular pedagogical experiences support students to retention? This research focuses on the coupling of service and learning as a pedagogy in higher education coursework.

Service-Learning as a pedagogy has been identified as a high impact practice that supports retention producing significant outcomes for traditional students, demonstrated as "improved academic content knowledge, critical thinking skills, written and verbal communication, and leadership skills" (Cress, Burack, Giles, Elkins, & Stevens, 2010, p.1). Can Service-Learning support retention for nontraditional students as well? Studies of nontraditional students relative to their outcomes for Service-Learning as a pedagogy are very limited. The most significant work yet, a quantitative study completed by Rosenberg, Reed, Statham, and Rosin (2012), measured the outcomes for students ages 25 and over at three institutions. This study largely examined nontraditional students

outcomes based on the student outcomes known to be true for traditional students. The study defines will be the first to measure nontraditional students' experiences in Service-Learning using a qualitative approach. Despite the void of empirical research, Chapter Two will reflect the alignment of literature relative to adult learner needs and experiential learning. This alignment influenced the design of this study.

The purpose of this phenomenological inquiry is to examine deeply the essence of the lived experiences of highly nontraditional students while in courses that use service and learning. Drawing on the lived experiences of these students, this study focuses on those learners that meet the NCES operational definition of highly nontraditional students and who are enrolled in Bachelor degree programs. These nontraditional students have the lowest completion rates in higher education. Participants in the study, defined as highly nontraditional students, meet at least four of the following criteria as defined by NCES (2002): delayed enrollment in postsecondary education, part-time enrollment, financially independent of parent, work full time while enrolled, have dependents other than a spouse, are single parents, or lack a standard high school diploma. This research will examine these highly nontraditional students as they are enrolled in credit-bearing, undergraduate higher education courses that use service and learning pedagogy. As participants share their personal experiences in these courses using service and learning, the common essence that exists, with particular emphasis on the transformation of identity, will be identified. The study will additionally be bounded by inclusion criteria for participants between the ages of 30 – 50 years old. This choice reflects no relevance to defining these students as nontraditional or adult learners, but instead offers focus to the study relative a particular adult developmental stage given its examination of identity.

Bounding the central phenomena examined is the concept of identity. Identity is comprised of three components: categorization, identification and comparison. Categorization reflects the tendency that people have to classify themselves and others into various social categories or social constructs. Thus categorization leads to identification or 'perception of oneness' with a group of people who have similar characteristics or roles (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). These multiple identities, or selves, are often classified into the common social demographic categories known as race, class, gender, sexual orientation and age (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) as well as role categories such as students, parents, workers. The final component of identity is exhibited when members of these groups engage in comparison, resulting in the perception of distinctiveness related to power and prestige (Hogg, 2004). Identities are categorized via comparison into "Ingroup" experiences where people identify with the group that has power and prestige or "Outgroup" experiences where people identify with the group that does not have power (Tajfel, as cited in Ashforth & Mael, 1989). These comparisons have been shown to affect self-esteem and produce internalized perceptions which affect behavior (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Ingroup versus Outgroup identity is determined on the personal level defined by the individual's perceptions and experiences of identity. Ingroup versus Outgroup status is determined on the institutional level as defined by the systems and their design for who receives power and privilege, resources and presumed worth (Eitzen & Zinn, 2003). Outgroup status in higher education reflects the systematic oppression of a particular Outgroup identity through established laws, customs, and practices that produce inequities regardless of oppressive intentions. This systematic oppression produces a set

of often invisible barriers limiting people based on their membership in Outgroups. The barriers are not invisible to those who are affected by them (Hobgood, 2000).

Outgroup versus Ingroup identity can be determined by using an Ingroup Identification Scale. The elements of this scale reveal an individual's sense of belonging, pride, connectedness, impact on thinking and feelings, and a sense of primary identity (Cadinu & Reggiori, 2002). For the purposes of this study, Outgroup versus Ingroup identity was defined through the participants' narrative examining for these elements.

Higher Education, as in other systems, privileges traditional students despite the fact that they have no social standing. Historical and current data reveal that higher education's policies, processes and customs have been exclusive of, or focused toward particular groups of students. At this time, higher education remains focused on the traditional students having power and privilege in the designs for access to enrollment and financial aid, socialization, faculty support as well as the successful outcome of academic retention and completion. This system, and its design, defines nontraditional students as having Outgroup status in higher education.

Many nontraditional students also identify as a part of other (women, people of color, low socioeconomic status) Outgroups (NCES, 2005). Intersectionality (McCall, 2005), the combination of multiple Outgroup identities, can create additional complexity for nontraditional students. Although the participants in this study were largely white, about half were women and all identified as low income.

Within the boundary of the central phenomena of identity is that of the experience of nontraditional student. As this population develop student identities that are layered and drawn from multiple sources, past and present (Kasworm, 2005), their identities were

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shaped by beliefs that were contradictory in nature, such as the belief in an ideal student image not reflective of their own. Nontraditional students may identify as members of Outgroups in many social categories, most particularly in their role as students. Engaging in a new role category can present situational cues that lead to category activation, an unconscious and automatic response of categorization (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This choice then leads to category activation which places all other role categories, including that of student, as secondary and potentially Outgroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Student identity has been largely defined using traditional students with components related to a sense of academic capability, competence and mastery (Torres et. al., 2003).

Closing the boundaries of this phenomenological inquiry is the concept of civic identity. Civic identity is defined as a feeling of belonging, an experience of investment and ownership in the local, regional, national, and/or international political communities to which citizens belong (Ketter et. al., 2002).

These definitions frame the research and evolve as the research progresses. This research examines the effects of this pedagogical intervention on nontraditional students with particular attention to civic and student identity development as demonstrated in Ingroup and Outgroup experiences, reflecting the extent to which students perceive these identities as marginalized. Nontraditional student participants in this study are further defined as age 30 – 50 years old. This choice serves to isolate the individual subject's developmental tasks relative to their identity.

Research Question

Given the Outgroup experiences of nontraditional students and the Ingroup

identification as civic engagers, the central question to be explored will focus on the

relationship between the pedagogical intervention of service and learning, and the

nontraditional student's identity development: To what extent do experiences of learning

and service contribute to the civic and student identities of highly nontraditional students?

Because there are so few studies that focus on both this population and their lived

experiences, a phenomenological study devoted to this understanding lent itself best to

the examination of this question (Cresswell, 1998).

Significance

This is a time of convergence. The White Paper, A Promising Connection:

Increasing College Access and Success through Civic Engagement (Cress, et. al., 2010),

outlines the issues. Concerns about higher education access and retention are receiving

national attention, creating policy and practice initiatives at the state and institutional

levels. The question is once again raised, "Higher education for whom?" These policy

and practice initiatives are also focused on the need to create a viable workforce in the

U.S. (Cress, et. al, 2010). Simultaneously Service-Learning and Civic Engagement have

been defined as high impact educational practices based on proven outcomes leading to

retention (Kuh, 2008). As an identified high impact educational practice, Service-

Learning has become more widely engaged as a pedagogy and an institutional priority.

These elements of convergence lend themselves in response to the challenges inherit for

nontraditional students, a population that is increasing yet not succeeding. "Just under

40% of the U.S. adult population has a two-year or four-year degree. "This is roughly the same proportion of American adults who had a college degree 40 years ago." (Cress, et. al., 2010, p. 3)

Nontraditional students maintain marginal status in research, policy, and practice (Kasworm, Sandman, & Sissel, 2000; Kelly & Strawn, 2011; CCA, 2011). Many of the approaches reviewed in this document have limitations. Some do not study nontraditional students specifically, some have not been empirically researched, and others are innovations surfacing in practice.

Despite the many gaps in the existing research, there is broad relevance for society at large. Business and industry have concerns about predictions related to workforce development. The growth of a knowledge-based economy requires workers to have higher levels of education. For some, this demands participation in higher education for the first time; for others, it's a return trip. In the current expanded global economy, the United States and its workers find themselves at a competitive disadvantage (Friedman, 2005). To match best-performing countries, the United States will need to graduate 10.1 million adults between the ages of 25 and 64 with associates and bachelor's degrees by 2020 (Kelly & Strawn, 2011).

Innovations require policy initiatives to support freedom for practice, encourage experimentation, and discourage approaches that are incongruent with positive outcomes. Policy, which defines resource allocation and shapes organizational principles, values, and ideals, has not been set relative to service and learning (National Commission on Service-Learning, 1998). A national policy development agenda, limited to Service-Learning in grades K-12, is just beginning to emerge. Research holds the promise of

support and impetus for policy development. In practice, there are many stakeholders with vested interest in the needs of nontraditional students. Higher education institutions can identify this growing population as an entrepreneurial revenue source (Yankelovich, 2005; CCA, 2011). This shift is of particular importance to the Northeast and Midwest regions of the U.S. as traditional student enrollment has declined since the start of this decade (Hebel, 2005; CCA, 2011). Higher education's institutional priorities, aimed to engage underrepresented students, can be met with strategies and models that draw and maintain the nontraditional student population. Their presence is both a need and an opportunity for higher education.

Communities, where higher education institutions are embedded, expect campus-community linkages and investment in their economic and community development. Communities' desire academic success for all of their members and responsiveness to community needs in the form of service initiatives and public-private partnerships. Knowles (1984) stated, "It is perhaps a sad commentary that, of all our social institutions, colleges and universities have been among the slowest to respond to adult learners" (p. 100). Nontraditional students, who celebrate their children's entry to college as first generation students, and contribute to the health, civic life and wealth of their communities, deserve a place in higher education that is both cognizant and responsive to their needs. This proposed research promises to contribute to the knowledge base that can impact learning for this special population.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW of the LITERATURE

To investigate the research question, three bodies of literature were explored: nontraditional student needs, identity development, and the coupling of service and learning. This section will begin by summarizing the key points from the reviewed literature.

Figure 3: A Representation of the Literature Review undertaken by the Researcher

LITERATURE REVIEW

Service & Learning

Andragogy, Transformative Learning & Conscientization

Nontraditional Students

Identity Development
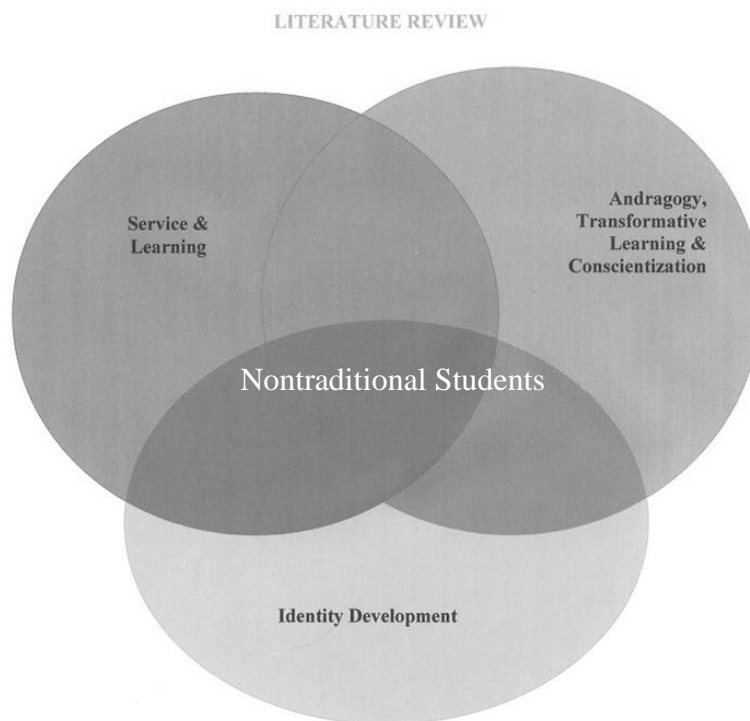
The Needs of Nontraditional Students

Nontraditional students are disconnected from higher education (Lundberg, 2003). They are challenged by the characteristics that define them and the associated socioeconomic consequences (NCES, 2002). Isolation and lack of social networks result in poor academic outcomes as defined by degree attainment. The classroom, their opportunity for engagement challenges them again (AOF, 2006). Yet nontraditional students are projected to increase in higher education enrollment (NCES, 2006; Kelly & Strawn, 2011).

If current U.S. educational gaps remain, from the year 2000 to 2020, there will likely be a decrease in personal income per capita in the country (National Center for Public Policy, 2005; Kelly & Strawn, 2011). Additionally employers desire to meet the needs of consumers, who comprise many of the same racial/ethnic groups as nontraditional students. If these adult students can fulfill higher education goals, they will be a workforce with the intellectual capital and the cultural competence to meet both employer and consumer needs.

Andragogy

The needs of adult learners are addressed through an andragogical approach offering adult educators a path for effective engagement and positive outcomes for nontraditional students (Knowles, 1998, 1990). Malcolm Knowles (1998, 1990) describes adult learners as having accumulated a foundation of life experiences and knowledge. Knowles rejected commonly-held perspectives about Pedagogy and referred to his work as Adult Learning Theory or Andragogy. Andragogy reveals the nontraditional student's desire for respect related to the wealth of skills and contributions

they bring to their learning. Knowles (1998) identified these learners as relevancy-oriented, needing and wanting reason, sense-making and applicability related to their learning. They are practical, seeking usefulness in knowledge creation (Knowles, 1990).

Knowles' work (1984) contends that we need to be considered capable "when we find ourselves in situations where we feel that others are imposing their wills on us without our participating in making decisions affecting us, we experience a feeling, often subconsciously, of resentment and resistance" (p. 4). Adults are self-directed in all other aspects of life, as workers, spouses, parents, citizens, and with a didactic approach, hark back to their conditioning in school to a role of dependency (Knowles, 1984).

Tough's (1999) study of informal learning among nontraditional students echoes Knowles' work. Combining interviews with student journals, Tough's study has been replicated 55 times in multiple nations. His research reveals that adults don't take classes because they want to be in control of, use their own style of learning. This adult learning approach is contrary to popular pedagogy focused on control and inflexibility "…it's just I don't like the way you learn in courses and classes, it's not my way of learning" (p. 6).

Adults have developed habitual ways of thinking and doing – prejudices, defensiveness – and need help to be more open-minded (Knowles, 1984). Self identity is derived from experience, "so if in an educational situation an adult's experience is ignored, not valued, not made use of, it is not just the experience that is being rejected; it is the person" (p. 11). Re-entry into school is challenged by past experiences. "This principle is especially important in working with undereducated adults, who after all, have little to sustain their dignity other than their experience" (p. 11). Knowles notes that

the importance of experience in self-identity, "is doubly as important with less educated and immigrant learners" (1984, p. 409).

Adult readiness to learn is triggered by life experiences such as the birth of a child, loss of a spouse, change in job, divorce, death of a friend, and change in residence. To induce this triggering effect, educational experience can offer role models, career planning, and diagnostic experiences that focus on where the learner is right now, and where they want to go (Knowles, 1984). The most potent motivators for adult learners are internal. These internal motivators include self-esteem, recognition, better quality of life, greater self-confidence, and self-actualization. Motivated to learn by life experiences is the nontraditional student's need (Knowles, 1984). Adults "don't learn for the sake of learning; they learn in order to be able to perform a task, solve a problem or live in a more satisfying way" (p. 12). Educators should organize the learning around life situations rather than subject units and make clear the relevance from the start. Adult learners have the need to know what will be learned (Freire, 1970).

This approach is anchored in the developmental tasks or characteristics of nontraditional students (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). "Adults are almost always voluntary learners, and they simply disappear from learning experiences that don't satisfy them" (Knowles, 1970, p. 38). Andragogy is premised on the assumption that as a person matures their self-concept moves from one of being dependent, toward one of self-direction. An accumulated reservoir of experience becomes an ever-increasing resource for learning. The nontraditional student's readiness to learn becomes oriented toward social roles, and over time, their perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application. Orientation toward learning, for these

students, shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of problem-centeredness

(Knowles, 1970).

Knowles' (1984) andragogical approach focuses on 1.) the concept of the learner, 2.)

the roles of the learner's experience, 3.) the learner's readiness to learn, 4.) the learner's

orientation to learning and 5.) the learner's motivation to learn. This andragogical model

is a system of elements that can be adopted or adapted in whole or in part (p. 418). In

this andragogical process each component is designed to address the nontraditional

student's needs:

1. *Climate setting* – The adult educator gives attention to creating an inviting and
    engaging physical and psychological environment. Strategies involve the use of
    seating and light, and developing mutual respect, collaboration, supportiveness,
    and trust. Openness and authenticity foster the development of new ideas and risk
    taking; pleasure in the learning is fostered by gratifying experiences, adventure
    and discovery to reach full potential; humanness becomes a commonly-held value
    achieved through comfort, refreshments, breaks, and a helping social atmosphere
    (Knowles, 1984).

2. *Learner involvement in planning* – The adult educator engages in mutual planning
    with the adult learner, formulating learning objectives and designing learning
    plans. The adult learner brings their motivation for why they want/need to learn
    to this process (Knowles, 1984).

3. *Learner involvement in diagnosing need and evaluating learning*– The adult
    educator taps into the adult learner's motivation as derived internally (desire for
    improved quality of life, self-esteem) versus external forces. Adults want to drive
    their own learning experiences and judge their own readiness to learn. The adult
    educator engages the learner in assessment of their own competencies allowing
    them to maintain and develop self-esteem and power in the learning process
    (Knowles, 1984).

4. *Methods are creative and varied* – Recommended classroom techniques include
    group discussion, simulation exercises, lab experiences, field experiences, and
    problem-solving projects, all of which will make use of the adult learner's
    experience which is both high in quality (draws from a great number of life roles)
    and quantity (years of experience), and provides opportunities for meaningful
    application and integration of knowledge (Knowles, 1984).

Andragogical studies include those conducted by Cross (1981) and Boshier (1973) whose focus was on adult learner participation. These studies examined the reasons, motives and barriers existent for nontraditional students relative to participation. Boshier's (1979) work found inadequate matches in adult learner experiences: mismatches were found between the student's self-concept and idealized self-concept, the student and other, and the student and the instructor. All of these mismatches contribute to higher rates of dropout (Long, 1983). These andragogical studies were deemed culturally biased, however: a deficit particularly important given this research's focus on adult identity development (Long, 1983). Owen (as cited in Long, 1983), debunked the commonly held myth of the past, proving that the ability to learn does not decrease with age. Butterdahl and Verner (as cited in Long, 1983) are reported as having examined differences in social class and instructional methods. Their study assessed no differences in nontraditional student participation relative to the gender of persons 25 years and older (Long, 1983). Johnson and River (1965) revealed that most participants in adult education are less than 45 years of age. They deemed that when education and income are controlled, race is not a factor. Cross (1979) stated that income, when considered independently of other variables, has immense association with education for nontraditional students.

Despite higher education's historical movement to understand, engage and respond to the nontraditional students, research to prove this theoretical approach or set of assumptions and practices is yet to be exhaustive.

Transformative learning results in the questioning and development of each learner's meaning schemes, involving a change in beliefs, attitudes, emotional responses

and opinions, breaking the cycle of the learner's negative self-images, often grounded in their identity development (Mezirow, 1997). Nontraditional students, with vast cultural and contextual experiences, need to change preconstructed meaning schemes to develop new perspectives and actions. Transformative learning processes and learning environments can help students to use this paradigm shift to excel academically (Illeris, 2003).

Freire (1970) advocated that adults can engage in a deepening awareness through a process entitled conscientization, drawn from the Portuguese term *conscientização* meaning consciousness raising. This process is grounded in an educational approach that focuses on the learner's perceptions and analysis of social and political contradictions, and subsequent action against oppressive elements in their lives (Freire, 1970).

Freire (1970) defines the process of conscientization as beginning with an analysis of generative themes. These themes are signs or representations of the impact of power dynamics in the lives of the learners. This impact of power contributes to the learner's self-definition or identity, and their perceptions of power, Ingroup or Outgroup. This power has significant emotional impact on student's action or inaction (Freire, 1970).

Freire (1970), like Mezirow (1997), contends that adults are transformed through processes grounded in critical reflection. The outcomes of these processes include increased awareness of the sociocultural reality which shapes the student's lives and identities as well as an increased capacity to transform that reality through action.

Higher education is ill-prepared for nontraditional students, and reflective, action oriented learning approaches are attractive, critical and characteristic of their

developmental needs (Anderson, 2003). Early studies are critiqued relative to cultural

bias in that these studies focused largely on white males (Long, 1983), and given a lack

of common definitions for these students, it is difficult to compare one empirical study to

another or group findings. Additionally there is criticism of the concept of Andragogy as

Knowles (1984) presents it as an alternative to Pedagogy when in fact it may be a type of

pedagogy. At best, Andragogy (Knowles, 1984) provides elements reflective of the needs

of adult learners that warrant further empirical research within a consistent framework of

who is and who is not an adult or nontraditional student. In practice, these elements have

been utilized broadly both in pedagogy and academic design. This confluence of factors

contributes to the lack of preparation or responsiveness higher education holds regarding

this adult learner.

Identity Development

Identity development processes and associated strategies relative to nontraditional

students offer great considerations for higher education. Social identity and

categorization theory have not been applied to nontraditional students in educational

contexts. The prevalent identities of nontraditional students related to perceptions of

student power and validity, unless integrated into learning, can produce Outgroup

experiences (Tatum, 2004; Kasworm, 2005). If their identities are defined solely through

Ingroup experiences related to work, parenting and civic engagement roles, higher

education can find a way to use this knowledge to more effectively foster Ingroup

educational experiences.

Kasworm's work (2005) focused on nontraditional students highlights the connections between adult life, adult identity, adult learner's academic studies, and adult student life. Her work reveals the importance of identity to the adult learner. Examining the nature of cultural and social adult student identity, Kasworm (2005) engaged adult undergraduate learners who were sharing the classroom context of a community college course. She found that identity development was co-constructed on two intersected planes, positional and relational (Kasworm, 2005). Adult learners in her research reported developing identities that were layered and drawn from multiple sources, past and present. Sometimes, Kasworm (2005) reports, adult learner's identities were shaped by beliefs that were contradictory in nature, such as the belief in an ideal student image, not reflective of their own. Adult students' identities were shaped by yet another paradoxical belief in the younger college student as reference. They used this younger student identity, as manifested in attitude and behavior, as reference on which to base their own position (Kasworm, 2005).

Kasworm's (1980) previous work confirmed that nontraditional students hold and exhibit a developed, structured, and secured identity. This is in sharp contrast to identity for traditional students, who are still exploring their own values, orientations, and life directions, thus engaging them in an identity development and maturation process (Kasworm, 1980).

The concept of identity, drawn from Social Identity Theory is comprised of three concepts: categorization, identification and comparison. Tajfel and Turner's (1986) work created distinctions between groups of school-aged boys with a socially-constructed hierarchy of power and prestige. They found that the boys displayed Ingroup favoritism:

consistently choosing to benefit the peers they identified as belonging to their Ingroup, and this favoritism was central to their positive self-definition (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Nontraditional students may identify as members of Outgroups in many social categories, most particularly in their role as students. Engaging in a new role category can present situational cues that lead to category activation, an unconscious and automatic response of categorization (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Typically, adults are classified into role categories such as parents, workers, civic participators. "Sixty-seven percent of highly nontraditional students and thirty-seven percent of moderately nontraditional students considered themselves primarily as employees" (NCES, 2002). "Even minimally nontraditional students were more likely than traditional students to consider themselves primarily employees" (NCES 2002). The nontraditional student's choice of primary identity as worker or employee orders all other role categories as secondary. This choice then leads to category activation which places all other role categories, including that of student, as secondary and potentially Outgroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Nontraditional students are primarily represented in Outgroup social categories associated with age, race, and class as defined by economic status. These three social classifications in U.S. society hold that the Ingroup, those having power and prestige, is young (age), white (race) and upper class (Tatum, 2000). Students of all identities need to see themselves reflected in their environments (Tatum, 2004); often nontraditional students do not see themselves reflected in the higher education environment. Lack of social networking can result in consistent Outgroup experiences on college campuses for nontraditional students. Identity, for these adult learners, is multidimensional and encompasses the intersection of every social identity (i.e. race, age, etc.) that comprises a

fully-developed individual (Tatum, 2000). For many adult students, membership in

Outgroups due to race and socioeconomic status has been internalized, contributing to

their negative perceptions and low self-esteem. The Outgroup experience is reinforced

when they do not see themselves and their learning needs reflected in the higher

education environment.

Three strategies have been identified to respond to what Tajfel and Turner (1986)

have deemed as poor social identity or Outgroup identity experiences:

1. *Social Mobility* - This adaptive strategy involves leaving the Outgroup for an Ingroup. If this action is not possible, the strategy prescribes that the individual attempt to identify less strongly with the Outgroup and focus on other Ingroups of which they belong. Another option available through the social mobility strategy is for the individual to focus more on personal identity than social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

2. *Social Competition* - This adaptive strategy involves the individual in actions that will improve their Outgroup membership. This strategy is often utilized in community organizing approaches. An alternative social competition option is for the individual to engage in intergroup conflict directed toward the Ingroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

3. *Social Creativity* – This adaptive strategy involves the individual in mental tricks to attempt to feel better about their Outgroup membership by identifying and weighing the strengths of the Outgroup more heavily than those perceived of the Ingroup. Another option available through the social creativity strategy is for the individual to consider how the Ingroup is more disadvantaged than the Outgroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Turner (1985) with his colleagues Hogg, Oakes, Reicher and Wetherell (1987)

developed the Social Categorization Theory. This theory examines the motivation related

to reducing uncertainty during the process of social categorization. As an individual is

defined as a member of any group, their membership definition is influenced by two

factors: 1.) the salience of the group and 2.) the degree in which the categorization fits.

This categorization is further clarified for the individual as they contrast the interpersonal

differences and similarities between themselves and other group members (Turner et al., 1987).

Best categorizations are defined by two presenting criteria: 1.) group members maximize similarities and minimize differences, and 2.) similarities are maximized and differences are minimized further on an intergroup basis, among and between members of different groups (Turner et al., 1987). A kind of group cohesion can then result, whereby members judge themselves based on a mutually developed intergroup prototype (Hogg, 1992). Leadership developed within and among groups is grounded during this uncertainty reduction process and the resulting intergroup prototype (Hogg & Van Knippenberg, 2003).

Closely related to social identity theory, social categorization theory is framed by the assumption that an existent group can influence the behavior of its members. As each member defines their identity and classifies themselves in the group, they become connected even if they have no direct contact with each other (Turner et al., 1987).

In summary, the identity development processes and associated strategies relative to nontraditional students offer great considerations for higher education. Social identity and categorization theory have generated much research in the arenas of sociology and psychology but have not been applied to nontraditional students in educational contexts.

Given the social and demographic roles that comprise the prevalent identities of nontraditional students, issues related to perception of student power and validity must be integrated into learning. A nontraditional student states her higher education goal related to her identity as a single mother: "I wanted more for my son and myself, even though I wasn't sure what exactly 'more' was at the time" (Rizer, 2005, para. 3). If the identities

of these adult students are defined solely through Ingroup experiences related to work, parenting and civic engagement roles, higher education can find a way to use this knowledge to more effectively foster Ingroup experiences for nontraditional students.

The Coupling of Service and Learning

"To an adult, his experience is him" (Knowles, 1970, p. 45). This definition of identity calls the adult educator to place emphasis on experiential techniques and practical application to use experience as a tool for learning to learn (Knowles, 1970). "In quantitative empirical research, the role of experience in the education of adults is, unfortunately, missing" (Long, 1983, p. 234).

Knowles (1970) touts the value of the nontraditional student's experience, recommending that educators take great measures to engage it. "The concept of the adult learner as an experienced person engaged in learning is among the most popular in adult education" (Long, 1983, p. 223). Adults have already been partly educated by life and their future experiences are influenced by these positive and negative experiences. "Adults do not learn from experience, they learn in it" (Fenwick as quoted by Lawrence, 2000, p. 256).

Thorndike's (1928) work reveals how prior experience effects future experience. He states that adults quite often learn much "in part due to a sensitiveness to ridicule, adverse comment, and undesired attention, so that if it were customary for mature and old people to learn to swim and ride bicycles and speak German, the difficulty might diminish" (Long, 1983, p. 124). Re-entry into the educational process for adult students is uncomfortable (Knowles, 1984).

As in Dewey's (1938) conception of reflection, an event or phenomenon such as death, retirement, childbirth, etc., can trigger opportunities for learning for adults, creating a progressive path: the circumstances created in one episode become the circumstances for the next logical step. As life experiences come together with an appropriate learning climate and approach, they stimulate reflection and further exploration for the nontraditional student (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991).

Kolb, (1984) grounded in Dewey's (1938) work on developmental learning progressions related to experience, examines the processes learners use to make sense out of experiences. His defining work on experiential education examines two types of learning: 1.) learning where students have a direct encounter with a phenomena to be studied and consequently acquire and apply knowledge, skills and feelings in an immediate and relevant setting and 2.) Nonformal learning that is acquired through sense experiences, better known as direct participation in life. The second of these definitions is that which is most prevalent for nontraditional students. Kolb's (1984) reflective cycle model is comprised of four consecutive elements forming a cyclical or spiral process in which learners can begin at any point:

1. *Concrete experience* – the learner is engaged in action, experiencing the situation's direct impact;

2. *Observation and reflection* – the learner examines the impact of the experience;

3. *Formation of abstract concepts* – the learner understands and correlates concepts with the experience;

4. *Testing new situations* - the learner utilizes and generalizes the learning gleaned from the previous experience in new learning experiences.

Experiential approaches to adult learning are further grounded in the concept of service and the action project format (Knowles, 1970). This example of community development as a mechanism or experience for learning is much broader and richer (Knowles, 1970). In this model, where communities are laboratories for learning, the process of problem solving becomes a reciprocal vehicle for learning for both the nontraditional student and the community (Knowles, 1970).

Weil and McGill (1989) further categorize experiential learning into four villages coupling the concepts of experience, service and community development:

1. *Village One* – Often known as prior learning, addressing the assessment and accreditation of learning from prior life and work experience (Weil and McGill, 1989).

Prior learning is one example of the coupling of learning and service directed to nontraditional students. Belzer (2004) in her article "It's Not Like Normal School" posits this coupling of service, civic engagement and learning via prior learning. Her work reveals the impact of linking nontraditional students' prior learning to address what Dewey (1938) suggests is learning implicit messages about learning itself.

The prior learning process is described in a 1977 presentation of an Adult Education Research Conference paper (Knowles, 1984). The nontraditional student's role in the process including goal development and educational planning differs in design and delivery from traditional higher education approaches yet is congruent with adult learner needs. The nontraditional student traditionally writes a portfolio reflecting and analyzing their formal and informal (which many adult learners find difficult to articulate) learning experiences integrating theoretical constructs during the process. The student is additionally engaged in self-directed degree planning as well as some formal coursework

(Knowles, 1984). The prior learning process engages nontraditional students to develop

the skills necessary in order to question, reflect, analyze and synthesize their experiences

to integrate and make meaning with their academic education in a degree program

(Knowles, 1984).

Dewey (1938) suggests that knowledge is not independent from meaning attributed

by the learner. This harkens back to Social Identity Theory as it relates to the context of

multiple identities that each learner brings to the learning. Belzer (2004) briefly examines

the impact of prior learning on the adult learner's identity as student, noting it "is a

potentially problematic factor in adult learning" (p. 55).

Weil and McGill (1989) final three categorizations of experiential learning into four

villages continue to couple the concepts of experience, service and community

development:

2. *Village Two* –Reform, experiential learning directed to bring about structural
   change (Weil & McGill, 1989).

In this Village Weil and McGill (1989) discuss a focus on the structure of the learning

experience or process, whether inside or outside the classroom. They note considerations

related to student engagement and content integration. They ground the need for this

pedagogical reform as necessary to the preparation of students engaged in experiential

learning experiences who will be prepared to address a changing society.

3. *Village Three* – Consciousness-raising grounded in experiential learning (Weil &
   McGill, 1989).

In this village, Weil and McGill suggest that people use their experience to focus on

community action and social change. These actions are preceded by consciousness-

raising that takes place via educational and community development processes.

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Individual experience is viewed as interdependent with societal power relations, internalized dominant assumptions, and ideologies. In this village, Weil and McGill (1989) state people are "enabled to make sense of their personal stories by making links between autobiography, group history and social and political processes" (p. 12). Theoretical foundations in this village come from anti-racist or class-based critiques of education (Weil & McGill, 1989).

4. *Village Four* –Experiential learning directed toward personal growth or self-awareness (Weil & McGill, 1989).

In this village of experiential learning, people are focused largely inward. Weil and McGill (1989) discuss this learning as an opportunity for the examination of past experience, including attitudes, beliefs, as well as autonomy, choice and goal setting. In this village, experiential learning brings the exploration of new ways of being in the world, recognizing maladapted patterns and finding new ways of responding. According to Weil and McGill (1989), this village is filled with opportunities for empathy, risk taking, personal and collaborative problem solving, creativity, support, and feedback. Theoretical foundations in this village come from humanistic psychology. Special emphasis is noted by Weil and McGill (1989) relative to issues of diversity in this village, utilizing experiential learning to unpack common assumptions as a vehicle for change. "It is believed that providing opportunities for systematic reflection on experience, the self-esteem and confidence of adult learners, particularly those who have been disenfranchised from education and job opportunities, can be boosted" (Weil & McGill, 1989, p. 20).

Experiential educational approaches engage students in efforts that develop

personal and civic development. In these models, designed to facilitate learning about

problems, resources and processes, students learn how a community is put together and

how people work collaboratively to achieve their goals.

> These are the process and contextual learning related to community development
> and service. Both kinds can be fruitful, but it is the second kind (process and
> contextual) which is currently most neglected by other forms of adult education
> and to which community development can make a unique contribution…of all the
> formats for learning this is the one that from the very beginning has been most
> congruent with the principles of Andragogy (Knowles, 1970, p.156).

The potential impact of experiential learning approaches for nontraditional

students is well documented. Experience, whether prior, concurrent with the educational

offering, or coupled with service or community development, has real connections to the

needs, characteristics and identities of nontraditional students. Howard McClucky (as

cited in Knowles, 1970) at the University of Michigan, states, "The adult educator is

primarily interested in community development as a means of educating the community

and the people who live there." Nontraditional students *are* the community and *do* live

there.

Higher education has utilized the innovation of Service-Learning to develop civic

engagement with traditional students, and link personal and interpersonal development

with academic and cognitive development (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Service-Learning, as

defined by Eyler and Giles (1999), is "a form of experiential education where learning

occurs through a cycle of action and reflection as students work with others through a

process of applying what they are learning to community problems and, at the same time,

reflecting upon their experience as they seek to achieve real objectives for the community and deeper understanding and skills for themselves" (Eyler & Giles, 1999, p. 3).

This cycle of Service-Learning has potential for great learning and reflection in each step of the process: identifying, planning, and carrying out service activities. The questions based on Kolb's (1984) reflection cycle guide the educator and students to identify, analyze and understand learning and next steps:

1. *What?* The educator and students ponder what has occurred, including all observable and palpable aspects of the experience (what you did, saw, felt, etc.) (Eyler, 2002).

2. *So What?* The educator and students examine their thoughts and feelings relative to the experience to define the learning, changes that have taken place, and associated importance (Eyler, 2002).

3. *Now What?* The educator and students define next steps utilizing new learning to develop further action and transformation (Eyler, 2002).

In addition to an integral reflection component, Eyler and Giles (1999) maintain that Service-Learning is comprised of some common characteristics:

- Linked to academic content in any subject area with connections to learning goals;

- Is positive, meaningful and real for participants;

- Offers opportunities to develop critical thinking by engaging participants in knowledge acquisition related to the service context, as well as determining and meeting defined community needs;

- Is reciprocal, integrating service with learning and resulting in benefit to the student as well as the community;

- Often inspires educational institutions to engage in partnership-building with community organizations;

- Experiences are cooperative versus competitive in nature developing teamwork and citizenship;

- Address complex problems in complex settings;

Using these common characteristics, with data from two national research projects engaging students from seven institutions, Eyler and Giles (1999) report the following potential Service-Learning outcomes with emphasis on cognitive and affective development:

1. *Personal and interpersonal development:* Service-Learning can challenge values and ideas, support and generate emotional and social development, and be personally meaningful.

2. *Understanding and applying knowledge:* Service-Learning can support cognitive development, offer opportunity to use skills and knowledge in real-life experience, and promote deeper learning because the results are immediate and uncontrived.

3. *Engagement, curiosity, and reflective practice*: Service-Learning can promote learning through active participation while providing structured reflection time for students to think, discuss and/or write about their service experience.

4. *Critical thinking*: Service-Learning can develop analytical skills by prescribing no 'right' answers.

5. *Perspective transformation*: Service-Learning can provide opportunities to examine self and others by participating in service and reflection.

6. *Citizenship*: Service-Learning can extend learning beyond the classroom and into the community to promote civic learning as well as foster a sense of caring for others.

   Saltmarsh (2005) states, "Civic learning, as exemplified in quality Service-Learning approaches, is rooted in a respect for community-based knowledge, grounded in experiential and reflective models of teaching and learning, aimed at active participation…and aligned with institutional change efforts to improve student learning. (Civic Learning section, para. 3)

In summary, Service-Learning approaches seem to offer nontraditional students clear connections related to their needs with great potential outcomes. Yet a posting in September 2004 to the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse's Higher Education

Listserv from Miriam Frolow of Seton Hall University revealed a dozen topic areas needing research despite a search of the three volumes of Recent Dissertations on Service and Service-Learning; Engaging the framework of Service-Learning with nontraditional students was one of them.

Nontraditional students do not know about Service-Learning (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). This anomaly, whereby students who *are* the community are not able to integrate their learning with community experiences, is evidenced by the data showing; 84% of community college students report never having had the opportunity to participate in a community-based project (AOF, 2006). Butin (2006) identifying some of the limits of Service-Learning, challenges Service-Learning scholars and practitioners to re-examine the forms and foundations of the current model.

One of the perceived challenges for Service-Learning in its current form has been the student's time. Traditional approaches require service be offered by the student outside of class meeting time. In its most traditional form, Service-Learning engages students in service concurrently and prescriptively within the context of coursework.

For nontraditional students, this learning approach, in a new coupling of learning and service, has the capacity to address their need to engage and honor their life experiences, identities, knowledge and skills. Nontraditional students may be able to shift their student identities from Outgroup to Ingroup as their multiple roles bring value when learning and service are coupled. The adult learners' needs defined by Knowles (1990) and Mezirow (as cited in Merriam, 2004) are inherent in the experiential learning of this coupling. Involvement in service enables nontraditional students to find learning that is relevancy-oriented, sense-making and applicable as it is grounded in real-life

experiences, and offers an inherent critical reflective nature thus meeting the needs of adult learners as defined by the research. The coupling of learning and service can additionally aid the nontraditional student by engaging their pre-formed adult identities in a learning process where they are valued thus increasing the possibilities of an Ingroup experience as a student.

Dewey (1938) posits these two sides of the same coin. He states that experience arises from interaction and continuity. Continuity is the experience that influences a person's future and interaction is the situational influence on the person's experience. This seamless cycle exemplifies that a person's present experience is a function of the interaction between one's past experiences and the present situation.

Nontraditional students bring a wealth of life experiences and contributions to civic life as adults engaged in higher education. They are workers. NCES data reveal that 46% of these adult students work full time while enrolled (Darlington-Hope & Jacoby, 1999). They are parents and community leaders. NCES data also reveal that one-quarter of female adult students in their thirties are single parents (Darlington-Hope & Jacoby, 1999). They are civic participators (Darlington-Hope & Jacoby, 1999). NCES data reveal that 59% of adults belong to a professional or community organization (NCES, 1997).

Using traditional approaches, higher education is typically unable to decode the apparatus these nontraditional students bring. Darlington-Hope and Jacoby (1999) present a few examples of Service-Learning/civic learning hybrid models where adults are engaged "on their own terms." They state that, "for many older students, working in the community is paramount to them despite their full load" (p. 1).

Similarly, many traditional models of Service-Learning offer service experiences where students act as individuals. This solitary action, which offers limited, classroom-only opportunities with peers, exacerbates the nontraditional student's sense of isolation and lack of social networks. Lundberg (2003), in her study of the social integration of nontraditional students, confirms these challenges and limitations associated with solitary work. She concludes that peer learning is a critical and successful approach for this population, especially with students who are over thirty years of age. Tough's (1999) research reports nontraditional students sharing with co-workers to learn collaboratively. "This doesn't fit our definition of learning because it's not a very intentional sort of learning, but it's part of normal human curiosity to 'sort of notice what the person beside us is doing' and this is how we learn how to do things" (p.8).

Tinto (1998a, 1998b) predicts that classrooms structured around peer learning are effective. Lundberg (2003) takes this work one step further moving beyond the learning derived only in the classroom, and drawing, instead, from learning derived in the workplace experience, neighborhood experience, and experiences in the larger community. Lundberg (2003) specifically concludes that successful adult students engage in more educationally related peer discussions, and that these discussions were the strongest predictors of their learning and persistence.

Kasworm's (2005) work builds further on this notion of peer learning by examining the "complex maturation and experiential base of lifeworld-shaped identities of the adult collegiate student" (p. 3). Her conclusions confirm that adult students want to have their life experiences recognized and valued in a formal way in the classroom. She describes adult students self-determined actions related to choice, privilege and

supportive acceptance. The students' changing identities are influenced by the individuals and classrooms they encounter in their learning (Kasworm, 2005).

This relates back to nontraditional student's identities. Dewey (1938) states that student learning is deepened by engagement in issues in which they are truly concerned. Diane Drude, age 44, a student in Darlington-Hope and Jacoby's (1999) profile states, "The service program has helped me build closer relationships with my professors, connected me to the college, enhanced my educational experience and most of all, linked me to my community" (p. 3). These researchers offer considerations for Service-Learning/civic learning hybrids for nontraditional students, including utilizing existing service work in the learning, providing bountiful and alternative reflection opportunities, and involving students' families (Darlington-Hope & Jacoby, 1999). Additionally, hybrid models combining learning and service sometimes utilize peer learning to foster social networking and support.

In summary, higher education has structural and pedagogical constraints relative to the specific needs of these students. Coupling service and learning may offer potential for new, hybrid designs that will successfully meet these needs through experiential learning. This research will use the literature framework to examine these phenomena.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodological approach of this study. As noted

previously, this study examined the lived experiences of highly nontraditional students in

credit-bearing, undergraduate higher education courses using service and learning. The

chapter begins with a review of the study's purpose and research questions. This chapter

then presents the theoretical framework for the study, followed by the rationale and use

of Phenomenological Inquiry. The study context and study procedures are then reviewed.

In closing, the data analysis, the role of the researcher and the study's limitations are

discussed.

This research focused on the coupling of service and learning as a pedagogy in

higher education coursework with particular emphasis on the transformation of identity

for nontraditional students. Within the boundary of the central phenomena of identity is

that of the experience of the nontraditional student. Layered and drawn from multiple

sources, past and present (Kasworm, 2005), their identities were shaped by beliefs that

are contradictory in nature, most particularly in their role as students. Student identity has

been largely defined using traditional students (Torres et. al., 2003). Closing the

boundaries of this study is the concept of civic identity, defined as a feeling of belonging,

an experience of investment and ownership in the communities to which citizens belong (Ketter et. al., 2002).

These definitions framed the research and evolved as the research progressed. The central question explored focused on the relationship between the pedagogical intervention of service and learning, and the nontraditional student's identity development: To what extent do experiences of learning and service contribute to the civic and student identities of highly nontraditional students? Because there are so few studies that focus on both this population and their lived experiences, a phenomenological study devoted to this understanding lent itself best to the examination of this question (Creswell, 1998).

Theoretical Framework

The nature of this examination is drawn from theories of learning, education and identity development from both the Humanist and Radical perspectives to transcend the traditional higher education approaches and respond to the most highly nontraditional students. Grounded in this plural approach, the study utilized Saddington's (1998) dimensions of experience in adult learners' lives which examine the constructs Humanist and Radical Theorists. Saddington's (1998) model asks the following central questions:

- What is the underlying theory of social development?
- What is the key value?
- What counts for knowledge?
- What is the role of the learner's life experience?

Saddington (1998) examines Humanist Theorists of education drawing from Malcolm Knowles (1970; 1984; 1980). Emerging as a paradigm in the 1960s, Humanist Theory focuses on human freedom, dignity, and potential, with the central assumption that

people act with intentionality and values (Huitt, 2001). This body of work notes the learner at the center of a process of discovery and self-actualization, seeking acceptance and wholeness as a central value for knowledge. In this thinking, the learner's life experience is utilized for integration, not only as a source of knowledge but also as the content of the curriculum.

In Saddington's examination of Radical Theorists, drawing from Freire and Habermas, there is a focus on societal and individual freedom with praxis, a process of reflection and action leading to transformative learning. Praxis results in questioning and reinterpreting cultural assumptions related to experience as a key value. As a process, it is radical in nature since it seeks understanding at a root cause level. Saddington's (1998) model goes on to note that the role of the learner's life experience is basic to not only understanding societal context, but as a call to transformative action that serves as a source of student knowledge.

Looking at the dimensions of adult learner experiences, Saddington's model incorporates Weil and McGill's (1989) Four Villages of Experiential Learning. Table 1 presents Weil and McGill's (1989) Villages and the rationale for the use of Village Three and Four for the purposes of this study.

Table 1. Rationale for use of Weil and McGill's (1989) Villages

Village	Focus	Rationale Regarding Use
Village One	Assessment and accreditation of prior experiential learning	This study will examine experiential learning (Service-Learning) that is concurrent with bachelor's level course work and therefore will not use this Village.
Village Two	Experiential learning and change in Post-School education and training	This study will examine experiential learning that occurs while nontraditional students are in school and therefore will not use this Village.
Village Three	**Experiential learning and social change**	**This study will examine nontraditional student experiences of social transformation related to identity and learning and will therefore use this Village.**
Village Four	**Personal growth and development**	**This study will examine nontraditional student experiences of growth and self-awareness and will therefore use this Village.**

Although there are four villages in Weil and McGill's (1989) model of Experiential Learning, this study uses an examination of only village Three and village Four. Village Three focuses on the consciousness-raising that is grounded in experiential learning. In this frame, students use experience to reflect on self within society, with education as liberation resulting in social transformation from a radical perspective. Village Four is focused on experiential learning that is directed toward personal growth or self-awareness (Weil & McGill, 1989). In this frame, students broaden their awareness and personal meaningfulness related to socio-cultural dynamics, grounded in their life experiences and their ways of reflecting on it from a radical perspective (Saddington, 1998). Saddington (1998) engages these experiential education frames to identify the dimensions of adult learner experiences that develop personal and civic development.

This study built on Saddington's framework including two of the Weil and McGill (1989) villages as well as his references to pedagogical dimensions and

progressive perspectives. This study adds constructs from Identity Development theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). These constructs include Ingroup and Outgroup Identities, and three constructs related to identity development conflicts and responses: Social Mobility, Social Competition and Social Creativity. This addition provides a foundation to examine study data, noting how the nontraditional student has utilized service and learning pedagogies to respond to their student status.

Adult learners' Outgroup and Ingroup identities produce experiences related to personal perceptions, societal power, and validity in roles (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Adult learners have vast cultural and contextual experience, as well as pre-constructed meaning schemes (Knowles, 1990, 1998). Service connects to community role identities and can trigger the exploration and redefinition of identities (Mezirow, 1997; Hogg, 2004, Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Conflict and response strategies for Outgroup identities are closely related to outcomes connected to Service-Learning. Table 2 reflects the Social Identity Theory Constructs added in this model.

Table 2. Social Identity Theory Constructs (Tajfel & Turner, 1986)

Identity Development Construct	Identity development Conflicts and Responses	Relationship to Service-Learning
Social Mobility	The focus of the strategy is related to personal versus social identity development	Service-Learning offers personal development outcomes
Social Competition	Actions are taken to improve Outgroup membership	Community development efforts address issues of power through organizing
Social Creativity	Analysis of Outgroup strengths identifies similarities and differences among/between group members	Service-Learning reflection enables individuals to challenge and change beliefs, and raise consciousness. Service offers opportunities for intergroup exchange, group cohesion and leadership development

Students adopting a Social Mobility response will leave the Outgroup to integrate with the Ingroup or identify less strongly with the Outgroup and focus on other Ingroups to which they belong, or focus more on personal identity than social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Students engaged in Social Competition will take action to improve their Outgroup membership, often utilized in community organizing approaches. This may also involve intergroup conflict directed toward the Ingroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Students engaged in the Social Creativity strategy attempt mental tricks to feel better about their Outgroup membership by identifying and weighing the strengths of the Outgroup more heavily than those perceived of the Ingroup, or considering how the Ingroup is more disadvantaged than the Outgroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Best categorizations occur when students maximize similarities and minimize differences, or when differences are minimized further on an intergroup basis (Turner et al., 1987). A kind of group cohesion can then result, whereby members judge themselves based on a mutually developed intergroup prototype (Hogg, 1992). Leadership developed within and among groups is grounded during this uncertainty reduction process and the resulting intergroup prototype (Hogg & Van Knippenberg, 2003).

The addition of the Identity Development theory constructs allowed for data analysis to reveal how the nontraditional student utilized service and learning pedagogies. If the student moved to join the Ingroup, traditional-aged students, this demonstrated their Social Mobility response to conflict. If the student worked to improve members of the Outgroup, nontraditional students, this demonstrated a Social Competition response. And lastly, if the student moved to identify the strengths of being a nontraditional student despite Outgroup status, this demonstrated a Social Creativity response.

Student race, age, work and civic identities were culled from the interview and demographic data, noted by the participants directly, and classified by the researcher according to Ingroup and Outgroup identities. The importance of identity to the adult learner is grounded in development drawn from multiple sources, past and present, and shaped by beliefs that are contradictory in nature and on which they base their positions (Kasworm, 2005). Having both Ingroup identities, those in keeping with societal norms, and Outgroup identities, those not in keeping with societal norms (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), nontraditional student identities have been shown to impact positive self-definition and consequently educational experiences (Kasworm, 2005).

The needs of nontraditional students provide a context for this blended theoretical model which is reflected in Figure 4. Note the three elements of this Blended model, with black boxes reflecting elements drawn from Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), white boxes reflecting the elements of Saddington's model (1998), and gray boxes reflecting the elements of Villages Three and Four (Weil & McGill, 1989).

Figure 4. A Blended Theoretical Model: Dimensions of Adult Learner Experiences and Identity Development Theory Constructs
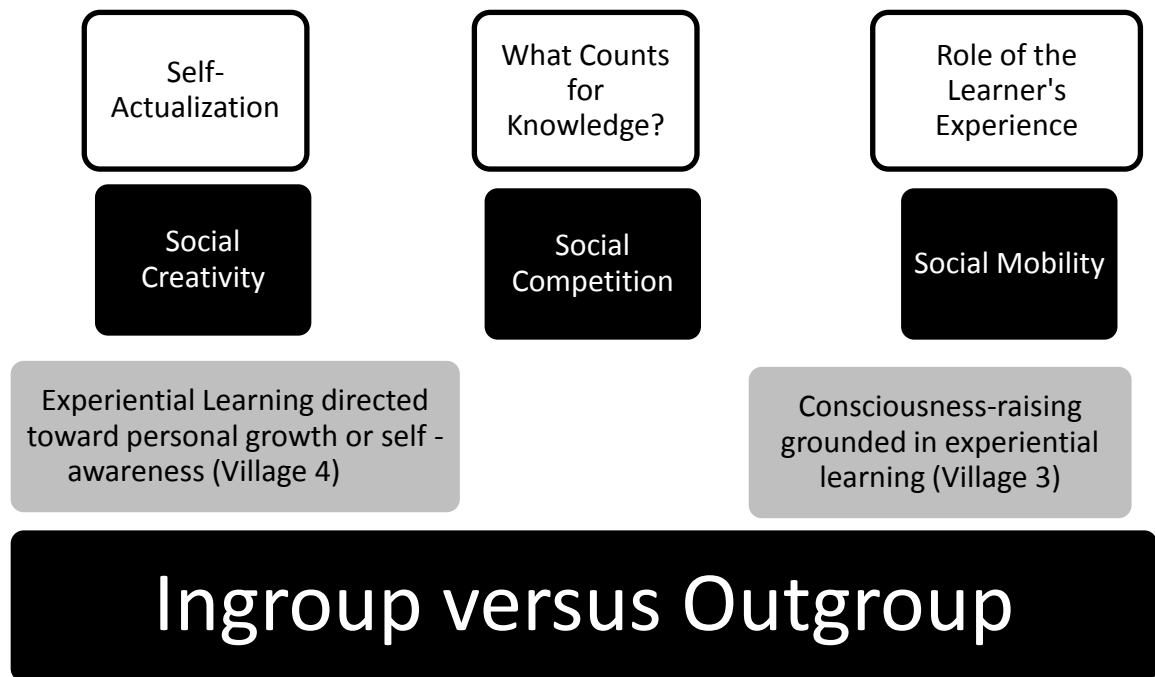
Self-Actualization	What Counts for Knowledge?	Role of the Learner's Experience
Social Creativity	Social Competition	Social Mobility

| Experiential Learning directed toward personal growth or self - awareness (Village 4) | | Consciousness-raising grounded in experiential learning (Village 3) |

Ingroup versus Outgroup

Adult learners need learning experiences that offer engagement, involvement and reflective processes, where classroom climate is representative of trust, support and challenge, and faculty are largely not prepared to teach adults (ACE, 2005). Experience can be a tool for learning (Knowles, 1970; Long, 1983; Merriam & Caferella, 1991). Adult learners have little experience working on group/community-based projects or in Service-Learning courses (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; AOF, 2006). Yet experience, coupled with service/community development connects to the needs, characteristics and identities of nontraditional students (Knowles, 1970; Weil & McGill, 1989; Dewey, 1938). Service-Learning can provide the learning experience qualities that adult learners' desire and need (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Darlington-Hope & Jacoby, 2006; Knowles, 1970). Adult learners' identity development can be influenced in learning experiences that enable the questioning and development of the learner's meaning schemes, resulting in

changes in beliefs, attitudes, emotional responses and opinions and can break the cycle of

a learner's negative self-images (Mezirow, 1997).

This model reveals the use of service and learning pedagogies as a lever for

identity development. The model predicts that attention to the pedagogical needs of

nontraditional students will help these learners to engage their identities fully, examining

and valuing them despite their Outgroup memberships.

Phenomenological Inquiry

In an effort to understand the unique experiences of nontraditional students, a

Phenomenological approach was chosen as the qualitative method of inquiry for this

study. Phenomenological research uses an inductive process of building from the data to

develop a model or theory (Creswell, 2003). The researcher gathers information using

open-ended questions, analyzes data to form themes and categories, looking for broad

patterns, generalizations or theories, and returns to theory and literature to form

generalizations (Creswell, 2003). Phenomenological research draws from both a

philosophical and methodological approach. Philosophically, this tradition emerges in

the seventeenth century; as a methodology, it appears at the turn of the twentieth century

(Patton, 1990). Grounded in the concept that no objective reality exists, this tradition

focuses on how people make sense of the world. The methodology precludes that the

only way to really know another person's experience is to experience it for ourselves –

either as a participant observer or through personal experience (Patton, 1990).

This tradition's sole intention is to study how people experience chosen

phenomena, while attending to perceptions and meanings that awaken our conscious

awareness. Descriptions are both explicated and interpreted. "Interpretation is essential to understanding the experience and the experience includes the interpretation" (Patton, 1990, p.69). Phenomenological research maintains the assumption that there is an essence of shared experience where core meanings are mutually understood through common experience (Patton, 1990).

Phenomenological research methodology maintains that knowledge is as it appears to consciousness, an unfolding process of knowledge production (Moustakas, 1994). The process has three essential stages: Epoché, phenomenological reduction, and structural synthesis (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

This process begins with the researcher as defined in Husserl's concept of Epoché. Epoché, the necessary first step, is the stage whereby the researcher begins to eliminate suppositions. It is a reflective process of returning to self (Moustakas, 1994). In Epoché, the researcher examines their biases, experiences, and personal involvement to make clear their preconceptions. This continues in an ongoing reflective and analytic process throughout the research process (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

The second stage of the process is defined as phenomenological reduction. Here the researcher brackets presuppositions as the subjects of the study are approached and explored (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). As the researcher's own lived experiences are examined, relative to the study, and the lived experiences of the subjects are explored, a textural description of meaning and essences, involving perceptions, thoughts, feelings, sounds, colors or shapes, evolves. The experience presents to the researcher a claim of validity and the researcher must explore and certify that they are not imposing this claim (Moustakas, 1994).

The third stage of the process is defined as structural synthesis. In this stage, the researcher begins articulation of the invariant themes and identifies a portrayal of these themes (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). This stage is also called Imaginative Variation as the researcher grasps the structural essence of the phenomena and presents a picture of conditions that surround the experience (Moustakas, 1994). This transformation of empirical experience into essential insights is what Husserl calls ideation (Moustakas, 1994).

Throughout the process, the researcher maintains intentionality as the subjective mingles with the objective, so that meaning is extended and knowledge is created. This component is connected to the concepts of conscientization, transformation and identity development in the internal experience of consciousness (Moustakas, 1994). This consciousness is both noemic and noetic. Noemic qualities of the research are grounded in the study of a phenomenon, not a real object. Noemic qualities include the experiences' textural aspects (Moustakas, 1994). Noetic qualities of the research are grounded in the essential nature of meaning making or structural aspects of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The act or the experience maintains two sides: the quality of the experience and the matter, the direction forthcoming from the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

The rationale used in choosing this inquiry approach was related to the features and philosophical underpinnings of phenomenological study itself. As this approach is appropriate to study that which is not understood and how people make sense of the world, the researcher felt it would be helpful in an examination of nontraditional students and their identity development (Moustakas, 1994). And given that the literature defined

these students as academically disenfranchised, this methodology offer validation and conscientization to participants as an outgrowth of the process (Moustakas, 1994; Cresswell, 1998). Lastly, the methodology seemed appropriate given the researcher's experiences as a nontraditional student and the opportunity for intersubjectivity (Moustakas, 1994; Marshall & Rossman, 1995). These aspects of the phenomenological inquiry related directly to the subjects that this researcher intended to examine as well as to the researcher herself.

In this research tradition, there is a belief in the essential structure of interaction allowing the researcher to study a single phenomenon to explore how knowledge is constructed and meaning is made (Creswell, 1998). This approach enabled the researcher to develop a detailed and in depth view of the phenomena, the experience of this little-understood population. The concept of identity, equally as amorphous, was able to receive detailed and in depth examination using this approach. For disenfranchised populations such as the one studied in this research, verisimilitude, the concept of being there or being present to others' realities is an important aspect of this inquiry approach (Creswell, 1998, p.21). Lastly, the emphasis of this approach on consciousness relates largely to that conscientization believed inherent in these phenomena for these students (Moustakas, 1994).

This inquiry approach also allowed for and promoted the recognition of the researcher's own preconceptions and personal experience, thus negating the need for hypothesis. For this researcher, having extensive experience as a nontraditional student, this inquiry approach provided transparent processes to understand and incorporate bias (Creswell, 1998). This method of inquiry likewise is very process-laden, using specific

data analysis and reflection techniques, and participants as co-researchers (Creswell, 1998). Edmund Husserl, one of the first researchers to engage this methodology, defines the needs for the researcher's subjective openness, a radical approach which holds "no value to closed minds" (Moustakas, 1994, p 25). To understand this population more fully, a radical approach was necessary. This researcher is quite process-orientated and collaborative in nature and found this approach a personal fit.

Participant Selection

This study sought to discover, describe and understand the nontraditional student's experience through explorative, open ended, face-to-face interviews. Thirteen student participants were recruited and interviewed in keeping with Creswell's (2003) recommendations of a range of 8-12 interviews in Phenomenological Inquiry, based on saturation. This was an advance from the intended number of ten participants. Participants met the age range of 30 to 50 years old, and four or more of the following characteristics from the NCES classification, defining them as Highly Nontraditional Students (2002):

- delayed enrollment in postsecondary education
- is currently enrolled in college part time
- is financially independent of parent(s)
- currently works full time
- have dependents other than a spouse
- is a single parent
- did not receive a standard high school diploma

The rationale for the choice of age group for this study was related to the developmental stages of adults. At age thirty, adult development literature indicates that individuals move into a period of settling down. This period sustains until the age of

forty when the individual moves into middle adulthood (Levinson, 1978). In middle adulthood, the individual transitions through mid-life until reaching the age of fifty (Levinson, 1978).

These stages are not predictive but provided a framework for understanding. Additionally, each stage has associated developmental tasks. During the settling down period, developmental tasks include establishment of a niche in society and work for progress and advancement in that niche (Levinson, 1978). Midlife brings the developmental task of reexamination related to dominance of attachment to the external world. Here the individual seeks to find a better balance between the needs of the self and the needs of society - a greater integration of separateness and attachment (Levinson, 1978). "Greater individuation allows him to be more separate from the world, to be more independent and self-generating… [with] the confidence and understanding to have more intense attachments in the world and to feel more fully a part of it" (Levinson, p. 195, 1978). These choices served to isolate the individual subject's developmental tasks relative to their identity development.

Participants were ultimately drawn from three public universities in Massachusetts that sustain significant undergraduate, nontraditional learner populations and offer them courses that use service and learning. First, a review was made of those institutions that were members of the Council on Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) and the American Association of Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE). From these institutions, those operating in Massachusetts were identified and the chief academic officer's office was contacted. This process narrowed the group of institutions to eight. A review of data from these eight institutions, both public and private in New

England, preceded this decision-making. Gathering these data revealed the challenges of the institutions with nontraditional students. Institutions did not have data about older students readily available as they were most often counted through Continuing Education units if at all. Institutions were able to eventually identify the numbers of nontraditional students but many shared that that they had no offerings of courses using service and learning to nontraditional student populations or had no mechanism for tracking those course offerings. Institutions noted a disconnect between their Service-Learning units and their continuing education units.

This review included an examination of the institution for two criteria: the presence of nontraditional students based on age and the integration of courses using service and learning with this population. This examination is noted in Table 3, Review of Institutions for Study Inclusion.

Table 3. Review of Institutions for Study Inclusion

Institution	Rationale & Outcome
Worcester State University	12.3% (791) of undergraduates are between the ages of 30-50 (FY09-10); Center for Service-Learning & Civic Engagement support; Home institution of researcher – **used for Pilot Study**
Cambridge College	High majority of undergraduates between the ages of 30-50 however no connections to Service-Learning
UMass Dartmouth	5.6% (437) of undergraduates are between the ages of 30-50 (Fall 2010); Center for Service-Learning & Civic Engagement support – **used for Research Study**
Springfield College	High majority of undergraduates between the ages of 30-50; however, no connections to Service-Learning
Bay Path College	High majority of undergraduates between the ages of 30-50; however, no connections to Service-Learning
Lesley University	High majority of undergraduates between the ages of 30-50; however, no connections to Service-Learning
Bridgewater State University	6% (579) of undergraduates are between the ages of 30-50 (Fall 2010); Center for Service-Learning & Civic Engagement support – **used for Research Study**
UMass Boston	16% (1,849) of undergraduates are between the ages of 30-50 (Fall 2010); No Center for Service-Learning & Civic Engagement; Conflict with CPCS – **used for Research Study with CPCS in exclusion criteria**

In this examination of institutions for study inclusion, the private institutions presented with high numbers of nontraditional students, but they were mostly garnered in specialized programs that did not include courses using service and learning. The public institutions presented best in both criteria. Worcester State University (WSU) was chosen for the pilot study as it was the home institution of the researcher. The University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth (UMB), Bridgewater State University (BSU), and the University of Massachusetts Boston (UMB) were chosen for study inclusion. Additional exclusion criteria was imposed on UMB as the researcher and one of the dissertation committee members maintained affiliations with the College of Public and Community Service.

Pilot Study

The pilot study was undertaken with WSU, where three interviews were conducted with nontraditional students who met the study inclusion criteria and had no prior experience with the researcher. The pilot study participants were referred by the Director of WSU's Center for Service-Learning and Civic Engagement with additional review for age criteria from the Registrar's Office. Pilot interviews were retrospective as participants reflected on a service and learning course taken during the previous semester and the data collection protocol was maintained. After each pilot interview, the researcher reflected on the process and further examined study areas needing refinement. The pilot study interviews were audio taped followed by the generation of transcripts. Data was preliminarily coded to assess the value of the interview tool and process. Changes were made to the interview tool which included: moving questions relevant to the student's bachelor's program beginning and ending dates as it proved a more sensitive question, given their experience; changing the question about Civic Identity to Community Identity for greater student understanding; and adding a question to assess whether this was the student's first experience with a course that used service and learning.

Recruitment

Staff from WSU's, BSU's and UMD's Center for Service-Learning referred students, as well as faculty who referred students, for the study and supplied contact information for the students' professors. This process was not simple in that BSU does not have a Service-Learning course designation system and relied solely on faculty self-reporting about courses that included service and learning. UMD had a system for course

designation, but their Center for Service-Learning could not identify the ages of students enrolled, and therefore, as in the case of WSU during the pilot study, had to rely on assistance from the Registrar's Office for age verification. UMB had the most challenging situation of all the institutions regarding study recruitment as there was no course designation and the university's Office of Student Leadership and Community Engagement had limited awareness of courses using service and learning. This challenge was coupled by the university's Office of Community Partnership which was more externally focused and had limited awareness of faculty pedagogy. This situation moved the study's outreach and recruitment methods into more of a community organizing approach.

This approach included using the networks of dissertation committee members, reaching out to the faculty involved in UMB's Civic Engagement Research Cluster (CERC), connecting to students through the Veteran's Center, and engaging undergraduate students through the Student Affairs listerv. Additional outreach involved social media to recruit students by joining the BSU Honors Program Facebook Page, the UMD MassPIRG and Center for the Visual and Performing Arts Facebook Pages, and the UMB Boston Asian American Studies, American Studies, MassPIRG, Philosophy Club, Psychology Club, Admitted Students 2010, Black Student Center, College of Nursing & Health Sciences, and Service-Learning & Civic Engagement Facebook Pages. This approach required widespread distribution of informational packets to provide understanding of the study, delay in the research plan timeline, and greater amounts of response screening for participation to ensure inclusion criteria.

Data Collection

Demographic data collection was completed with the participants prior to interview by a web-based Demographic Form on SurveyMonkey. This survey included the collection of data relevant to age, race, gender, occupation, student status indicators including first generation, prior higher education degree/certificate completion, date of entry and anticipated completion of bachelor's program, as well as an assessment of the NCES (2002) Nontraditional Student Characteristics. This data provided validation of the study's inclusion criteria, context for the examination of the interview data, and the opportunity to assess participant's identities for appropriate Ingroup (those having power and privilege) and Outgroup classifications (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). The process of Ingroup and Outgroup classification will be discussed in the data analysis section of this chapter. Once participants were confirmed, the informed consent process was completed. Participants were formally invited to participate, advised of the risks and benefits of participation, informed of their rights, the confidential treatment of data, and given information about the dissemination of data, as well as contact information for the researcher and her advisor.

Extensive interviews were conducted with each student participant over the course of two months and while they were in the final eight weeks of their course engaging service and learning. The interview developed personal history related to their identities and explored the details of their experience through reflection (Seidman, 2006). Each interview was one to two hours in duration. Interviews were conducted at campus locations, public venues such as coffee shops or libraries, and at participants' homes. Reminder phone calls, emails and texts were sent one week prior to the scheduled

interviews, as well as the day prior to increase success. Most interviews had high degrees

of emotionality and participants presented both at the interviews and in post-interview

communication with needs for support and resources.

Faculty who were teaching the courses that study participants were enrolled in

were asked to complete a web-based Academic Experience Form on SurveyMonkey to

assess the level of service and learning integration in their courses. The form included

the degree to which students are engaged in reflection about concurrent service and

integration of course concepts. This proved problematic in two ways: first, all

participating faculty rated their courses with a high degree of reflection and integration

even when study participants' experiences were otherwise; and second, as recruitment

became more complex and timelines were advanced, it became difficult to get faculty to

respond to the survey. The researcher, with dissertation chair advice, assessed the

contribution of the faculty response is survey as low through analysis of the data and set

protocol that after three outreach efforts, such as emails or telephone calls to faculty, they

were not pursued.

Data were recorded during the interviews with an audio digital recorder and then

transcribed into narrative form in written transcripts. A copy of the Interview Protocol is

included in the Appendix. Interview questions included:

- Describe your experience as a student in this course…
  - Retrospective to hopes and expectations
- What aspects of the course have been the most important to you?
- Describe yourself as a student – how do you define yourself? As a community participator? As a worker?
- How has this course you are currently enrolled in influenced these identities?

During the informed consent process, participants were asked if they wanted to become modified co-researchers. This was an effort to provide greater mutual benefit and reciprocity to study participants. Co-research is a collaborative form of inquiry whereby all are engaged as co-subjects (Seidman, 2006). In this model, people collaborate to define and structure the research study, enabling the researcher to more fully participate in the culture being studied. Of the thirteen study participants in the research study, ten opted to be engaged as modified co-researchers. Two of the three pilot study participants opted to be engaged as modified co-researchers. In this study, participants were engaged as modified co-researchers (Seidman, 2006) in the following roles:

- As participants in pilot interviews, they collaborated to help further refine the study process during a post-interview debriefing;

- As participants explored their own experiences, they were informed about potential risks related to discomforts that may surface during interviews;

- As participants, they were informed about the coding of data transcripts for anonymity and the secure storage of records, their rights to engage in debriefing via email communication and to member-check, as well as review their interview transcripts;

- As participants, incentives were offered as compensation for their time commitments;

- As participants, they are recognized in the final work and made aware of plans for dissemination;

- Lastly, participants will be informed about the researcher's experience as a nontraditional student;

This study benefited from the model as it promoted understanding of social roles and influenced professional practice, as well as promoted self-knowledge and consciousness-raising. As participants recounted their experiences, the interview provided opportunity for reflection. This reflection provided participants with greater understanding of their social roles, sometimes even unearthing elements of their experience that they had not examined, and connections that they had yet to make. In this reflection, participants' narratives presented many opportunities to influence professional practice as strategies that both worked well and did not work well for them as nontraditional students were recounted.

Data generating began with pre-interview demographic data. The researcher maintained a research journal of reflective notes, including process notes after each interview and Epoché reflections intended to suspend data judgments (Creswell, 2003).

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed on an ongoing basis using the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method (Moustakas, 1994). This process enabled explication, reflection, and interpretation for the researcher to examine the data to reveal structure, meaning, configuration, coherence, and circumstances clusters (Moustakas, 1994). Table 4 from Creswell (1998) outlines the process:

Table 4. Data Analysis for a Typical Phenomenological Study (Creswell, 1998)

Phase	Activity
Data managing	Create and organize files for data
Reading, Memoing	Read through text, make margin notes, form initial codes, memoing
Describing	Describe the meaning of the experience for the researcher
Classifying	Find and list statements of meaning for individuals - Group statements in the meaning units
Interpreting	Develop a textual description: "What happened?" Develop a structural description: "How was the phenomenon experienced?" Develop an overall description of the experience, the "essence"
Representing, Visualizing	Present narration of the "essence" of the experience; use tables or figures of statements and meaning units

First, the researcher read the transcript from the interview to get a sense of the whole experience. Then, the researcher read the transcript again slowly to identify each time there is a transition in meaning (Moustakas, 1994). During this second read, margin notes, initial codes and memoing were done in the margins of each transcript by the researcher using a coding schema developed based on the study's theoretical framework. Table 5 reflects the Coding Schema Drawn from the Theoretical Framework.

Table 5. Coding Schema Drawn from the Theoretical Framework

Code	Description
Role of the Learner's Life Experience (Saddington)	
Convergence of life experience past and current (Dewey, Merriam & Caffarella, Thorndyke, Long, Knowles) [CLEP]	The source of knowledge and the content of curriculum
Basic to understanding societal context [SC] and the source of knowledge [K&C]	Challenges & Contributions
Villages at Work (Weil & McGill)	
Village 3 [V3]	Consciousness-raising grounded in experiential learning; Personal growth and development
Village 4 [V4]	Experiential learning directed toward personal growth or self-awareness; Experiential learning and social change
Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner)	
Social Mobility [SM]	The focus of the strategy is related to personal versus social identity development; Service-Learning offers personal development outcomes
Social Competition [SCo]	Actions are taken to improve Outgroup membership; Community development efforts address issues of power through organizing
Social Creativity [SCr]	Analysis of Outgroup strengths identifies similarities and differences among/between group members; Service-Learning reflection enables individuals to challenge and change beliefs, and raise consciousness. Service offers opportunities for intergroup exchange, group cohesion and leadership development; Paradigm shift – personal & community
Outgroup [OG] versus Ingroup [IG] Identities	Age (older), Race (white vs. non-white), Work, Civic Identity/Participator

Analysis specific to the Ingroup versus Outgroup status was defined by the systems and their design for who receives power and privilege, resources, and presumed worth (Eitzen and Zinn, 2003). For the purposes of this study, data were collected reflecting participant's age, race, work and civic identities. These identities were then analyzed as belonging to Outgroup versus Ingroup status. Since Ingroup status in higher education is reflected in the systematic privilege of traditional students in the designs for access to enrollment and financial aid, socialization, faculty support, and the importance

of their successful outcomes of academic retention and completion, all study participants were deemed as having Outgroup status (Hobgood, 2000). This was further confirmed as a review of the interview data did not reveal Ingroup elements such as a sense of belonging, pride, connectedness, or sense of primary identity as related to student identity (Cadinu and Reggiori, 2002).

Ingroup status related to race in the United States is given to those who identify as white; this has both historical and current data that reveals power and privilege for this group. Study participants revealed rich work and civic identities through their collective narrative. These identities hold power and privilege in a community context but not necessarily in an academic one (Ketter, et. al., 2002).

As the transcripts continued to be analyzed, descriptive comments were culled, highlighting the elements that mattered most in the participants' narratives of their experiences; comments were both linguistic and conceptual, and were coded by participant (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Categories and their composing elements were drawn from the data by culling these comments or quotes (Creswell, 1998). Preliminary categories and their composing elements were then drawn from the data (Creswell, 1998). Charts were then developed for each unit or theme to group the data with supporting comments/quotes from the interviews. Descriptive comments were color-coded to reflect the ages of participants and allow for the examination of similarities and differences in the themes charts.

Once the researcher obtained a series of preliminary meaning units or themes from the data, redundancies were eliminated and the researcher reflected on each given unit. Table 6 reflects the iterative nature of the coding process.

Table 6. Coding Process Iterations

Preliminary Themes	Revisions	Final Themes
Role of the learner's life experience (Convergence of life experience past and current)		
-History of challenges-Experience to share	No change	-History of challenges-Experience to share
-Can apply learning -Tensions of being an older student -Meaning-making	Moved from Identity	-Can apply learning -Tensions of being an older student -Meaning-making -Connections to Parent, Worker and Community Identity
Service and Learning Course Experience (The source of knowledge and the content of curriculum - the elements of the course that delivered knowledge & content)		
Service Placement/Partner -Type -Choices	No change	Service Placement/Partner -Type -Choices
Strategies Used in Course that were important and meaningful	No change	Strategies Used in Course that were important and meaningful
Faculty-Student Relationship	No change	Faculty-Student Relationship
Course Elements that were Challenging	No change	Course Elements that were Challenging
Understanding Social Context Village 3: Consciousness-Raising Social Competition Actions to improve Outgroup membership - Community development efforts address issues of power through organizing/change	Understanding Social Context (Combined with) Village 3: Consciousness-Raising (Combined with) Social Competition	Understanding Social Context, Village 3: Consciousness-Raising, Social Competition
Social Mobility (personal identity development vs. social) Village 4: Experiential learning directed toward personal growth & self-awareness	Social Mobility (Combined with) Village 4	Social Mobility, Village 4
Social Creativity: Analysis of Outgroup strengths, similarities, differences among/between group members	No Change	Social Creativity, Student Identity
Identities		
Student Identity- conflicts between advantages of being older and Outgroup Status	Move to Social Creativity	
Parent Identity Worker Identity Community Identity	Move to Experience	

The researcher examined the themes or meaning units for interrelationships, connections and patterns, both convergent and divergent, and then transformed each unit, integrating and synthesizing insights into consistent descriptions of the structure of the phenomena. The analysis resulted in statements revealing general essence descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). These essence descriptions were then abstracted to form super-ordinate themes bringing together related themes. Additionally, polarization was examined among the themes to note divergences. This process coupled the coded comments/quotes with a demographic profile of each participant to additionally examine for differences across the age range of the study sample (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Data collected enabled the researcher to examine qualities of the participants interviewed as well as qualities of their experiences, both of which were essential to present a narration of the essence of their experience as nontraditional students.

Participants chose pseudonyms for use in representing their data. The researcher created a confidential list, linking names, pseudonyms, and interview code numbers. Once the data gathering was completed, this list was destroyed, and all data was reported without participant identifiers to remain confidential.

Delimitations and Limitations

Each choice that was made in regard to this study served to offer delimitations in an effort to narrow the scope of the study. Given the method of inquiry, which produced in depth exploration of the phenomena, a limited scope was not of concern to this researcher.

There were many limitations inherent in this research design. The intensive, emergent interview process produced data that was filtered through the views of the participants' experiences and biased responses (Creswell, 2003). The process of data analysis addressed common essence among the participants to offset these unique perspectives.

Given that the interviews drew significantly on the participants' experiences, they were laced with personal perspective and emotion. Intimacy, discomfort, misuse of words, all could have lead to embarrassment, vulnerability, and a potential challenge to reputation for participants (Seidman, 2006). The process of informed consent and data treatment to ensure confidentiality was critical to this research. Participants were treated as co-researchers, engaged in the debriefing process, and were free to withdraw at any time (Moustakas, 1994). Lastly, intersubjectivity, related to phenomenological inquiry, the co-mingling of the subject's and researcher's experience, was transparent to both parties involved and managed by the researcher's journaling and Epoché reflections (Moustakas, 1994).

Role of the Researcher

This researcher brought many dimensions to this research study. Some of these dimensions offered limitations and others offered benefits. My experience as a nontraditional student has spanned many years, almost my entire higher education. I was acutely aware of the bias and presuppositions I brought to this research. It was part of the rationale for my choice of Phenomenological inquiry as it offered me a process for addressing these challenges. From another perspective, I had great legitimacy with study

participants, having been there myself. I took comfort in this methodology, and its reflective practices strengthened me as a researcher.

I brought many skills from my professional experience that contributed to the success of this study. I had practiced interviewing for the purposes of counseling, investigation, community needs assessment, and research. I had vast experience in qualitative data collection and analysis as a consultant. As an adjunct faculty member for the last six years, I understood the work of faculty. I utilized my experience as an educator to engage with faculty to garner their collaboration in this research. Lastly, I have been teaching Service-Learning courses to nontraditional students during my tenure as an educator. This offered me a unique perspective as I examined the data and produced results contributing to practice, policy and innovation.

Conclusion

This research examined the coupling of service and learning with particular attention to civic and student identity development as demonstrated in Ingroup and Outgroup experiences. As participants shared their stories, this research examined the common essence that existed and was identified in their experiences. The research examined this identity transformation students experienced, seeing themselves and the world differently as they viewed themselves as having knowledge that is valued (Coccia, 1997).

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the study findings that relate to the service and learning

experiences of highly nontraditional students. It begins with a discussion of the

institutions where study participants were drawn and a profile of the study participants

themselves. This chapter will then present the findings grouped categorically according

to elements of the study's theoretical framework. Participants were asked to choose a

pseudonym by which they would be identified for the study. This effort will enable a

human face coupled with the quotes used to exemplify the findings. The chapter ends

with a summary of the findings.

Study Participant Institutions

Three higher education institutions were engaged in this study. These institutions

were identified and engaged after a process of examination of colleges and universities in

New England related to the numbers of bachelor's level students who met the age criteria

of 30 – 50 years old and their offering of courses that used service and learning. The first

institution engaged was University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth (UMD). UMD's

mission reflects its status as a public university "acting as an intellectual catalyst for

regional and global economic, social and cultural development" (UMD website, 2011).

As one of the five campuses of the University of Massachusetts, UMD holds an

undergraduate enrollment of 7, 749 students as noted on their website in 2011 (NCES website, 2011). Situated on the south coast of Massachusetts between Rhode Island and Cape Cod, one hour from Boston, UMD draws adult students from the region's urban and suburban communities. UMD has a well-developed Center for Civic Engagement whose leader is at the Assistant Provost level. The Center provides resources to students, faculty and community partners, and maintains a system for designation of courses that engage service and learning (UMD website, 2011). UMD holds classification as a Carnegie Community Engagement Campus as well as the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll.

The second institution engaged was Bridgewater State University (BSU website, 2011). BSU's mission reflects its status as a public university with a "public responsibility to educate the residents of Southeastern Massachusetts and to use its intellectual, scientific and technological resources to support and advance the economic and cultural life of the region and the state" (BSU website, 2011). As the largest institution in the Massachusetts State University System, BSU holds an undergraduate enrollment of 9,328 students according to their website in 2011 (http://nces.ed.gov/). Situated on the south coast of Massachusetts between Rhode Island and Cape Cod, less than one hour from Boston, BSU draws adult students from the region's urban and suburban communities with over 95% of its students drawn from the state. BSU has a Community Service Center in which Service-Learning is embedded. A Faculty Associate for Service-Learning is appointed to lead efforts, including resources to students, faculty and community partners (BSU website, 2011).

The third and final institution engaged was University of Massachusetts at Boston (UMB website, 2011). UMB's mission reflects its status as a public research university "with a special commitment to urban and global engagement…a vibrant multi-cultural educational environment…creating new knowledge while servicing the public good of our city, our commonwealth, our nation and our world" (UMB website, 2011). As the second largest of the five campuses of the University of Massachusetts, UMB holds an undergraduate enrollment of 11,568 students according to their website in 2011 (NCES website, 2011). Situated in the urban environment of Boston and without any on-campus housing, UMB draws adult students primarily from the Greater Boston area. UMB has an Office of Community Partnerships under the Office of Government Relations and Public Affairs, which supports faculty and community partners, and an Office of Student Activities and Leadership, which supports student service. UMB holds classification as a Carnegie Community Engaged Campus.

Study Participants

A total of 13 students participated in this study drawn from the three higher education institutions described above. Participants had many differences and similarities. All of the study participants identified as being between the ages of 30 and 50 years, yet the majority were nearly 40 or more than 40 years of age. Participants were almost equally divided by gender with 46% that were male and 54% that were female. The racial identities of participants were largely homogenous with 81% of students identifying as White and the remainder as Black or Multi-Racial. Given that the literature indicates an overrepresentation of people of color among nontraditional students, issues for future research relative to race are raised; this study did not attend to

issues of race. Participants reported a wide variety of occupations including utility company manager, consultant, technician (2), nurse, military, waitress, retail, cook (2), psychiatric unit worker and child care; Although only some of these occupations could be classified as working class, most of the participants identified as having low income.

All participants were engaged in bachelor's level, credit-bearing courses at the three institutions reflected above during the time of the study. Each held one characteristic in common; each course engaged service and learning in its delivery. Despite this common characteristic, the courses were quite diverse. Service-Learning courses (indicated below as s-l) were reflected in all but two of the total courses. Some of these Service-Learning courses had institutional designation, and some were characterized as such by faculty due to a lack of course designation at their institutions. One of the Service-Learning courses was entirely online and some were structured as a hybrid courses, with some online and some traditional course time, coupled with volunteer service (indicated below as vol/s-l hybrid). One course was characterized as a Capstone course, one as a pre-practicum course, and one as an internship course.

Participants were engaged in study of a variety of disciplines in these courses from the Health Sciences to Fine Arts and Social Sciences to Computer Science. The institution where each participant is enrolled is not revealed as it could provide identifiable characteristics given the small number of highly nontraditional students.

Table 7 provides a description of each of the study participants.

Table 7. Description of Study Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Race	Course Discipline	NCES Nontraditional Characteristics	Occupation	Course
Steven Jones	50	M	W	Psychology	4	Utility Co Manager	Internship
Raine Murray	50	F	W	Gerontology	5	Waitress	s-l
Sonia Webster	49	F	B	Criminal Justice	4	Office Worker	s-l
Jane Smith	48	F	W	Nursing	6	Nurse	Online s-l
Jacqui LaLane	42	F	W	Social Work	5	Retail	s-l
Stephen Brown	42	M	W	Photography	4	Technician	s-l
Peter Hughes	41	M	B	Management	4	Military	s-l
Georgette Van Rubenstein	40	F	W	Psychology	5	Consultant	vol/s-l hybrid
Scott Christian	39	M	W	Education	4	Cook	pre-practicum
Stas Haim	39	M	Multi	History	6	Cook	s-l
Nicholas Martin	38	M	W	Computer Science	4	Technician	Capstone s-l
Chisco Niger	34	F	B	Psychology	4	Psych Unit Worker	s-l
Jennifer White	30	F	W	Psychology	4	Child Care	vol/s-l hybrid

Note: There were in fact both a Stephen and a Steven among participants

All 13 participants met the NCES criteria for Highly Nontraditional students exhibiting at least four of the characteristics (NCES, 2002). More than one-third of the study participants held more than four of these NCES characteristics with 23% holding five and 15% holding six, increasing the degree of nontraditional status among student populations. Table 8 reflects the cumulative characteristics of the study participants as a group.

Table 8. Cumulative Characteristics of Study Participants

Number	Characteristics
13	Ages 30-50 (Not an NCES Characteristic)
12	Financially independent
8	Delayed college
8	Has dependents other than spouse
7	Works Full Time
6	College Part Time
4	Single Parent
2	No standard high school diploma

Figure 5 portrays a representation of the study participants moving beyond the NCES

characteristics for Highly Nontraditional students (noted in the oval shapes below) to

include other factors (noted in rectangular shapes below) that have been identified as

challenges to student retention and completion. These include racial minorities (7% of

participants), first generation college students (46% of participants), and immigrants

(15% of participants). All participants additionally identified as low income and

commuter students, factors known to challenge student success.

The complexity of these characteristics and their cumulative effect are explained

in the concept of Intersectionality. Drawn from feminist sociological theory,

Intersectionality examines "the relationship among multiple dimensions and modalities of

social relationships and subject formations" (McCall, 2005).

Figure 5. Universe of the Nontraditional Student – Study Participants
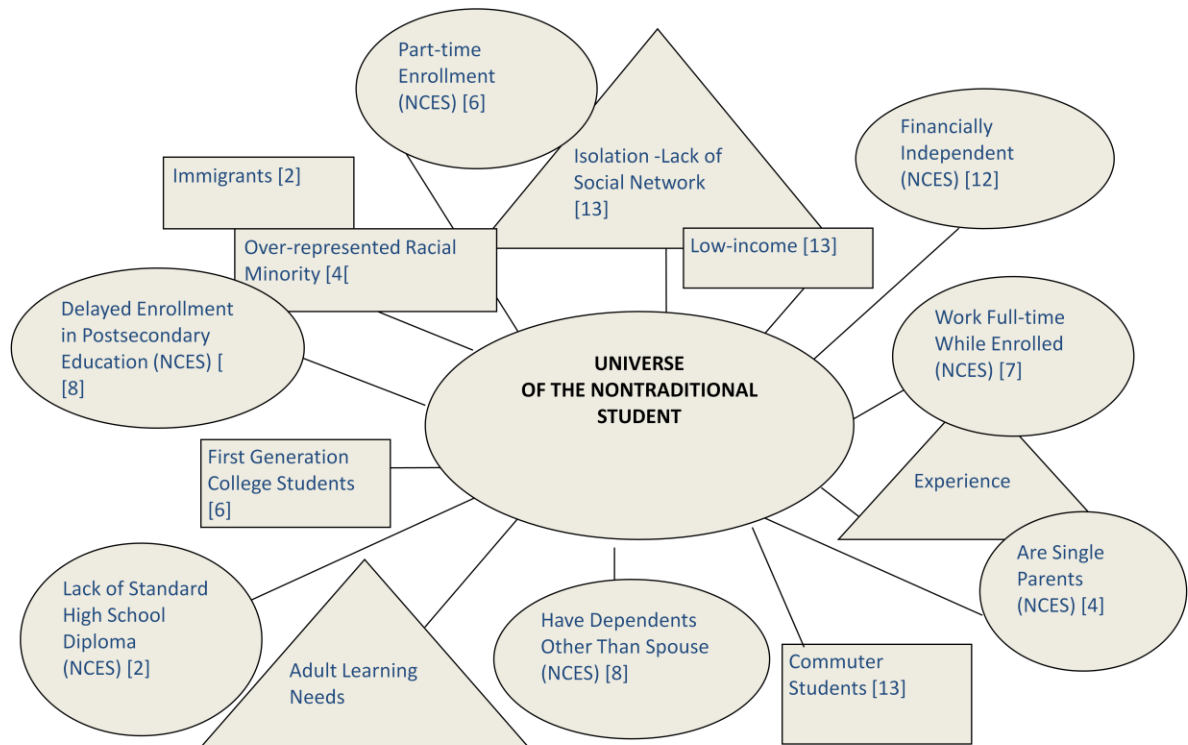
It was notable that 84% percent of study participants reported that this was their first course that engaged service and learning. Table 9 reflects the higher education class level at which participants identified (given their nontraditional status, some note being in-between levels). Thirty-eight percent identified as seniors, 23% identified as junior/seniors, 15% identified as juniors, 15% identified as sophomore/juniors, and one identified as a first year student.

Table 9. Higher Education Class Level and Course Experience

First Time Taking a Course Engaging Service and Learning: 11	
Senior: 5	Junior/Senior: 3
Sophomore/Junior: 2	First Year: 1
Junior: 2	

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Meaning Drawn from Life Experience

As participants shared about their experiences in courses that engaged service and learning, their narratives strongly emphasized the role of their life experiences. These experiences exemplified Saddington's (2000) discussion of the convergence of life experience for adult learners, past and present.

Identity – Course connections: History of challenges

Participants' narratives consistently toggled between their current experience as adult learners and their past experiences that have shaped their identities. Most of the participants, 70%, shared that they had a history of challenge and that these challenges played an integral role in their academic lives. These challenges included immigration, involvement with the Juvenile Justice system, post-military disability, and problems with substance abuse, health and family. Jacqui, a study participant, shared, "I work with disability services, and I do have a hard time with tests, so I go to the center and I get extended times and I have concentration… suffer from anxiety". Scott, a study participant, talked about his challenges:

> being a chef…then we had a surprise pregnancy…then we had two kids after that, and so then I had to transition from that [a chef] to be a stay at home dad and I was like, as soon as I get all these guys in school, I'm going to go back to college.

Two study participants shared about their lives in substance abuse recovery and a third shared about her experience with a significant other in recovery.

As participants shared their narrative it became apparent that their histories of challenge included real and perceived academic failure, particularly as they reflected on the norms of attending college and achieving a Bachelor's Degree. Raine, a study

participant, shared that as a foster child, she was the first to go to college, and only one of two siblings in a family of eight who graduated high school. She discussed the academic failure of her own children and the tremendous pressure that all of this experience puts on her to succeed academically, "I'm the one," Raine stated. Sonia shared about her siblings' academic success, "I kind of got held up to them growing up because they were really smart…me I didn't care; I kind of went the opposite way." Stas, another study participant, shared about coming to the U.S. as an immigrant, "[out of] my wife's family... [and my own], half the family is in Russia... I'm the last one [to go to college]. My family has very good education." For some, these experiences of perceived or real academic failure were coupled with real discouragement from friends and family. Georgette noted, "Pop wanted me to work in an office and discouraged me from going to college," and Jacqui shared:

> My mom…didn't encourage me [to go to college]. She said, 'I don't want you to be upset when you fail'…she was trying to be helpful…I am a grown up and I'm going to do this for me…nobody in my family…graduated from college…I've had many struggles in my life…but I'm lucky enough to change life around… [I] fought very hard to get where I am.

In summary, these histories of challenges that presented strongly for most were integral to nontraditional students and their identities. Most felt that these experiences had contributed to their development significantly and were, in fact, assets. These histories of challenge, largely disengaged prior to their course experiences of service and learning, were assumed to be deficits. Additionally, these histories of challenge were so prevalent among nontraditional students' identities and disconnected from their academic experiences, it relegated their student identities to the bottom of the list.

Identity – Course connections: Parenting

Half of the study participants discussed their experiences as parents. Two participants discussed their return to school as grounded in a desire to better help their children academically. Scott noted "My kids think it's funny; you know, Dad's going to be a teacher." Jane shared that she "was a volunteer in the community: being a working mom interfered with that," and Stas shared how parenting will interrupt his education, "No I have no idea when I will finish. Actually, I have five months baby, so I'm going to take it easy next semester."

Study participants discussed the complication of juggling parental and student roles. Robert stated, "At times, in other groups [course group work], students want to meet as soon as possible…can you meet tonight at 5:30? Well, I commute an hour away, my kid has lacrosse."

Scott said, "I have three kids…so a lot of life outside of [school] revolves around them, their friends, their school; my wife and I try to be active in their schools." Jane noted how being a parent impacts her role as a student, "It did make a difference… the woman over 30 [another student in her course] and I kind of connected, and ended up being more like the leaders; I don't know because we're moms or whatever."

In summary, for many participants, there were connections to their roles as parents, again noted as primary among their identities as their parental responsibilities demanded. For nontraditional students who were parents, children were great motivators for returning to school. Conversely, parenting responsibilities got in the way of academic progress. For some nontraditional students who were parents, taking a leadership role

among traditional students seems inevitable. All of these factors related to parent

identities had impact on nontraditional students' perceptions of themselves as students.

Identity - Course connections: Worker identity

Study participants discussed their lives as workers in light of job losses,

challenged work history, or the desire for job change, present in about half of their

experiences. Robert, a study participant, shared about leaving the military and being

disabled, "I'm looking for marketability in the job market." Sonia shared her challenged

work history, "I just had to leave…I felt I was close to a nervous breakdown...And it was

my son who said, 'why don't you go to school'…I thought 'that's an idea.'" Steven noted

his experience:

> [I was a] good worker… [I] lost the job due to the economy; I was
> devastated…been there for a long time…was well invested in it. It felt like it was
> a huge part of my life…actually turned out to be the best thing…decided to go
> back to school.

Stephen, another study participant, also discussed wanting a change in employment:

> If I like what I'm doing, I get so focused…[if not] I just kind of go through the
> motions; that's what I was doing for six years as a theatre technician, so there was
> no joy…I was making good money…but it was a miserable job…it stunted my
> creativity. I wasn't the person I should be. I was hitting my early forties and the
> time was to do it now. I quit my job. I did a complete 180. I applied here and I got
> that fire in my belly.

Jennifer shared the same sentiment:

> I work full time, and I decided I don't want to sit in a cube all day so that
> motivated me to go back to school. I say I'm pretty dedicated because, you know,
> the first time around I was just getting a degree basically to get a job. I'm
> definitely putting more effort into it this time around.

Georgette echoed the need for change once again when she said, "I don't want to do the work I'm doing now."

Participants also noted the challenges that work poses to their responsibilities as students: Nicholas noted, "It is a lot, full time school student, full time employment." When recounting their course experiences, many participants shared about their positive worker qualities. As a team member, Nicholas stated, "I think I'm a pretty decent worker. I get good evaluations. I tend to work very independently; I work at an IT team." And Jennifer noted, "I am a fairly good team member…go to work on time…fulfill my duties." Stas shared, "Oh, my work is very easy. It is very little. I am a cook. Since I come to America, I work in restaurants and in the cooking industry actually. This [being a cook] very easy to find a job if you don't speak English…if you don't need to write English also. So it's a good job for me…I am a very good worker. I have good experience working in different restaurants." Chisco noted, "I work hard. I do not sit around. I am not a lazy person …I started a new business, so I'm working. I'm doing the business. I'm going to school." Sonia shared, "[I'm] very focus oriented…it has to be perfect...whatever I started on, my mind will be set to get that done." Jane noted,

> I think of our generation… at the work place…we work extra, hard working, loyal and even at my waitressing job…I see the young people come in, do what they have to do and…leave; and don't feel guilty about that…I'll just do it. It's different.

Jacqui reflected the connection for participants between their positive worker qualities and their course experiences:

> [I was in] construction…waitressed…managed a restaurant…retail…I could not keep the job [after failed work experiences]. The woman…at the pantry [food pantry where she was doing service for class]…said that I should be in a managerial position…I was very good at what I did…delegated very well…at

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seeing the whole picture. It's huge… [the] warehouse… [we] distribute that food out to [geographic area] and plus they have the clothes…I didn't realize I was doing that…I guess it just comes out.

Participants related these positive worker qualities as helpful to their developing student identities. Scott noted, "My background is in culinary arts…hands on, real time kind of work…transferred over well to academia…a kind of intensity…strong work ethic."

In summary, participants shared the emerging connections between their worker and student identities. Their participation in courses using service and learning created an opportunities to engage their life experiences as workers and strengthen their current experiences as students. Although their worker identities were primary, as reflected in the literature and understandable given their economic needs, these worker identities also contributed to their motivation to return to college.

Identity - Course connections: Community identity

Originally conceived in the design of this study as civic identity, participants were responsive in recounting their community identity as part of their narratives. For half of the study participants, this was an important and currently held identity. Georgette noted, "I volunteered even as a child." Chisco shared, "I participate in church, I work with kids…so I take anything that has to do with my church and within my community very seriously." Sonia discussed her role in the community as, "[At] my apartment complex, talking to neighbors, kids." Jennifer shared, "The only volunteering type of work that I have done is like environmentally-based. Like there's the [town] natural resource track, just cleaning up woods and forests and the coalition for [geographic area]." Some participants connected their community identity to their role as parents. Robert shared:

When I can find the time, I put in time at my children's school or in the community for different events whether it be support or entertainment, or you know, all kinds of different things…I describe myself as a community participator, active in my community. Not quite as active as I may have been in the past, but very concerned, very observant…I like to be a part of my community. I like to give back. I like to share in the experience. I think if you want to live in a good community, you have to make it a good community. It doesn't happen by itself. It takes people to be active, to be passionate and supportive and understanding.

In summary, participants shared about their own histories of community engagement, for many noting that community identity is currently held with importance. This importance of nontraditional students' own community identities was additionally reflected in their community ties, and for some, as part of their parenting roles.

Coming home – Reconnecting with community identity

About half of the study participants discussed that the courses engaging service and learning provided an opportunity for them to reconnect with their community identity, having lapsed in their community service due to work, school, and family juggling. They recounted that their course experience revealed that they can find the time, especially given the meaning and value of the service work. Georgette shared about her lost self when she simply stated, "[I] left my community identity behind." Stas discussed, "I used to participate years ago…since I start study…I have no time to help them, unfortunately." Jacqui noted, "It [the course] kind of made me think…maybe I can make another commitment other than school, like school just consumed [me]…just seems like I'm so out of touch with the world." Scott revealed the impact of this new experience, "That's the first time I've done nonprofit volunteering work in a sustained

way instead of just writing a letter for Amnesty International or whatever; it was actually being committed to something." Echoing Scott, Stephen shared:

> I never have been [engaged in the community] until this semester, not just because of this course…I had two essays published…about [city], trying to get [city] back on its feet, and I actually got attention from President of Arts United, which I have a meeting after this, so as far as my involvement in the community of [city], it is starting to happen.

Jane stated:

> Now I feel that I can say that I am a community participator! I've worked in the community for about 15 years…so I was very involved…but when I went to nursing school and I had my youngest child. (I have a 9 year old) I went back to school when he was 2, so with that I needed to go back to waitressing. I kind of lost my sense of community because I wasn't... I mean, I was waitressing in the community, which is another interesting thing; however, I wasn't aware, really, of the social kind of issues, so that's why I'm continuing my community service [after the course is completed] because it almost felt like I was home again. When I walked in, I was like, 'I miss this.' This is me, like I felt comfortable; I want to be involved again.

Jane was not the only study participant who expressed a commitment to continue community service in this sense of coming home: approximately half of the participants stated their plans to do so. Raine shared, "It really made me want to be becoming more active again… and know what's going on," and Jacqui stated, "I have decided to stay on. I've already been done with my hours." "Maybe [in the past I was involved] with animal/rescue work, Alcoholics Anonymous…It's important to me…that's why [I'm] staying at [the] food pantry." Scott shared that he will continue tutoring, "I think it's good for the school [university] if there is a continuity…and I think there is still more to learn there." Some participants noted that they will continue with their community service but in a different venue. Jennifer said, "I would actually like to do more volunteer work. I'm not sure that I would go back to that location," and Nicholas shared,

"I really wanted to do the project that did involve non-profits, or try to help sustainability in a town. I probably would pursue those kinds of activities in the future." Jacqui harkened back to her own history of challenge when she revealed:

> I just know where a lot of those people have been…I've grown up with that…know that they are using…lost…not doing well. They know I'm doing well and that I'm in school, and if they can see me doing well, maybe that will put a little thought in their head…it's like if I can do it, you can do it."

In summary, participants reflected upon the value of the course-related community service and the reconnection it offered with their community identities. Some comments reflect the isolation some nontraditional students experienced as their commitment to school left them feeling out of touch with the world around them. This reveals further disconnection. For many, the resurrection of community identities through these courses was powerful and grounded in work in their own cities or towns. This experience was powerful enough to spur greater understanding for managing community work while being a student and renewed commitment to the work. For others, the experience was so powerful that new commitments will include community work.

Identity – Course connections: Application of experience and learning

Participants shared that their life experiences had direct connections to their service and learning courses. Sonia, a student whose service focused around criminal justice, shared about her life where she described herself as an urban youth of color: "I want to help juveniles... when you're young…I did stupid things, we all do, and everybody deserves a second chance." For Sonia, her experience was tied closely to race and the experience of her own youth was propelling her academic work. Steven, whose service as part of his Psychology course focused on working with people in recovery

noted, "As an addict, [this course and I] are connected." Chisco, another Psychology student whose service focused on working with the mentally ill shared, "Mental illness is especially different from where I originally come…Nigeria. There is a big stigma and it's something people do not even talk about." Chisco's identity as an immigrant has a strong impact on her learning. Although this study did not examine data for race and/or immigration identities specifically, data highlights the need for further research.

Scott tied his work life to the tutoring he was doing with the Education course he was taking: "I don't want to be a 50 year old chef and teaching kind of came to me because my mother is a lifelong teacher, my sister is a teacher, a lot of my friends are teachers in Boston, and it's something I could envision myself doing." Nicholas shared, "I can see how that directly related to my career I'm in now and moving forward. It was nice, as I was learning things either I have already done or been in some of those situations, and be able to, you know, directly where I can apply that."

It has been shown that traditional students in Service-Learning courses value the opportunity to apply their learning (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Participants in this study also found value in this learning application but with strong emphasis on the opportunity to share their experiences. Here, study participants found a place of strength, either from their history of challenges, work, or their perspectives as older students. This was coupled with meaning-making related to the course and its service elements.

Raine shared, "I can share my own experience…being an older student…who has been around a little bit and then coming back into a classroom setting and learning this, and then taking it back out…applying it in everyday life." Jane noted the course connection to her own experience, "I had worked with homeless populations before, so I

was, I felt, ok." Georgette shared how she felt about her life experience in relation to the course, "it's an advantage." And Robert echoed her sentiments:

> [In] the community, I do see new things, and I enjoy learning new things but a lot of it I'm familiar with already, so I understand how organizations are formed…which departments to go to, how systems and organizations are run…I think that adds value to a community project, to have that knowledge and to go in…I see things differently because of my age and I see the big picture….I think that helps with the new learning…the more Service-Learning at the university, I think the better we'll be prepared in the real world, in our communities.

In summary, participants shared about the value of their course experiences in applying learning, connecting their past and present experiences, and engaging their past experience, particularly those related to their histories of struggle.

Identity – Course connections: Value and meaning-making

Other participants discussed the value of these courses: Chisco shared, "It was meaningful for me…I work [in an] adult psych unit…so I feel very attached to people with mental illness." Nicholas noted, "The overall [course] project did relate to my job now, my life…I did enjoy helping somebody out, doing work for free."

Coming home - Literally

As participants shared how these courses were meaningful, drawing from their life experiences and connecting to their identities, many shared a sense of reconnection with their former lives (prior to being a student) and a sense of home. This sense of home occurred either through their community identity or more literally, place-based, in that they connected with the communities in which they live and a culture of which they already belong. Jacqui noted about her food pantry service work on [geographic region],

"I live on [geographic region]." Stephen, discussing his arts project service work, shared that he went to "my Laundromat," in his neighborhood to film people. Jennifer said, "I mean, I grew up in the area…there were a lot of Portuguese people there; I'm Portuguese so… [there were] basic customs that we talked about." Jane shared:

> I go to the library…I knew that some of the people hanging out there were homeless and after the experience (the course)…now these people have a face and a name, and it made it really different and that was also difficult too, you know... How do you react when you see someone? …If I went to do an errand, I would... [see] my people."

Robert recounted:

> So I had a group that joined with me [in the course] and I made my opinion known that we should try this project because this particular group that we were researching is in my community. So the closeness, the proximity, the timing, it all just seemed to work out.

In summary, participants reflected on the importance of service in the communities where they were already members and the value of investing in their home cities or towns. Additionally, they reflected on the emotional value of being connected in their course-related community service to people and places that were already meaningful to them. This connectedness, through these courses, helped to bring together value, meaning, and experiences that provided nontraditional students with integration among their many identities.

Outgroup Experiences and Social Creativity

As participants shared about their experiences in courses that engaged service and learning their narratives reflected a stunning Outgroup experience as highly nontraditional students in higher education. These experiences are exemplified by Tajfel and Turner's (1986) discussion of the Outgroups and social creativity as a response

strategy. Outgroups are those that are not normative; nontraditional students can see themselves and be seen by others as Outgroup in higher education. Social Creativity can be utilized as a response strategy where Outgroup members attempt to feel better about their status by identifying and weighing the strengths of the Outgroup.

It is important to note that although this study is classifying participants as a group, they are not. Participants do not know each other, are not in the same courses, or even at the same institutions. Their group status is defined purely by their characteristics. Every study participant reported an Outgroup experience as a highly nontraditional student in higher education to greater or lesser degrees. This is of particular importance as these Outgroup characteristics, separating them from the normative group of students in higher education, are also contributing to the student's identities.

Outgroup conflict

As participants shared their narrative, their Outgroup status became clear, marked by the tensions that exist between the recognition of their own strengths as older students and perceptions of them versus younger traditional students. Participants discussed the advantages of being an older student but most often in contrast with the disadvantages. Raine exemplified this tension most powerfully when she said, "We are better students but less educated, inferior." Her words note the advantages that nontraditional students perceive they bring to academic work: positive worker and parent experiences and qualities, histories of challenge, and for many, existing community connections and ties. Participants noted the advantages of being an older student such as being better organized and prepared, speaking up more freely, having more experience and more stable lives.

Yet, these tensions expressed by most of the participants were shadowed by perceived disadvantages, some of which had been internalized by messages from society as well as their families and friends. Participants identified a number of disadvantages in being an older student including having had negative experiences, the pressure to succeed that is related to the economy and to their life trajectories, juggling multiple roles, and being engaged in the aging process. Nicholas reported a sense of pressure, "I took five classes and last semester I worked full time; you know I wanted to graduate by the time I was 38 and I turn 38 this year." Chisco shared, "Education is something that I live for every single day…I'm juggling a lot but my grades are so great." Steven noted, "[I] see myself different…some of the younger students…didn't know what to make of me. 'What's this old guy doing here'? One of the other students said. 'Oh, is that the old guy'? I thought that was pretty cool! Yah, that's the old guy." Jacqui shared, "Sitting there listening to kids, compared to me they're kids…you have to live a little bit, really bad experiences in your life…when you're 18-19 years old it's easy to…blame the mother with the four kids…the addict… they just don't have the same understanding of life…I'm in a different place." Chisco noted, "I will call them children because they were 19 or 20, and you know they act like children, they come in on the cell phone, and they text, and they come in and out… the class is noisy." Robert echoed:

> I'm an above average student…I've never been paired with a group of just adult learners [in classes], but I've seen other adult learners and they really have it together. Not to say that non adult learners don't have it together…I remember in another course there was a group of older gentlemen…and they had their stuff going on...very well organized…planning things in advance…Their reports were crisp and informational. added, "Sometimes you feel pressured to explain that to them [younger students]… [They] think well you're not supporting the group [due to juggling roles].

Stas reported:

> Adult students understand the importance of education more than young students...have experience working in low payment jobs and make little money, and at the end of the month they finish the job with a little paycheck. Adult people also have to take care of the bills and rent, take care of the child education, buy food, buy clothes, pay for car, for bus. Young students, they come on the bus and don't have to care about the car insurance. They come from the parents' home, so they don't have to care about the rent.

Participants shared many particular differences, again reflecting the tensions of advantages and disadvantages they perceived between themselves and younger students. Jennifer noted, "I have more of a focus compared to some of them… my last partner was like 'oh what's going on today'?… just slept through the lecture, [she said] I was partying last night." Scott shared his perspective of being on the outside:

> I don't have the distractions that I think a lot of them do. I think they are still trying to figure out who they are, their worried about romantic involvements, or just social life, or their living situation is more unstable. You know I come from a very stable marriage and a stable house. So I don't have a lot of those distractions, so that puts us on a different playing field. I mean, I wouldn't be able to put out the quality of work that I do now when I was their age, so it puts you in a different place…as an a older student, you're always outside of that, and you have to shove your way back in to the main flow of the class. My outside school issues are very different from theirs. I can talk about my kids or going to pick people up from school, and they're worried about things that you would expect college students to be worried about.

Stephen shared, "I think the younger students saw this just as another assignment where I see each and every project as my life hinges on it, not just for the grade; I wanted to do it. It's not like I'm 20 years old and you have that apathy towards everything. I don't have that apathy; I have that drive…whatever I attack, I want to make it work as best as possible." Georgette noted, "My brain isn't young but I still have an advantage…it comes easier to me given my experience, but I need a moment." Jacqui reflected, "[My] life experience…helped me when I write papers…when I'm asked to

talk about my experiences, it's helped me a lot." And Scott shared, "I still sometimes see myself as a 21 year old at least in my own eyes, inside my head."

Participants noted very particular challenges in their Outgroup student identities. These challenges included discouragement from others, feeling parental with younger students and a sense of isolation as they don't see other students who are older. Nicholas represented this Outgroup experience when he said, "Members in my group were, in general, a little bit older than me…overall I think we were kind of the other group." Raine noted, "[I] question why I do this." Participants shared about how others discourage them, with Steven recapping, "I don't give up." Participants shared about their isolation and Jacqui reported, "I never saw anyone here [at my university] like me [age]," while Raine reflected her gratefulness when she said, "Gerontology is the exception: There were many older students in class." Scott shared, "There is another guy who is actually older than me in the program and that makes me feel better …sometimes I kind of feel like the dad in the group."

These challenges were further magnified for participants as they discussed their disconnectedness from the institution in which they attend. Seventy-eight percent of participants noted that they had no connection to their higher education institution outside of taking courses. One participant noted her luck at being awarded part time work study and another shared that he actually worked at the institution. The few that engaged with institutional resources included Jacqui, who shared, "[I] tried not to use disability services…you shouldn't have to need any help [as an adult]." And Stas reported, "I used the tutoring services. It helped me a little bit. I'm not great yet but I guess it's ok." Chisco noted her connections with a scholarship program and "…the Psychology Club."

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And Jennifer shared, "I might not participate so much in the campus activities or things in that nature but… It's not, I mean, [it] doesn't make me [bad]…" Raine noted her lack of preparedness for academic challenges stating, "[I] struggle as a student…[I] went into this blindly."

Almost half of the nontraditional students shared about their decisions to return to school, identifying challenges related to risk and loss. Raine shared, "It was a big adjustment for me going back into the classroom". Participants noted a loss of social life and sleep, having to work harder coupled with the fear and anxiety of going back to school. Stephen shared about leaving a 'good' job' and taking criticism for this action, "I sacrificed a lot to be here and I have to make it work and I want it to work, so since I've been here, I have been a straight A student."

These challenges for older students were also reflected as participants discussed their anticipated time to graduation, with over two thirds sharing about what we know as Stopping Out (ACE, 2009). Steven noted, "[I'm] in it for the long haul," and Jacqui shared, "I want to feel good about me and I think that something inside of me clicked…that's why I'm still here…years later plugging along."

A couple of study participants identified their Outgroup experiences a little differently in that they could pass for a younger, traditional student. This Outgroup experience research relates to race where Blacks who are lighter-skinned 'pass' for Whites (Piper, 1992). Scott shared, "I look very young and people don't believe I'm a 39 year old and I have two kids and I guess I don't have trouble with this."

Social creativity

As participants shared their narrative it became evident that their experiences in these courses that engaged service and learning offered opportunity for Social Creativity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Social Creativity is a strategy where Outgroup members engage in an analysis of strengths, similarities and differences of their group. Participants shared how their course and related service experiences provided opportunities for them to reflect on these similarities and differences.

When participants reflected on their differences in regard to traditional students, their Outgroup experience was reiterated. Raine stated, "They communicate differently," and Sonia shared, "We would sometimes get frustrated, especially one girl was very young, like 21-22, and it was just like the last minute…kind of different work ethics." Jacqui noted:

> I think everybody should go to school a little later because I'm in every single class, I write every single paper, my papers are turned in on time, and I see some of these kids and it's just who cares if I pass in my papers. I think it makes a big difference being an older student."

Robert shared:

> I think just the major challenges are when you have students that aren't being proactive or you have students…that are less motivated than others to complete the work, rather than wait until the end where now it's a rush and you've added extra stress…[it] can create problems for myself and for other adults. Sometimes you're able to iron out the differences and work very well together, and other times there is some friction or some challenges that are very difficult to overcome. When you meet those challenges, it makes it even harder to complete the course work.

Many participants shared that through their courses and related service, they were able to eventually challenge and change their beliefs. Raine shared how she "can learn from younger students," and Steven reported, "They bring a different perspective…when

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you're working…have a collective goal. I think we can all learn from each other and…just because I'm older, I don't put myself above anybody."

Steven's perspective further demonstrates how some of the participants' courses that engaged service and learning offered opportunities for Intergroup Exchange (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). These Intergroup Exchange opportunities fostered leadership and group cohesion between the nontraditional and traditional students, changing beliefs for participants about self and others. Steven went on to state, "Ok, not everybody is in the same place...so just listen to what people say. I really learned how to…listen better to people, students, instructors, patients, nursing staff, the doctors. Really listen to what they say and try to understand it from where they're coming from." Jacqui shared, "I fit in pretty well…[I] get along with the other [younger] students…pretty good at getting them to see a different kind of thinking…give them a different scenario…make them think. I kind of like being that other voice." Jane reported, "[the young students are] great with technology and all that, and we were okay too. We could muddle our way through but we're not as quick at it, so that was a little different… It was fun though, because it was good to have that, you know, different perspective." And Stephen noted, "This time around… I felt a little out of place…I took a thirteen year hiatus for many reasons…I realized a lot of these kids could be my kids and the disconnect was very obvious…I got used to it…I see them as my peers, just get to know each other and find that common ground."

Almost half of the participants shared how their course experience and its related service work motivated them academically, provided reassurance and incentive for

completion. Steven shared, "I was really looking forward to this," and Raine reflected, "[the course] makes me more well rounded." Stephen reported:

> I've always been a creative person since I've been a kid, and I've always wanted to do something with my creativity in life; I wasn't sure in what capacity or where or when, but this project actually kind of gave me a glimpse of what I can do."

Sonia shared, "Because it's [the course] focusing on what I'm interested in so my other classes that I had to take seemed better because of it." Georgette notes, "[the] service reassured me, [it's] given incentive to finish." And Robert reported, "The project excited me to push forward… it was the right direction, right thing." In summary, it is striking that most participants felt a strong Outgroup status and found Social Creativity as a strategy of value.

Outcomes of the Experiences

Social context and consciousness-raising

As participants shared their experiences in courses that engaged service and learning, their narratives strongly emphasized course outcomes related to understanding and affirmation. These experiences exemplified Saddington's (2000) discussion of the understanding societal context as important to adult learners, and Weil & McGill's (1989) Village Three reflecting the consciousness-raising of experiential education.

Most of the study participants reported experiencing a greater understanding of the field related to the discipline they were studying in these engaged courses as well as a greater understanding of their fit within that field. Raine shared, "[It] opened possibilities for me in the field." Steven shared, "[I] feel like I'm more marketable." Georgette noted, "[I] found out where I fit" and Robert shared "[I] understand the field better." Steven

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noted, "We were able to put into practice what we learned in class." Robert shared, "We got our hands dirty," and Georgette noted the value, "To get my feet wet." Jennifer shared:

> I didn't really know what to expect going in. I thought it was a good learning experience...to get into the health care field, and I don't have that much experience with sick people basically. It was really...to make sure that I could handle or feel comfortable around these people...that was my main goal."

Scott summed up his sense of understanding fit and field:

> It gives you something to refer to in all your education English classes. I was in the writing center yesterday and here's how it went in the real world, and you feel like you have the trump card; you feel like saying, I have real experience doing this and I know what it's like, and so it's been an advantage as far as being a student."

Most of the participants also shared an increased understanding of their own communities as a result of the course and related service. Jane shared, "It made me so much more aware of population health and what's going on in the community...I live close to the community center and I think it was really hard for me because I always knew there was a homeless problem in our community...however tucked away, hidden." Jacqui noted what learning about her own community meant for her:

> To kind of open up your mind to do social work in your town...the person working in the food pantries...police officer, they're just everywhere...helping a person not commit suicide... in the hospital... to jog your mind and get you thinking more outside the box.

For many participants, this course and its related service work offered a first-time look at systems from an advocacy or political lens. This opportunity offered the participants increased awareness that was sometimes disillusioning and frustrating. Raine shared, "[I] became a strong advocate" and Steven noted that he "understood the

struggle" while Jane reported that she "understood the vicious cycle." Chisco expressed

that her new-found understanding of "How the health care system in the United States,

everything is being managed; people cannot see certain doctors because their insurance

will not cover that," and Stephen noted, "When we got the details of…the project…I flew

head first in because this is exactly the kind of work I want to do, but as I said, I didn't

realize the stumbling blocks [in the community]." Steven shared, "Initially… [I] had a

lot of disillusionment...how the system would operate…patients would be treated," and

Jane reported, "…I saw how the system really functions and I was really disappointed. I

had expected more…it was really hard for me." Jane went on to share her new-found

broader perspectives:

> The windshield survey (group community assessment that she did as part of her service)…some on foot; it was just really good… looking up data about different things that we observed…was really hands on, in depth... It was at the local, the state and the national level.

Scott added the value of networking, "I've met a lot of like-minded people."

As participants shared about the conscious-raising that resulted from their course

experiences, almost half noted that the experiences affirmed their educational path.

Raine shared, "this is what I want to do." Steven shared, that it "confirmed my path,"

while Scott said it "affirmed my path," and Sonia noted that it "made me more

determined to work in juvenile justice," while Georgette reported that it was "especially

[important] since I am at the end [of school]." In summary, participants experienced new

awareness about themselves in relation to others and as part of their academic journeys.

Social mobility and self-awareness

As participants shared about their experiences in courses that engaged service and learning, their narratives recounted course outcomes related to personal growth. These experiences exemplified Tajfel and Turner's (1986) discussion of the social mobility as a strategy for Outgroups, and Weil and McGill's (1989) Village Four reflecting personal growth and self-awareness inherent in experiential education.

Most of the study participants reported learning skills, building confidence and experiencing a reinforcement of their values as a result of the course and related service. Jacqui noted, "I guess it made me a little bit more outgoing. There's a lot of opportunities here and it's like oh yes, maybe I can do this…maybe I can do this…now." Jennifer agreed, "I think it gave me a little more confidence. I feel like I may have helped them in some way. Just like the willingness to, you know, reach out to these people." Raine reported learning patience and "[I] liked what it was doing for me as a person." Jane confirmed a reinforcement of her values as she noted, "The course focused on our values…because we have to understand those before we can work with other, you know, populations. So it was kind of like that, soul searching."

Study participants reported some new learning that was a surprise even to them. The first of this new learning was directly related to how they viewed their experiences. About one third of participants stated that they thought they already knew everything that the course and its related service could offer them. Chisco captured this surprise learning when she noted, "At first, I wasn't really sure; I didn't know if I had the zeal or not. I felt like I know everything, so I was like what am I going to do, but I am glad I took it because it gave me a different concept on the patients." Raine stated it clearly when she

said, "[I] realized, I knew nothing." The second area of surprising new learning was related to being able to juggle the service work as well as liking it, experiencing an emotional benefit as a result. Nicholas shared, "I wasn't expecting actually I should be going out and doing a full project going into it…I liked it." Jacqui noted that after feeling that there was no way of juggling the service, "It was a blessing in disguise for me."

This emotional outcome of the course and related service was further discussed as transformative in nature by participants. Jacqui shared, "[I] did not feel that [being changed] with other courses." Stephen noted that the service was ethical and "the right thing to do." Jacqui shared, "It has helped me be a little bit more compassionate towards people…to look at people a lot differently. I've tended to kind of isolate myself and be a little cynical of the world…it makes me feel good to be helping." Some participants reported emotionality related to their course experiences, expressing it as exciting or fulfilling. Robert stated;

> We were proposing a marketing plan…there are real tangible benefits; that my project, my group actually won the prize. It was pretty exciting for the students…It's nice to have that experience, the networking, the knowledge that you gain, and then, not only that but I'm in my community so that really helped a lot, that was very fulfilling for me.

Lastly, some participants reported breaking stereotypes about themselves and others as a result of the course and its related service. Scott shared his new sense of high school students, "I had a much easier time engaging with them [high school students] and developing a rapport with them than I thought." Scott went on to share about his new sense of self:

> It's something that's kind of new, especially since I still work in the kitchens; you tell people you are out in the high schools tutoring English, and they look at you like you're taking ballet classes. They look at you like you have two heads, and

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you start to see yourself in different roles like that. You dress differently, you talk differently, and kitchen culture is extremely kind of like pirate ship culture: you know, it's very manly in body and rude and loud. Teaching culture is very patient, and nurturing, and developing, and it's been on the school part; it's been very good for me.

In summary, participant experiences reflected both personal and professional growth.

Source of Knowledge and Content of Curriculum

As participants recounted their experiences in courses that engaged service and learning their narratives strongly emphasized course elements related to each course's content and practice. As Saddington (2000) predicts, it has been shown previously in this chapter that some course elements related to the source of knowledge and content of curriculum are more effective for adult learners. To review, these are elements that draw from and recognize the learner's experience, that provide personal growth and present opportunities for Intergroup Exchange. This section reflects the study participants' experiences related to the pedagogical and curriculum-related elements they identified that effectively met the needs of these highly nontraditional students.

Service placement

The first course element that participants noted in their narrative was their service placement or community partner. There was much variation in how decisions about service placements were made. Jennifer noted that she was assigned a placement, "They gave us a list of places we could go and we could pick, or if you didn't have a preference they just assigned." Two other participants noted that they were assigned a service placement without choices or with limited choices. Three participants shared that they

were charged with finding their own service placement. Chisco shared, "Getting…a

place to do my internship was another kind of difficult task, but finally I got a place."

Sonia reported about the stress of having to find her own placement and landing in

service work that was not quite what she had hoped for:

> [I] had to find my own placement and had a series of rejections. I really wanted
> something in the course...so time was running out and I really needed to find
> something…They want you to have all this solid experience in your field and I'm
> not really getting that....This worked out fine. It's been really positive. It's been
> really good. It's just been a wonderful experience for me! I had about three
> interviews. I was a little nervous…it took like three weeks.

Nicholas shared that he wanted a choice in his placement, "We would more directly

impact the local community and you know the social environment here. That's probably

one thing I would have liked to have seen." All study participants agreed that the

optimum situation would be for them to have a choice in service placement drawn from a

list that faculty developed.

The second course element that participants noted in their narrative was the type

of service placement or community partner. Again, there was a great deal of variety

reported by participants as most service placements were tightly tied to the discipline

they were studying. All participants reported the importance of their service placements

connecting with their life experiences. Steven, who identified himself as an addict,

shared about his "intensive experience in a dual diagnosis unit." Raine reflected on

providing friendly visiting with the elderly and Jacqui on her work in the food pantry, all

in their home towns. Stephen shared about his service placement: "I photographed this

neighborhood in [city] which is my home town…really diverse…clientele…it's like two

worlds within one… [I] photographed them so they could have photographs of

themselves on the walls." Robert reflected on his service placement in a Business Process

Management course, "… [We did a] case study on a textile company in [city]… [A] Group member had relatives there… [The] group had option to choose."

For other participants, the service placement held meaning as it related to their goals for the future. Georgette shared about working with autistic children and Scott reflected on his placement giving him the "opportunity to tutor students in a high school writing center, instead of observing in the classroom." Nicholas shared about his Capstone Information Technology Management class where "We [small group] had to go out and find a local business or community group and then do some kind of IT project with them that would…help them increase effectiveness…or revenue or exposure….We found a local architect… [a] small business…she's a single parent." Jennifer shared:

> It is an elective. It's a one credit course…basically…to…provide friendship and support for mentally, physically disabled people, people who maybe had an addiction of some sort… [I was at] a house…that housed maybe like thirty individuals…provided them a place to live."

In summary, participants offered clear information about the course strategies that worked well for them.

Course elements that were challenging

Study participants noted a number of course strategies that challenged them. In addition to having to find your own service, mentioned previously in this chapter, participants noted other challenging course practices, including juggling the time demands of the course and its related service, limited opportunity for reflection, discussion and/or service work, lack of course organization, lack of connectedness with other course students, coupled with lack of preparation for service, and group work with

traditional students. Two participants in the study additionally noted that the writing elements of the course were challenging to them.

Although only two nontraditional students noted a course experience with limited opportunity for reflection, they felt strongly that it was a missed opportunity. An additional participant lamented that their course experience did not provide any feedback from the faculty about their reflections.

Two participants were dismayed that their courses met infrequently and one participant remarked on the particular challenges that an online course presented in terms of being personally organized. Despite the online nature of the course, this participant expressed great satisfaction with the service work related elements. Two participants shared their desire that the service work continue for the full semester; their courses offered service work for more limited time periods.

A few participants recounted challenges they experienced related to the lack of in-class discussion. Stas noted, "Usually the lecture was very busy, so we had no time to talk to each other." Participants reported that this lack of discussion contributed to fewer reflection opportunities and a greater sense of disconnectedness with other students in the course.

Jennifer noted the need for preparation for service work:

> I felt a little awkward in the way that, you know, they ask me if I work there, and we were supposed to say that we worked there, but we really weren't and I felt that I was lying to them in a way. I'm really there to provide company, how do you tell that to someone?

Two participants shared that they did not have an opportunity for group work, and the majority of participants reported that they lacked preparation for group work with younger students. Robert reflected:

> Working in groups…one thing the university does not prepare you for is how to deal with group dynamics. You have adult students, you have younger students, kids in the dorms, parents, all kinds of different dynamics and schedules, and that can get…difficult.

Although almost half of the participants shared that juggling and time management to do service was a challenge, their reflections on how these courses were meaningful, drawing from their life experiences and connecting to their identities, seemed to offset these challenges inherit in the service work. More than one participant stated that they were not thrilled to do it. Jacqui shared, "[It was the] biggest pain in the neck." Others noted conflicts with personal roles, other school assignments, weather and coordination. Despite these initial complaints there was a strong commitment from more than half of the participants to continue in service work or community engagement in some form.

Course elements that were meaningful

Study participants noted a number of course strategies that they found critical to their success as highly nontraditional students. Participants noted how connected readings, in-class discussion, written reflection and clear course materials were meaningful to them in their course experience. Additionally, they identified group work and faculty relationships as critical in providing course meaning, particularly given their Outgroup experiences.

More than half of the participants mentioned the importance of course readings that were connected to themselves as nontraditional students or to place, particularly their place of service, which was often their home towns. Raine shared, "I love my books [from this course], and I think I'm gonna keep the books. Usually I take them back to the bookstore as soon as I can, but not these." Jane reflected:

> [the course] text was written in the 90's so a lot of people were complaining... it's outdated, it's old. But I loved it because that's when I was working for a community agency so I could relate to everything… It was set in… the Boston area so that was another thing that I liked because it was familiar to me.

Jacqui recounted:

> [In the course, students were] finding news articles that have to do with social welfare in my particular area…where ever they live…I live on [geographic area], so I drive over the…Bridge and I have been doing this since I was a little kid and seeing the [organization's] sign. I'm looking…for these articles and there, low and behold, is a recent article about the [organization]…She [the professor] does this to try and get you thinking about…how social welfare works.

Chisco shared:

> The course part of it [versus the service] is very intense; we had so many books to read and they are very good and interesting books…It [the book] touches on every area including family members and how to deal with crisis, and all the loved ones having mental illness, and all the patient rights.

One third of the participants remarked on the importance of in-class discussion in their experience as highly nontraditional students. Participant mentioned that this discussion facilitated mutual learning and understanding for them with the younger traditional students. Steven shared how it helped him work through his frustration and disillusionment. Jacqui commented on the weekly poster session symposiums in her course, "I will need to know how to do that… it's not like you're going in this high graduate class and you're doing a poster for the first time." She continued to note the

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attention and feedback from faculty as well as the value she saw in the opportunity. "She's kind of giving us experiences." Stephen shared about the "twice weekly meeting to check progress," and Nicholas reported, "Every week, we had to give a status updates… [a] presentation of where your project is…It was really the focus our course."

One third of participants addressed the value of written reflection and faculty feedback in response to this work. Scott shared about the value of his experience keeping a journal during the course. Jacqui reflected on the value of her similar experience, "[We did a] journal of the whole process and [had to] write a paper at the end to reflect on the thought process, how you felt about and the difficulties you went through or not." Jane shared about the four journal entries that she did over the semester and their value to her work. Steven noted the following about his weekly journal activities: "One time... [we were] directed to write one on a situation that pushed our buttons? [It] helped me turn a negative experience in to a positive one…and put it into a bigger context."

Half of the participants discussed the value of group work in their course experience as an opportunity to understand traditional students and engage in Intergroup Exchange. Robert shared, "As a group we met weekly…after class or before…we had weekly deliverables…to move the project forward each time. We were an ambitious group." Stas reported, "…half of my group members was younger students, but I had [a] very good experience. They were hard working and nice personalities so I was very happy to be part of this group."

Most of the study participants reflected on faculty relationships as they shared about their course experiences. They reported that these relationships were critical, given their highly nontraditional student status, and they noted a desire for a relationship with

faculty that was peer-like. Three participants characterized this relationship as faculty treating them "like a graduate student." Nontraditional students want respectful and invested relationships with faculty such as those with graduate students, often characterized as mentors. Elements of this critical relationship with faculty included respect and understanding the nontraditional learner's experience, the ability to allay the learner's fears or anxieties, and to set a tone for respect with younger students, and to lesser degree, the ability to prepare learners for service. Jane shared, "she got it [faculty]. She gives a lot of reinforcement. She asks a lot of questions. She listens to people; she knew her stuff and…the Service-Learning…was really the meat and potatoes." Jacqui reported elements of active learning led by faculty, "She kind of took the approach of doing and that's what I liked about doing the Service-Learning project because she really wanted us to do stuff."

Sonia shared how faculty respect was missing in her experience, "He doesn't believe anything you say. He's got that type of...it kind of bugs me…he talks and he'll talk for the whole....he kept us till late." This example of faculty not allowing time for interaction and discussion was a sign of disrespect highlighting the absence of an important course element to nontraditional students. Stas related his special faculty connection, "It was important to have immigrant professors…I think it's not too easy for American-born professors… transfer from different culture, different language, and a different program of the studies."

Chisco captures the intentionality of faculty and the leveling effect it had in the course with both younger and older students:

> I think she really prepared us. [Faculty] made everyone understand that we all had to be respected in the class… share your experiences…give your feedback. This is

the class that I have been very free to speak, to mingle; The professor is very nice…has a good sense of humor. Unlike other classes…that was my worst class and that was the class that I have gotten the worst grade so far. [This faculty's approach], it makes you feel comfortable to bring in anything you encounter, the stresses everything you go through…you can share it with everyone and people will give you suggestions so that was very different. She respects other students as well. [This class] I have done presentations without being afraid or without having any fright, so that paved the way for me.

Participants noted this kind of a relationship was perceived as a connection to academic success. Robert reflected, "The brilliance and the passion that my instructors have…their encouragement, their support for me as an adult learner...So that's invaluable."

There were other course elements that participants found meaningful in their experiences. One third of participants reported the value of clear course organization coupled with student license. Robert shared, "The instructor had specific guidelines, parameters, but…we had a lot of freedom." Two participants reiterated the value of being exposed to policy level issues. Scott noted, "It's all a path, but it's been a bit making it up as we go; it's been challenging, frustrating but it's also been kind of liberating. But if I have an idea, I have the room to run with it." Other course elements of note reflected by individual participants include conducting surveys, and getting feedback from faculty and the service placement before final grading, and the value of observation at service placements. Scott additionally reported, "We have meetings, once a month…get together with the principals from various foundations involved [in the service project] because we discuss were we want to go with it. It gives us as students…a little chance to take initiative to show leadership." Robert noted the institutional commitment, "I'm very pleased with the outcomes, and I hope the university looks to broaden that, to expand that."

Summary

Participants in this study reflected extensively about their experience in a course that engaged learning and service. Their narratives revealed the critical convergence of their life experience past and present, both positive and negative, during the tenure of the course. Their stories reveal their Outgroup experiences as highly nontraditional learners, and the ensuing tensions that challenge them as they pursue higher education. Their voices reflect the outcomes of these courses grounded in personal and professional transformation, coupled with personal growth, self-awareness, consciousness-raising and new-found societal context. They recount their experiences of coming home and negotiating their Outgroup experiences through understanding with traditional students and a desire for connection with a traditionally oriented system of higher education. They provide direction for faculty offering the elements of pedagogy and curriculum that are most meaningful.

These narratives, the data in this chapter of findings, are drawn from hours of interviewing. They reflect the study participants' quick recall of meaning and the validation they gleaned from being heard. Largely these study participants approached this opportunity with zeal and trepidation, asking "can I really help" and "can you really use this information?" of the researcher. Trusting, more than one participant revealed, "you're the only one that I've told that to." Many asking, "can we keep in touch?" as they maneuver in disconnection their academic path. Yet their work, their experience, provides understanding and insight to guide the future of work with nontraditional students.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Summary

This final chapter will restate the purpose of this study, review the research

methods used in this study, and summarize the findings. Interpretation, elucidation and

implications of the findings are then discussed. The chapter will end with

recommendations for future practice and research.

The Students

Nontraditional students are a growing population in higher education and are now

defined as the "new majority" (CCA, 2011, p. 6). Economic challenges, changing work

demands and the desire for personal and professional advancement fuel the adult learners

return to school. In order for the United States to match best performing countries, 10.1

million adults aged 25 to 64 will need to attain Associates and Bachelor's Degrees by

2020 (Kelly & Strawn, 2011).

Their numbers are increasing, yet our understandings of the factors predicting

their success have not. Nontraditional students have been adjunct to the institution of

higher education. "Leaders have been making policy decisions about higher education

absent critical information about 40% of the students, as if their success or failure was

less important than that of traditional full-time students" (CCA, 2011, p. 2). Their

presence within the ivy-covered walls has been met with tremendous challenges, including limited course offerings, part time faculty, and a lack of student socialization.

Nontraditional students are a population that remains uncounted. Five years ago it was estimated that 73% of college students were nontraditional (Green, Ballard, & Kern, 2007). In 2011, it was estimated that only 24% of all college students attend full time (CCA, 2011). By 2019, 22.6% of adults aged 25 and older are expected to be college students as compared to 9.7% of students of traditional age (Kelly & Strawn, 2011).

In the United States, this situation, exacerbated by complex home and work demands frequently results in a lack of persistence to graduation with only 11% of highly nontraditional students attaining a Bachelors Degree (NCES, 2002). An examination of part time students reveals a graduation rate of 24.3% with decreasing rates for subpopulation based on race, age and socioeconomic status (CCA, 2011). Nontraditional students are, at best, twice as likely as traditional students to leave higher education without attaining a degree, and half as likely to complete a degree (NCES, 2002; CCA, 2011).

Challenged by the myriad characteristics that define them, these students have poor academic outcomes. The NCES has defined nontraditional students as having one or more of the following seven characteristics: delayed enrollment in postsecondary education, part-time enrollment, financially independent of parent, work full time while enrolled, have dependents other than a spouse, are single parents, or lack a standard high school diploma (CAEL, 2000). NCES further defines nontraditional students on a continuum of minimally nontraditional, who present one nontraditional characteristic; to moderately nontraditional, who present two to three characteristics; to highly

nontraditional, who present four or more characteristics (NCES, 2002). Using this NCES classification system, nontraditional students comprise almost three quarters of all U.S. undergraduates (NCES, 2002). These criteria, however, could be applied to a twenty-four year old or a fifty-five year old student.

The literature reveals that adult students have a unidimensional experience as they engage in college: the classroom and the classroom only. While traditional students are wrapped in services and support -- residence life, health and counseling services, co-curricular activities – nontraditional students are not likewise engaged. Inconvenient hours and the demands of work and family conflict with the resources offered to traditional students (Bowl, 2001). These disadvantages prevent nontraditional students from becoming a real thread in the fabric of college life. The report, Act on Fact (2006), presents the recurring theme of the classroom as the place of prominence for these learners. The report identifies that while 45% of U.S. community college students have worked on projects with other students during class, only 21% have done so outside of the classroom. The classroom becomes the single opportunity for these students to become a part of the academic community.

The problem is clear: We have neither clear definitions of nontraditional students nor methods of effectively counting them. "While nontraditional student numbers have increased, our understandings of the unique factors that predict adult student success have not increased likewise" (Lundberg, 2003, p. 665). This research reveals the importance of using the NCES Characteristics as a comprehensive method to both identify and understand nontraditional students.

In summary, nontraditional students remain disconnected from higher education. They are challenged by the characteristics that define them and the associate socioeconomic consequences. Their isolation and lack of social networks lead to poor academic outcomes as defined by retention, graduation and degree attainment. In the classroom, a beacon of hope for engagement, nontraditional students continue to be met with challenge. Yet despite the disconnect, this population is projected to increase in higher education enrollment.

Purpose

This Phenomenological Inquiry examined the lived experiences of highly nontraditional students enrolled in credit-bearing, undergraduate higher education courses, and engaged in pedagogy related to service and learning. This research examines the effects of this pedagogical intervention on nontraditional students with attention to their identity development, reflecting the extent to which students perceive these identities as marginalized. Adult learners need learning experiences that offer engagement, involvement, and reflective processes, and where classroom climate is representative of trust, support, and challenge.

This study examines the experiences of thirteen students, aged 30-50, enrolled in undergraduate courses using service and learning at three public universities. This research presents adult learners in their vast cultural and contextual experience, as well as pre-constructed meaning schemes. It provides a framework for understanding nontraditional student needs and the impact of courses using service and learning. It provides insight into strategy to strengthen student identity and draw connections across their multiple worlds.

Summary of Findings

The themes drawn from analysis of the research data reflect the narratives of the

nontraditional students who participated in the study. A representation of the study

findings as they fall within the conceptual framework is offered in Table 10.

Table 10. A New Theoretical Model- Study Findings: Adult Learner Experiences and Identity Development in Courses Including Service and Learning

Role of the learner's life experience	
Constructs	**Themes**
Convergence of life experience past and current	• Meaning drawn from life experiences, history of challenge • Service resurrected positive worker identity supporting student identity development • 'Home' as connected to place and community identity
Understanding societal context and consciousness raising	• Application, field and fit, understanding my community better, affirmation of path
The source of knowledge and the content of curriculum	**Course elements that are critical:** • Group work as Intergroup Relations • Discussion as a Leveling Mechanism • Faculty relationships that are peer-like • Choice of service placement/partner with options offered • Meaning-making through connected readings, written reflection, clear course materials
	Course elements that are challenging: • Juggling • Lack of preparation for group work with younger students • Limited reflection
Experiential learning directed toward personal growth or self-awareness	• Skills, confidence, reinforced values • New Learning: policy, emotional value, manageable, broken stereotypes
Negotiating Outgroup Identity	• Advantage/disadvantage tensions, societal perceptions and pressure • Lack of college connections • Risks & losses, Juggling, Can pass • Opportunities for intergroup exchange, examination of differences, group cohesion and changing beliefs • Peer-like relationships with faculty

Convergence of life experiences past and present

Emerging as the first and most prominent theme, the participants spoke strikingly in elaboration of the integral Convergence of their Life Experiences Past and Present. Nontraditional students shared broadly and passionately about their histories of challenge and the meaning that they were able to draw from these past experiences in their service and learning. This meaning-making additionally supported their ability to resurrect their own positive worker identity, and use it to support their own student identity development. This was critical for these students as they held a plethora of characteristics as highly nontraditional students which often overshadow the development of a student identity. These characteristics, coupled with the history of challenge recounted in their narratives, revealed additional factors challenging their academic success, including a host of social, health, and economic-related barriers, a lack of support and outright discouragement for their return to school, and their own perceived academic failure to be "in this place at this stage of life." Their experiences in these courses provided an opportunity to engage these past experiences as an advantage in their learning.

'Home'

From this integral theme of the Convergence of their Life Experiences Past and Present, arose a second theme of 'Home'. Nontraditional students shared largely about their experience of service and learning as being a homecoming as they reengaged their own civic or community identities. For many, these identities were lost due to family or academic obligations, and the experience in these courses not only reenergized these lost

identities, but also shifted students' thinking about how manageable it could be, propelling them to commit to continued community service. An additional element of the second theme of 'Home' is connected to place. Many of these students recounted the value of doing service in their home communities, enriching them and learning about them in new ways.

Enhanced learning

A third emerging theme from the narratives of nontraditional students in courses using service and learning was Enhanced Learning. This theme was plentiful and was to be expected, given that this is an expected outcome with traditional students. It manifested for nontraditional students in many forms, including increased skills and confidence, values that were reinforced, the opportunity to address stereotypes, and the ability to apply learning in the field. This theme of Enhanced Learning additionally echoed the sentiments of the second theme of 'Home' as nontraditional students shared about the emotional value of community service, and its surprising manageability in their schedules. This theme of Enhanced Learning continued as nontraditional students discussed new learning related to systems and policy, and their disillusionment and excitement in these new discoveries. These new discoveries exemplify what Freire (1970) notes as "deepening awareness" and a process entitled conscientization.

Three surprising elements of this third theme illustrate the unique Enhanced Learning experience of these students. The first surprising element was reflected in their own surprise as they entered the course's community service believing that they knew everything the experience would hold and admittedly were mistaken. The second

surprising element illuminates the depth of their emotional experience in that many

nontraditional students reported feeling changed, less cynical, and less isolated at the

close of the course. The last surprising element of this theme of Enhanced Learning was

the students' clear affirmation of their academic path. This was not only suggested in

their enhanced understanding of their personal fit in the context of the field but

encouraging and sustaining of their journey on a challenged academic path.

Outgroup status

The fourth theme explores the question of their Outgroup membership. The

narratives of these nontraditional students revealed the ongoing tensions as they saw

themselves differently from traditional students, as the 'Other'. For many, this

manifested in the continuous disruption of the academic paths, moving in a 'Start/Stop'

pattern as life got in and out of the way. Another manifestation of their Outgroup status

was highlighted by the intensity of the risks and losses they had incurred just in making

the decision to return to school: losses of workplace status or positions, finances, family

relationships, peers and social time, and the high stakes value of succeeding in this

academic venture. These risks and losses are in sharp contrast to those of traditional

students whose academic pursuit is celebrated and rewarded. These risks and losses

exemplify the 'juggling' inherit in the lives of nontraditional students.

Further indicators of the Outgroup status of nontraditional students in higher

education are illustrated in their myriad stories of frustration and misunderstanding in

relationship to traditional students. This was exacerbated for some students, who never

saw another student who looked like them. This fourth theme of Outgroup status was

reinforced by higher education in that most reported no connections to the institution, "just going to class," and some feeling that they shouldn't need additional support given their age. These tensions were not only external to the students but internal as well, as they grappled with the advantages they had in maturity and experience, and the disadvantages they experienced in their lack of abilities, and histories of academic failure. Sadly, they reported that these internal tensions were reinforced by society's expectations, perceptions and pressures to finally accomplish academic success.

Course characteristics

The fifth and final theme emerging from the narratives of nontraditional students focuses directly on their experiences with the courses themselves: Course Characteristics. Nontraditional students, grounded as adult learners, were clear about the Course Characteristics that worked well for them. These characteristics included discussion, group work, and a choice of service placement/partner with options offered by faculty. Nontraditional students noted that Course Characteristics that supported their meaningful experiences included readings that were connected to the community in which their service work occurred or to some other life connection, written reflection opportunities that resulted in faculty feedback, and clear course materials with the understanding that they were co-creators in the course. Course Characteristics that were challenging to the nontraditional students included limited reflection opportunities, juggling priorities including those within the same course, and a lack of preparation for group work with traditional students.

A fascinating element of this fifth theme, Course Characteristics is focused solely on the role of faculty. Nontraditional students illustrated the critical nature of their relationship with faculty asking for it to be peer-like in nature. This element emerged as the key to faculty orchestration of intergroup exchange between traditional and nontraditional students, the development of group cohesion including the examination of differences, and facilitation that enabled mutual respect to be fostered and the opportunity to change beliefs about the 'Other'.

Discussion

This research examined the experiences of nontraditional students in courses using service and learning. In this section, I will examine the themes to interpret them and apply them to a broader context. I will explore the interrelationship between and among the themes. I will provide an answer to the research question and connect these answers to broader emerging concepts. And lastly, I will provide justification of the study approach and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the research.

Nontraditional students as compared to traditional students

The themes from this research suggest that there are benefits for nontraditional students in courses using service and learning. Benefits to this pedagogy have been clearly identified since the landmark research of Eyler and Giles (1999), Where's the Learning in Service-Learning? How are the experiences of nontraditional students different as compared to those of traditional students? A brief comparison will serve to

reflect what we know about student outcomes relative to Service-Learning and how the findings of this research support and contradict these findings.

At A Glance: What We Know about the Effects of Service Learning on College Students, Faculty, Institutions and Communities (Eyler, Giles, Stenson & Gray, 2001) presents a comprehensive review of the research findings related to all student outcomes of Service-Learning. The research reflected in the report is focused on traditional aged students and provides an interesting comparison to this study's findings.

Convergent personal and social student outcomes

In the area of personal and social student outcomes, we know that nontraditional students have benefitted from Service-Learning. This study reveals that these outcomes are supported in the experiences of nontraditional students as well. Nontraditional students experienced Enhanced Learning including increased skills and confidence, values that were reinforced, the opportunity to address stereotypes, and the ability to apply learning in the field. Traditional students experience development in all of these areas as an effect of Service-Learning (Eyler et. al, 2001).

There is little that we know about nontraditional students and courses using service and learning. More recently, a single study engaging more than 900 nontraditional students, defined as age 25 and older, used survey design to confirm these outcomes of personal skills development as known to be outcomes associated with traditional students (Rosenberg, Reed, Statham & Rosing, 2012). The findings of this study confirm those of Rosenberg, et. al., (2012) and unearth additional positive student outcomes for nontraditional students. Table 11 reflects Eyler et. al.'s (2001) comprehensive review of

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traditional student outcomes related to Service-Learning while providing a side-by-side

comparison using the findings from this study examining nontraditional students. Note

that there are some areas which are unknown relative to traditional students' outcomes

for Service-Learning. Although this study was not intended to provide such comparison,

it will serve a helpful purpose in informing Service-Learning practitioners and future

research about the similarities and differences between traditional and nontraditional

students in these courses.

Table 11. Comparison of Nontraditional and Traditional Student Experiences in Courses Including Service and Learning

Finding from this Research	Nontraditional Student Experiences in Courses using Service and Learning	Traditional Student Experiences in Courses using Service and Learning
Student Outcomes		
Convergence of Life Experience Past and Present	• Meaning drawn from life experiences, history of challenge • Service resurrected positive worker identity supporting student identity development	• No • No
"Home"	• 'Home' as connected to place and community identity • Increased community identity and continued commitment	• No • Yes
Enhanced Learning	• Application, field and fit • Understanding my community better • Affirmation of path • Skills, confidence, reinforced values	• Yes • Understanding the community better • Yes • Yes
Outgroup Status	• Advantage/disadvantage tensions, societal perceptions and pressure –sense of "Other" • Lack of college connections • Risks and losses • Opportunities for intergroup exchange, examination of differences, group cohesion and changing beliefs	• Those served are the "Other"; Are the Ingroup • No • Lower stakes • Yes
Service-Learning Processes		
Course Characteristics	**Course elements that are critical:** • Group work as Intergroup Relations • Discussion as a Leveling Mechanism • Faculty relationships that are peer-like • Choice of service placement/partner with options offered • Meaning-making through connected readings, written reflection, clear course materials	 • Yes • As part of reflection • No • Relevant to quality only • As part of reflection
	Course elements that are challenging: • Juggling • Lack of preparation for group work with younger students • Limited reflection	 • Unknown • Unknown • Yes
	• New Learning: policy, emotional value, manageable, broken stereotypes	• Yes

Divergent personal and social student outcomes

As noted in Table 10, interesting divergence in these personal and social outcomes for students exists in the area of reducing stereotypes. For traditional students, the outcome is grounded in reducing stereotypes and facilitating racial and cultural understanding during community service as they encounter individuals who are different than themselves. Drawn from the theme Outgroup Status, nontraditional students experience this stereotype reduction differently, manifesting in two forms: one, the stereotype or preconceived notions they have of themselves, and two, those they hold in regard to the traditional students. Enhanced Learning findings from this study revealed that nontraditional students held notions of themselves that were often characterized as incapable, failed, and less-than, and their service and learning experiences helped them to see themselves as efficacious. Again this is another example of the consciousness-raising which Freire (970) referred to as conscientization.

Additionally findings from this study reflected the tensions that nontraditional students experienced with traditional students, and their service and learning experiences helped them through group work. This study finds that group work was critical to traditional student experiences. Group work is identified as positively effecting traditional students in the context of Service-Learning as well as building interpersonal development (Eyler et. al, 2001).

In this comparison, there is little reflection of the tension highlighted by the nature of traditional students' Ingroup status, given the normative nature of what society expects a university student to be and do. Traditional students' Ingroup status is further reinforced by the constructs of higher education institutions where faculty attend mostly

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to day students, socialization is provided at college entry, retention and support strategy is plentiful, and student engagement moves way beyond the classroom across the institution. Findings from this study, in the theme of Outgroup Status, illuminate this difference as nontraditional students report minimal, if any, connections to their university, leaving the classroom as the only place within higher education for impact.

Another exacerbation of this tension arises from this study's theme of Outgroup Status. Nontraditional students experience huge risks and losses in their decision to come back to school. These high-stake risks and losses include the loss of workplace status as they changed positions or lost positions in order to return to school. Another loss/risk is the decision to reduce income and/or commit income to school-related expenses. Social losses include family relationships, particularly when their decision to return to school was not supported, and the loss of peers and social time, reducing their amount of social support. For traditional students, the risk and losses are much less. Although they may leave home to attend college, they are often the recipient of a big send-off and ongoing social support. An additional difference for nontraditional students in the high-stakes gamble to return to school is value of succeeding in this academic venture. There may not be another opportunity for these students. They already report a great deal of stopping and starting during their academic career due to work, family and economic demands. Family economic and social outcomes may be riding on success 'this time' and the perception of stopping out is another failed attempt, whereas the traditional student may just need to take some time off.

There are additional parallels between nontraditional and traditional students in other areas of student outcomes. Traditional students are known to be positively affected

by Service-Learning in the areas of social responsibility and commitment to service (Eyler et. al., 2001). This outcome is usually grounded in building the traditional students' civic or community identity. Once again, a recent study confirmed that nontraditional student engagement in Service-Learning also produced the outcome of enhancing their level of civic engagement (Rosenberg et. al., 2012).

This study's findings found in the theme 'Home' reveals a reconnection to civic or community identity for nontraditional students in courses using service and learning. This reconnection provides the nontraditional student with an opportunity to increase their community identity as part of the course's requirement of community service and its integration in the learning. For many nontraditional students, this notion was not met with glee; many questioned how they would be able to manage the task while juggling all of their other life and academic responsibilities. Once engaged in the work, nontraditional students found great value in reclaiming an identity that they had shed due to competing demands. A recent study confirmed that nontraditional students in Service-Learning courses reported the outcome of an enhanced level of civic engagement (Rosenberg et. al., 2012).

Findings from the theme Convergence of Life Experiences Past and Present reflect how the course using service and learning provided nontraditional students with meaningful ways to draw from their life experiences and histories of challenge. As individuals who had well-formed identities as workers having been solidly entrenched in the job market, the experience provided them with a connection between their positive worker identities and how those skills and abilities can translate into and support the development of a student identity.

This theme of 'Home' also revealed that nontraditional students were delighted to provide community service through their courses in their home communities, further enriching these cities and towns, and supporting their community identity development. For traditional students, these connections are unexplored. The Convergence of Life Experiences Past and Present and the theme of 'Home' may be present to a lesser degree, such as when they are away from their home communities at school or have very limited past experiences. In comparison, for nontraditional students, the community service work was personal and more about understanding my community versus traditional students who would more typically be moving to understand the community.

Service-Learning processes

Eyler, et al. (2001) provides a review of the research related to Service-Learning processes to offer a comparison of student outcomes for traditional students and with this study's findings for nontraditional students. In this comparison of nontraditional and traditional student experiences in courses using service and learning, a look at Processes reveals some similarities and differences between the two populations. Both traditional and nontraditional students experience great value when reflection is part of the instructional process. This study's findings reveal the use of reflective practices in the classroom as critical for nontraditional students.

Students in this study were prescriptive in listing reflective practices that were meaningful and impactful to them. This list included in-class discussion and written reflection assignments that resulted in faculty feedback. Another area of impact to both traditional and nontraditional students relevant to course Process is the characteristics of

service placement. This area reflects the place or organization where the community service will take place, often called a community partner. For traditional students, the quality of this placement was critical (Eyler, et. al., 2011). For nontraditional students in this study the issue of quality was further expounded in the theme, Course Characteristics, in that they wanted to be able to choose their service placement or partner in a process where options were offered them by faculty.

In summary, the comparative analysis of traditional and nontraditional student experiences in courses using service and learning portrays both similarities and differences, and raises consideration for future research and examination of practice for both populations. Can we examine the experiences of traditional students more fully to understand their use of past experience in meaning-making and their sense of 'Home' in courses using service and learning? This may be especially relevant to commuter students or minimally nontraditional students. If practice widely adopts the listing of reflection strategies nontraditional students have prescribed, will traditional students experience the same or similar benefits?

Know me!

There is an interrelationship among and between themes from this study's findings. Figure 6 below provides a representation of this study's findings about the experiences of nontraditional students in courses using service and learning.

Figure 6: A Representation of Nontraditional Student Experiences in Courses using Service and Learning
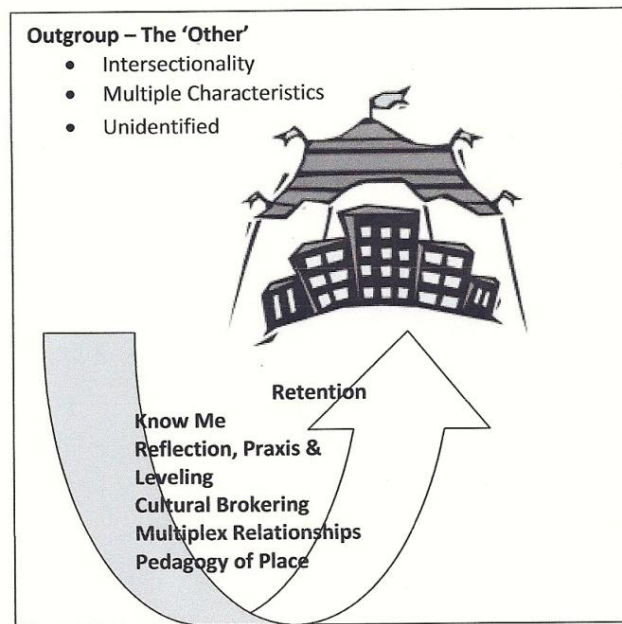
The elements of the representation in Figure 6 are described in depth in the following sections. Globally looking across the themes of Convergence of Life Experience Past and Present and Outgroup Status, the message resonates: Know Me! Higher education students are addressed and discussed as a homogenous group of people. This study's findings build upon adult learning theories to reveal the intimate nature of nontraditional students and what is meaningful to them in their course experiences.

Lest we forget, nontraditional students are not a homogenous group either. They bring a set of complex characteristics and a myriad of often-competing roles and identities. They are actually not a group at all as this research reveals. In higher education, they are often found in isolation, with a few individual students in an entire institution, confirmed by the data collected to identify institutions for inclusion in this study and by the experiences reflected in the narrative of the study's participants.

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Remember the isolation of Jacqui's words, "I never saw anyone here [at my university] like me [age]." The literature notes that nontraditional students move onto higher education campuses steadily after dark. I have taught many a Saturday morning, a time of class meeting choice for many of my nontraditional students, seeing them arriving, sometimes with breakfast and children in hand, greeted by locked classroom doors as someone had forgotten them.

Outgroup status

To understand nontraditional students as an Outgroup, reflected in this study's findings, we need to reflect within a multicultural perspective. The Outgroup framework (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) drawn from Social Identity Theory is most often applied in regard to race. Henri Tajfel and his student, John Turner's hallmark work focused on observations of intergroup relations, the group dynamics in which two groups were defined within particular parameters. Tajfel and Turner's observance of these groups in repeated situations followed the same pattern of identification, categorization and classification, or comparison. Individuals have an innate tendency to scan their environments, looking for others with whom they identify. This identification confirms or denies individual identity as membership of the group. The innate process continues as one categorizes the groups present as Ingroup or Outgroup, building borders in the process. Ingroups hold perceived power and offer self-esteem to members. Outgroups do not. Classification is complete when perceived power is defined and the comparison is made defining the Ingroup in the situation.

This study's findings in the theme, Outgroup Status, reveal the experiences of nontraditional students in higher education environments with Ingroup, traditional students. One student in the study shared that she had never seen anyone like her. Social Identity Theory reflects the classification students make that defines the nontraditional as Outgroup. Although this theory has historically been applied to issues of race, in the last two decades, broader usage has been given to multiple identities, including gender, age, socioeconomic status and sexual orientation.

In this new and broader understanding of Ingroup and Outgroup status, the intersection of these identities has been closely observed and studied (McCall, 2005). Intersectionality examines "the relationship among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relationships and subject formations" (McCall, 2005). This manifests most strongly when an individual holds multiple Outgroup statuses. This was the case for many of the participants in this study. Some were immigrant and nontraditional students, for example. Intersectionality reflects how socially and culturally constructed identity categories interact and bind together to shape each other in identity development, reinforcing a sense of hierarchy and a system of oppression (McCall, 2005).

NCES characteristics

For highly nontraditional students, as all study participants were classified, intersectionality and its ensuing sense of hierarchy and oppression, was present as they held multiple Outgroup identities. In the context of higher education, some of the NCES Characteristics hold great stigma and high Outgroup status in our society: delayed college, no standard high school diploma, and single parent. Those NCES Characteristics

that hold less stigma and lower Outgroup status in our society include: being a student that works full time or attends college part time. The two remaining NCES Characteristics, being financially independent and having dependents other than a spouse, can indicate Ingroup status if given financial security or Outgroup status when financial insecurity is present. All study participants identified as low income, an additional Outgroup status.

In addition to the complexity of nontraditional students' Outgroup status in higher education and multiple Characteristics, Figure 1 in Chapter One entitled The Universe of Nontraditional Students, reflects additional factors that have been identified as challenges to student retention and completion. These include first generation college students, low income, racial minorities, and immigrants. Racial minorities and immigrants both hold Outgroup status in our society.

In contrast, being a nontraditional student may not seem as big of an Outgroup status as others discussed above. It is of note, however, that a few study participants did reflect that the tensions were strong enough that they could pass for traditional students. An additional element to Outgroup status illustrated in this study was that of internalized oppression (Lipsky, 1977). Internalized oppression is defined as distress patterns that arise within the Outgroup as they experience individual and systematic inequities. This study's theme of Outgroup reflects strongly the societal perceptions and pressures that challenge nontraditional students. It is clear that these perceptions have been internalized and have helped to reinforce tensions both internally and externally. Remember Raine's story as only one of two siblings in a family of eight who graduated high school, the academic failure of her own children and the tremendous pressure that all of this

experience puts on her to succeed academically, "I'm the one," she stated. For Raine, the

external pressure has been internalized, reflected when she later states, "We are better

students but less educated, inferior." Stephen echoes these internal and external tensions,

"I think the younger students saw this just as another assignment, where I see each and

every project as my life hinges on it." When I began my doctoral work, a well-respected

colleague dissuaded me, stating that at my age I would never see a return on the

investment. After years and years of messages, these strong societal perceptions and

pressures related to academic high stakes or even failure, challenge and reinforce tensions

both internally and externally for nontraditional students.

Disconnected and complex

It is probably unusual to frame nontraditional students as a cultural or identity

group, be it a group that is disconnected and complex. It is also a group that is ill defined

in terms of numbers. This study revealed that many institutions that hold both

nontraditional student populations and courses that include service and learning do not

mingle the two. Service-Learning is directed toward traditional students, with some

believing that it will not work with nontraditional students. Some institutions do not

count nontraditional students at all, focusing on retention outcomes in their data that these

students cannot achieve. Some institutions count anyone over the age of 24 years as

nontraditional, discounting the effectiveness of abandoning age and counting

characteristics. Examining nontraditional students holds the complexity of identities and

characteristics, numbers, and learners' experiences. These are all factors that influence

student lives.

Know me! – The classroom

'Know me' is a loud finding of this study. Rosenberg, et. al. noted from their very recent research that you are "more likely to reach the nontraditional student if they [faculty] learn as much as they can about the prior experience of each student at the beginning of the term" (2012, p. 173). This study's findings confirm that the classroom is the only higher education connection for nontraditional students. This creates and mandates enormous opportunity and responsibility for faculty. This situation is complex as most higher education classrooms are comprised of traditional students with minimal percentages of nontraditional students. In addition, faculty are largely ill prepared to teach adults, raising the need for additional faculty development (ACE, 2005).

This study's findings define that courses that integrate service and learning offer faculty great pedagogical opportunities to address nontraditional student needs. None of the courses in which study participants enrolled were populated with a majority percentage of nontraditional students. Yet the nontraditional students' narrative in this study captured numerous effective strategies. Some of these strategies have already been highlighted in this chapter in the section Nontraditional Students as Compared to Traditional Students, revealing that research supports the beneficial outcomes to both populations.

Reflection, praxis and leveling

One such pedagogical strategy is integrated written and oral reflection, identified in this study as critical to nontraditional students. We know this to be true for traditional students as well. Findings note clearly that reflective course processes provide additional

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benefits for nontraditional students. For them, oral reflection, most often noted as class discussion, offers praxis. In Saddington's (1998) examination of Radical Theorists, there is a focus on praxis, a process of reflection and action leading to transformative learning. Praxis results in questioning and reinterpreting cultural assumptions related to experience as a key value. As a process, it is radical in nature as it seeks understanding at a root cause level. Saddington's (1998) model goes on to note that the role of the learner's life experience is a call to transformative action that serves as a source of student knowledge. This concept of praxis is exemplified in this study's findings as nontraditional students recounted their experiences in faculty-directed classroom discussions. These discussions became an opportunity for faculty to come to know the life experiences of nontraditional students.

Cunningham (2000) discusses praxis as an opening of space for new voices. She adds that different voices bring different experiences to the space, in this case, the classroom. With Outgroup status, nontraditional students bring new voices and new experiences to the classroom. This study reveals that this facilitated oral reflection aids faculty and traditional students in understanding the experiences of nontraditional students, enables nontraditional students to connect their experiences past and present, and offers opportunity for the engagement of intergroup dialogue. This study's findings show that in this strategy nontraditional students, grounded in isolation and difference, find connectedness with traditional students and faculty, integration of life identities in the sharing of experiences, and that this intergroup exchange fosters an examination of differences leading to group cohesions and changing beliefs about the 'Other'.

"Power is omnipresent in adult classrooms, inscribed in the processes that define the field. The flow of power can be named and redirected or made to serve the interests of many rather than few…" (Brookfield, 2000, p.40). Discussion and oral reflection becomes a leveling mechanism, a term drawn from anthropology, shifting the perceived power in the classroom.

Parks Daloz, Daloz, Parks and Keen's (1997) work, entitled Common Fire: Leading Lives of Commitment in a Complex World, discusses the Constructive Engagement with 'Otherness'. In this conceptual framework they speak to the need to engage with the 'Other' in authentic ways, over time. Parks et. al. (1997) denotes that these connections do not change equity but provide for understanding the value of the 'Other'. This study's themes coalesce to highlight this critical opportunity for the nontraditional student to shift internal and external tensions, and see themselves as belonging and bringing value as a student. Tajfel and Turner (1986) define this as Social Creativity, an adaptive strategy where the individual finds mental "tricks" to attempt to feel better about their Outgroup membership by identifying and weighing the strengths of the Outgroup more heavily than those perceived of the Ingroup. In this study, we find faculty facilitating this trick through intentional strategy in the classroom as a Cultural Broker.

Faculty as cultural broker

"The adult educator's task is that of helping people articulate their experience in dialogic circles and then encouraging them to review this through the multiple lenses provided by colleagues in the circle" (Brookfield, 2000, p.38). This study's findings

support the need for critical reflection that is ongoing, offering a sense of entering and

reentering the circle, real or imagined. This is the task of a Cultural Broker. Cultural

Broker is a term drawn from anthropology where individuals or groups were observed in

acts of negotiating or crossing borders between two groups, from one culture to another

(Jezewski & Sotnik, 2001). It is an act not frequently attributed to faculty, an act "of

bridging, linking or mediating between groups or persons of differing cultural

backgrounds for the purpose of reducing conflict or producing change" (Jezewski &

Sotnik, 2001, p.1). This study reveals that faculty can be a third party in classrooms with

nontraditional students, capable of acting in both directions to facilitate intergroup

relations.

Giroux discusses cultural brokering in the context of Border Pedagogy, "…a

politics and a pedagogy" developed around and "capable of acknowledging the multiple,

contradictory and complex subject positions people occupy within different social,

cultural and economic locations" (Giroux, 2005, p.13).

> Border pedagogy is attentive to developing a democratic public philosophy that
> respects the notion of difference as part of a common struggle to extend the
> quality of public life. It presupposes not merely an acknowledgement of the
> shifting borders that both undermine and reterritorialize different configurations
> of culture, power and knowledge. It links the notion of schooling and the broader
> category of education to a more substantive struggle for a democratic of radical
> democratic process. (Giroux, 2005, p.20)

Giroux (2005) reflects the findings in this study in the themes of Outgroup Status and

Course Characteristics. Nontraditional students require Border Pedagogy and courses

that include service and learning provide opportunity for it. But this may be a new role

for most faculty. Giroux (2005) prescribes the first step in Border Pedagogy as

understanding the border signals, the cultural margins that are structured through history,

power and difference. This study's participants have clearly revealed their border signals. Second in the Border Pedagogy process is the need to create pedagogical conditions in which all students can learn to become border crossers (Giroux, 2005). This takes place by making differences visible, in strengths and limitations, framing not only the discourse but the social or intergroup relations as well. Third in the sequence of Border Pedagogy is the incorporation of how students construct meaning into the actual pedagogy. Giroux (2005) goes on to state that the experience of marginality impacts learning. This is confirmed by the experiences of nontraditional students in this study.

This study's narratives are clear about meaning-making reflecting the value of integrating past and present experiences in courses using service and learning. Findings are grounded in nontraditional student voices reflecting the immense value of classroom experiences where faculty explicitly carried out this process. Findings indicate that group work, as an assignment and classroom strategy served to further foster intergroup relations, but it was also clear that nontraditional students lack preparation for group work with younger students. Positive outcomes in the findings were attributed to the presence of faculty engaging in cultural brokering and Border Pedagogy. This intentional and explicit action by faculty was highly valued by nontraditional students.

How can this faculty approach manifest itself fully with nontraditional students? Service-Learning places great emphasis on reflection. Giroux (2005) describes the need for intentionally interrogating pedagogical practices toward building a Border Pedagogy. We know that reflective practice is an integral role for faculty. This ongoing reflective interrogation is highlighted in Chang and Baldwin's (2008) review of the ensuing faculty benefits of professional and personal balance, building of intellectual and social

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community, and as a catalyst for experimentation, risk-taking, and innovation. Traditional students have shown benefits from reflection in courses using service and learning. How might Cultural Brokering and Border Pedagogy support learning and development for traditional students? Are faculty willing to embrace this interrogation of practice?

Multiplex faculty relationships

This study reveals that the faculty role is critical for nontraditional students. Given their exclusive experience based solely in the classroom, apart from community service, faculty are their sole connection to higher education. One fascinating element of the theme Course Characteristics, from this study was the nature of the relationship between the nontraditional student and faculty. The study's narratives relayed that faculty were the conveyers of respect for nontraditional students and that the relationship was best when it was peer-like. Older students are most probably closer in age to faculty and this may be a factor in phenomena. Additionally, given Outgroup status, nontraditional students may perceive the faculty as having power. This aligns with the previous section where faculty roles and pedagogy have had tremendous impact on nontraditional students in their perceptions of self, as well as their interactions with traditional students. Some study participants likened the relationship to that more commonly seen with graduate students, where faculty nurture and support the scholarly development of students.

Faculty-graduate student relationships are described by Girves and Wemmerus (1988) as a model for socialization and retention. Nontraditional students are not typically engaged in models for either socialization or retention. Girves and Wemmerus

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(1988) describe the benefits of the relationship further, adding that it is tailored to the student's goals, needs and learning style with a commitment to the goals of scholarly enterprise and a desire to succeed. The characteristics of faculty-graduate student relationships are well defined: support advancement in scholarly activity, provide resources and interventions for road bumps, help to accrue experiences, networks and professional placement, provide advice and advocacy, promote engagement, and take interest in their career and well-being. The faculty-graduate student relationship is interpersonal and professional, and includes adjustments due to differences in culture, ethnicity and gender (Girves & Wemmerus, 1988). Nontraditional students in this study reported the value of this kind of relationship, as well as the challenges posed to them when it was completely absent.

The peer-like or faculty-graduate student relationship is an example of a Multiplex Relationship. Coleman (1988) discusses this relationship and its critical relevance to building social capital. The "central property of a multiplex relation is that it allows the resources of one relationship to be appropriated for use in others" (Coleman, 1988, p. 109). It is a resource or network dense relationship which enables the ability of persons in one context to call on assistance to solve a problem in another.

This study reveals that nontraditional student relationships with faculty are central to their classroom experiences. In courses using service and learning, some nontraditional students noted the immense benefits of multiplex relationships with faculty, resulting in mentoring and the development of capital so necessary for this Outgroup.

Pedagogy of place – 'Home'

The concept of 'Home' arose in the findings of this study repeatedly in nontraditional student experiences. In the first manner, the theme of 'Home' related to a sense of homecoming as nontraditional students resumed a community identity through their courses using service and learning. In the second manner, the theme of 'Home' related to the fact that nontraditional students were providing community service in the very cities and towns in which they reside. This study's findings, dual perspectives of 'Home', are tied to the concept of Placed-based education or Pedagogy of Place. Originally developed by The Orion Society and John Elder of Middlebury College in the early 1990's, Pedagogy of Place is rooted in what is local, including the special history, environment, culture, economy, literature and art of a particular location. The pedagogy understands and respects students' local community as a primary source of learning (Callejo Perez, Fain & Slater, 2003).

The study's findings resonate about the value of a Pedagogy of Place for nontraditional students. Community service work in their home communities provided great value for them as a source of learning. Thus, their own communities offered one additional source beyond the classroom, their usual single learning domain.

A Pedagogy of Place is experiential, project-based, and tied directly to the real world. This study's finding strongly reflect the value for nontraditional students as they engaged in experiences that tied together their multiple identities, past and present (Callejo Perez, et. al., 2003). Course Characteristics theme contents included typical strategies used in Pedagogy of Place where students engage in readings that are connected to the community or settings in which they served. This provided additional

meaning-making opportunities for nontraditional students, coupled with the actual hands-on work through their community service.

In summary, this study's findings have provided increased understanding of nontraditional students and their experiences in courses using service and learning. The research question relative to community identity development is addressed as nontraditional students report reconnection and resurrection of that identity. This community identity development seems to provide for integration of experiences past and present, reinforcing learning. The research question relative to student identity development is addressed as nontraditional students report that this integration of experiences has moved their perception of themselves as students. In addition, nontraditional students in their Outgroup status crave to be known and understood in all their complexity and find great value in courses that include service and learning where reflective strategies offer opportunities for praxis and leveling, where faculty engage in cultural brokering, and multiplex relationships with students and where a Pedagogy of Place will bring them home.

Conclusions

"Dare the school build a new social order?" (Count, 1932 as quoted in Cunningham, 2000, p. 574). As an increasing population in higher education, what should our socially responsible practice be with nontraditional students? And what is higher education's role in the nation's social and economic development?

Nontraditional students in this study produced a powerful narrative. This data are powerful in that they convey emotion and lives fraught with challenge. The findings

from this study beg for an understanding of this power. The power of this narrative is further reflected in the lack of preparedness to effectively engage nontraditional students demonstrated in higher education. This is enhanced by the internalized messages that these students are given both real and perceived. The findings beg for a reshaping of who belongs in the academy. But most importantly the power of this narrative explores the central question of this research: To what extent do experiences of learning and service contribute to the civic and student identities of highly nontraditional students? The findings beg for intentional action. This research results in the beginning of an understanding of this special population, their experiences in courses using service and learning, as well as strategies to increase higher education responsiveness and perhaps even retention.

Implications for practice - Faculty

Many implications for faculty practice have come forward from this research. First, is knowledge and understanding of nontraditional students' complex Outgroup status and characteristics. Next, is use of pedagogical practices that can enhance the nontraditional learner's experience and perhaps that of the traditional student as well. Rosenberg et. al. (2012) quote Jacobs and Hundley, "Although research on age is more extensive than research on other characteristics of nontraditional students, evidence suggests that changes in curriculum that benefit older learners are likely to engage all types of nontraditional students by addressing conflicting aspects of their lives in the learning process" (Jacobs & Hundley, 2010, p. 161). The pedagogical practices coming

forward from this research speak to the intentionality and creativity of faculty, as well as their investment in their own ongoing learning.

The faculty is a powerful force for nontraditional students as they may the only connection to higher education. Reflective processes in the classroom that seek to offer praxis and provide a leveling mechanism for nontraditional students and traditional students can provide deeper, transformative learning and support intergroup relationships. Cultural brokering and the formation of multiplex relationships with nontraditional students can shift Outgroup perceptions, reduce tensions, and provide social capital and essential skills for today's workplace for all students. A Pedagogy of Place can increase civic engagement for all students and help to bring to the classroom a sense of 'Home' for nontraditional students. These pedagogical practices may be more uniquely tied to courses that use service and learning, but could be relevant to many types of courses.

This study reveals that faculty development and reflection can result in the engagement of these practices to leverage the learning experiences of nontraditional students in important and critical ways. Faculty will need resources for ongoing faculty development to garner additional pedagogical skills, to understand the characteristics and needs of nontraditional students and to practice new faculty roles. Faculty can additionally contribute to the vast research agenda that seeks to gain insight and guide the future of work with nontraditional students in all disciplines or institutions, in courses that use service and learning, as well as those that do not. This nontraditional student must find presence on research agendas and conference proceedings. Faculty can forward this work as practitioners and scholars.

Implications for practice - Institutions

Retention and completion are at the forefront of all higher education institutions at this time. Figure 7 reflects a current convergence of factors now in higher education, including who has access, how is retention sustained, coupled with the broader incorporation of Service-Learning and Civic Engagement, and the increasing population of nontraditional students.

Figure 7. Higher Education Convergence
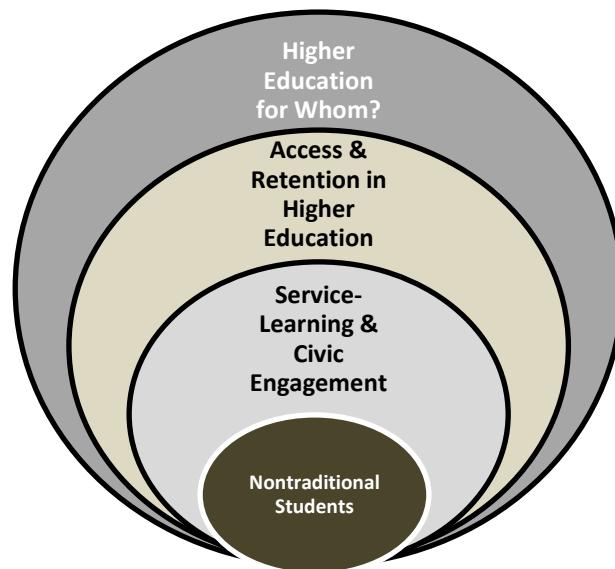
"Never before has there been a more catalytic time for higher education to bring to bear the powerful tool of civic engagement on one of the most challenging issues facing our country – improving college access, retention, and graduation rates, particularly among those who have traditionally been underrepresented in higher education" (Cress et. al, 2010, p.2). Nontraditional students reflect a number of underrepresented populations by nature of their characteristics. President Obama has issued dual calls to higher education: increase completion rates and greater dedication to service – "help

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solve our nation's most critical problems through service" (Cress et. al., 2010, p.2). National calls are echoed on the state level, where the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education (BHE) voted to start tracking civic engagement at public colleges and universities as part of its Vision Project targeted to college completion, workforce development and addressing inequities (MA BHE, 2012). Research (Astin & Sax, 1998; Vogelgesang, Ikeda, Gilmartine & Keup, 2002; Gallini & Moely, 2003) demonstrates that connecting the classroom to the community is an effective pedagogical strategy. "College students who participate in civic engagement learning activities not only earn higher grade point averages but also have higher retention rates, and are more likely to complete their college degree" (Cress et. al., 2010, p. 3). Higher education must pay attention to this convergence, and seek practices and structures that integrate efforts that are focused on inequities, retention, Service-Learning and nontraditional students. These efforts are often scattered at higher education institutions and they need to find ways to collaborate.

Service-Learning has been shown to support retention though improved student satisfaction, and studies have shown that students engaged in Service-Learning are more likely to graduate (Eyler, et. al., 2001). This study reveals some of what we already knew through the literature. Nontraditional students experience a lack of college connections, struggle with stopping out, are isolated, sometimes don't believe they should need help, and experience great risks and losses associated with their return to school. This is the sad story.

This research also contributes to the story that is promising for higher education institutions serving nontraditional populations of any size. Nontraditional students make

great gains in courses that use service and learning – some of which are the same as traditional students and some of which are additional. Nontraditional students found a vehicle for student identity development in courses that use service and learning through experiences where their identities are integrated versus competing. Nontraditional students found affirmation in their academic path, an indicator of student identity development, during their community service work, noting that they knew they were on the right path, and could see the value in their academic struggle. This student identity development for nontraditional students is reinforced even further through their experiences in the classroom. Classroom strategies support student identity development through opportunities to feel validated, connect effectively with others, and with faculty. Higher education must commit to support faculty and pedagogy related to service and learning.

As this research began, there were clear roadblocks created by institutional practices. These roadblocks included, not counting nontraditional students, characterizing them only by age, and not connecting them to courses that use service and learning. Nontraditional students need to be counted in their complexity, so that higher education can understand this population and adequately respond to their needs. Higher education must accurately know and plan for this increasing population, and understand clearly that some seemingly traditional students may, in fact, be nontraditional by characteristic(s).

This research offers a wealth of understanding about nontraditional students, their student identity development, and the motivators and incentives that are critical for their retention and completion. As higher education institutions grapple with shifting

demographics, can they plan for all populations? Some institutions have developed adult

education centers or special programs to address nontraditional student needs. This

research suggests an alternative approach that seeks to find integration, understanding of

difference, and strategies that enhance the learning of all students. Ceasar McDowell

speaks to this challenge, and proposes "Designing for the Margins" (November, 2011).

He uses the analogy of a circus tent where institutions typically plan for those in the

middle. "Designing for the Margins" challenges us to plan for those on the outer edges in

that strategies that sustain the marginal, will, in turn, also sustain the mainstream. Higher

Education institutions should adjust counting mechanisms, seek to promote the

understanding of nontraditional populations, enable access to courses that use service and

learning, coupled with support for faculty to learn and engage in innovative strategies that

can serve to sustain all students.

Implications for Research

Limitations

There are many limitations inherent in this research. The intensive, emergent

interview process produced data that was filtered through the views of the participants'

experiences and biased responses.   When examining anyone's experience, perception is

reality. The interviews, drawing on histories and experiences of struggle, were laced with

personal perspective and emotion. The researcher worked diligently to address issues of

intimacy, discomfort, misuse of words, linguistic accents, challenges with transportation,

need for parking money, emotionality which could have lead to embarrassment,

vulnerability, and potential interviewing challenge. These issues were addressed to

greater and lesser degrees by the researcher, depending on the relationship established

with individual participants. Most participants wanted to be treated as modified co-researchers, thus conducting transcript reviews and most often sustaining ongoing communication with the researcher in a multiplex relationship. Intersubjectivity, an element of phenomenological inquiry, where the experiences of the participant and researcher are co-mingled was transparent and managed through post-interview sharing and researcher journaling with varying degrees of effectiveness.

The recruitment of participants proved challenging and required the use of multiple outreach strategies simultaneously. This was compounded by institutional counting and tracking mechanisms, or lack thereof, for both courses using service and learning, as well as the nontraditional students themselves. This raises the question further about who is nontraditional and whether the same opportunities are available to all students. In addition, despite the development of a profile of each participant, it was not possible to examine any differences among those who were at the youngest end of the spectrum as the number was too small for comparison.

All of the study participants were from public institutions, all identified as low income, and the majority identified as white. These limitations provide fodder for future research.

Future research

Most assuredly this study continues to raise new questions. This research is one of a few works focused on nontraditional students at the bachelor's level and focused on students over age 30 years. Community college students have been the benefactor of more research but may not experience Outgroup status in their settings at all. I suspect

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that there are myriad practices that faculty have used to engage service and learning in their courses where nontraditional students are present. What is the scope and breadth of those practices? This is the next item at the top of my personal research agenda as I believe it has direct implications for practice.

Perhaps this research suggests that effective strategies in courses using service and learning with nontraditional students are effective for all students. This could be an area for future research. Can we also examine, through further research, the level of preparedness younger students have for working in groups with older people, students included? When I learned of the challenge nontraditional students had with intergroup relations, it raised the question of whether this is conversely true. This could be of great value as we aim to prepare tomorrow's worker, functioning in multi-age environment.

How different is the 24-year-old nontraditional student from the 50 year old? Literature on Outgroup status would imply that the further away from Ingroup, the greater the Outgroup experience. Yet, is this based on age only or do other nontraditional student characteristics carry more weight? If they are, there is great relevance in this research to all Outgroup members, including those relative to race, gender and sexual orientation. Since this research did not examine specifically for race, future research would be highly beneficial and support the extent to which intersectionality plays a role in nontraditional students of color.

These areas will be important to understand and bring relevance to both practice and policy. As we understand the characteristics of all students better, it could provide fodder for the consideration of the expanded use of prior-learning assessment programs,

the not so distant cousin of Service-Learning, both as a retention and completion propellant, but also as a transformative practice.

On a policy level, where counting and outcomes hold great stakes, how many students are actually traditional and why do we most often define nontraditional and traditional students by age? This practice discounts the characteristics that could help us to understand their life experiences. How many of those suspected to be traditional are really mildly nontraditional? And why are there no uniform practices in higher education? Even in the definition of nontraditional students, there is great variance. This researcher was thrilled to encounter the NCES Characteristics and used them as a unifying model for nontraditional students. Given the current economic challenges in the U.S., what policy initiatives will best support higher education to support nontraditional student achievement? The future of families and communities rely upon this.

On an institutional level, what can higher education do to understand the nontraditional student in their myriad characteristics, support courses that use service and learning for this population, and foster faculty development in their critical and multiplex roles? Should resources be funneled into special units focused on nontraditional students as is often done for other special populations, or will an approach that seeks integration serve all students more effectively? What resources can be allocated to support faculty development and multiplex roles, given the great demand on faculty in institutions where teaching is primary, who have large numbers of courses to teach and students to advise? How can faculty be rewarded in this work with nontraditional students so as to draw those who are tenured into the dark when nontraditional students are often first arriving on campus.

What Is It Like For You?

Are you in a Service-Learning course this Spring 2011 semester?

Are you a student between the ages of 30-50 years old?

If your answer to these 2 questions is YES...

Share with me

what it's like for you in an interview

for my research

(about one hour at a convenient location)

Contact me:
Suzanne Buglione
508-757-6519 or
CmUnityBuild@aol.com

RESEARCH INTERVIEWS FOR UMD STUDENTS TO TAKE PLACE IN APRIL, 2011

$20.00 gift card for your participation

Help others learn

about

your unique

experience!!!

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol
1. Participant to complete demographic form prior to the interview
2. Review demographic form for accuracy
3. Review consent forms in detail; secure signatures
4. Secure false name
5. Conduct interview.
6. Remind participant about data next steps:
   a. Audio digital recorder formulated into narrative form in written transcripts
   b. Member-check if modified co-researcher
   c. Communication about dissemination if modified co-researcher
7. Thank you - give participant $20 Target gift card for their participation

Interview Script
"I am Suzanne Buglione, a doctoral candidate from the UMASS Boston and I am doing a research project on nontraditional students. I am a nontraditional student now and was when I was working to get my bachelors degree as well. Thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed. As I shared with you previously I will be audio-tape recording this interview for transcription later. I will not use your real name or any other material that would identify you in the transcription or reporting the research. Do you have any questions about the study or the interview?"

- You are currently taking a Service-Learning course - describe your experience as a student in this course…
  PROMPTS:
    o Reflections on your hopes for the course
    o Reflections on your expectations for the course
    o General information about the course

- What aspects of the course have been the most important to you?
  PROMPTS
    o In your academic life
    o In your adult life
    o In your community life
    o Struggles & Gains

- Describe yourself as a student – how you define yourself?
  PROMPTS:
    o Related to this course
    o As compared to others
    o In relationship to your other identities
    o Struggles & Gains

- Describe yourself as a community participator?
PROMPTS
    - Related to this course
    - In what ways….
    - As compared to others
    - In relationship to your other identities
    - Struggles & Gains

- Describe yourself as a worker?
PROMPTS
    - Related to this course
    - As compared to others
    - In relationship to your other identities
    - Struggles & Gains

- How has this course you are currently enrolled in influenced these identities?
PROMPTS
    - Student
    - Community Participator
    - Workers
    - Struggles & Gains
    - As compared to others
    - Influenced other identities

- What else should I know about your experience?

- What is your Occupation:

- Are you…(Student Status)
    - □ First Generation Student (you're the first in your family to go to college)
    - □ Prior higher Education Degree/Certificate Completion (do you have a college degree or certificate already)

- Date of Entry - when did you begin working on your Bachelors degree?

- Anticipated Completion of Bachelors Program - when do you think you will finish?

- 1st Service-Learning Course?

"Thank you for your time, your sharing and reflections.

INFORMED CONSENT FORMS

University of Massachusetts Boston
Department of Leadership in Education
100 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA. 02125-3393

Consent Form For Nontraditional Approaches with Nontraditional Students: Experiences of Learning, Service and Identity Development

Principal Investigator: Suzanne M. Buglione, Ed.D Candidate at UMass Boston

Introduction and Contact Information
You are asked to take part in a research project that is intended to understand the experience of 30-50 year old students in Service-Learning courses in Bachelor's Program. The researcher is Suzanne Buglione, a doctoral student in the College of Education at UMass Boston. Please read this form and feel free to ask questions. If you have further questions later, Suzanne will discuss them with you. Her telephone number is 508-757-6519. Suzanne's Academic Advisor is Dwight Giles, Jr. and his telephone number is 617-287-7621.

Description of the Project:
This study is intended to understand the experience of 30-50 year old students in Service-Learning courses in Bachelor's Program. Participation in this study will take one hour to one hour and fifteen minutes (60-75 minutes) for one audio-taped interview. Before the interview you will be asked to complete a Demographic Form about yourself. During the interview I will record the conversation with an audio digital recorder. If you want to be a modified co-researcher in this study you will have the opportunity to read the written transcript, created from the audio-tape, of you interview to make sure that it is accurate. You will receive a $20 Target gift card for your participation

Risks or Discomforts:
You might experience some discomfort during the interview as you reflect on your experiences. Please feel free to talk about these feelings during the interview. If you feel any other negative or distressful feelings as you participate in the research process, you may speak with Suzanne about them; she is a nontraditional student. Her telephone number is 508-757-6519. Or you may speak with Suzanne's Academic Advisor is Dwight Giles, Jr. and his telephone number is 617-287-7621.

Confidentiality and Anonymity:
This study is designed to be **confidential**. That is, the information collected will not include information that specifically identifies you such as your name or telephone number. During your interview you will be asked to provide a false name. That name will be used when the interview tape is typed up or transcribed. Once the study is

complete the list that links your real name and your false name will be destroyed. There will be no way for anyone to link you with what was said in the interview. If you decide to be a modified co-researcher in this study, you will receive recognition for your contribution using your real name. What you said will still be noted under your false name.

Voluntary Participation:
The decision whether or not to take part in this research study is voluntary. If you do decide to take part in this study, you may terminate participation at any time without consequence. If you wish to terminate participation, you should contact Suzanne immediately at 508-757-6518. Whatever you decide will in no way affect your status as a student or have any negative consequences.

Benefits:
If you want to be considered as a modified co-researcher on this study, you will receive the following benefits:
- The opportunity to review your transcript (the written version of the interview dialogue) to make corrections and ensure accuracy
- Recognition of your contribution on all products (reports, articles, etc.) related to this study.

Your decision about this role is voluntary and will not have any negative consequences. Please check one of the following statements below to reflect your decision:
- □ I would like to be a modified co-researcher on this study
- □ I would not like to be a modified co-researcher on this study

Rights:
 You have the right to ask questions about this research before you sign this form and at any time during the study. You can reach Suzanne at 508-757-6519 or her Advisor Dwight Giles, Jr. at 617-287-7621. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact a representative of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, which oversees research involving human participants. The Institutional Review Board may be reached at the following address: IRB,, Quinn Administration Building-2-080, University of Massachusetts Boston, 100 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, MA 02125-3393. You can also contact the Board by telephone or e-mail at (617) 287-5370 or at human.subjects@umb.edu.

Signatures
I HAVE READ THE CONSENT FORM. MY QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. MY SIGNATURE ON THIS FORM INDICATES THAT I CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. I ALSO CERTIFY THAT I AM 18 YEARS OF AGE OR OLDER.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

_____   _____
Signature of Researcher   Date

_____

Typed/Printed Name of Participant

_____

Typed/Printed Name of Researcher

Consent Form For Nontraditional Approaches with Nontraditional Students: Experiences of Learning, Service and Identity Development

Principal Investigator: Suzanne M. Buglione, Ed.D Candidate at UMass Boston

This study involves the audio taping of your interview with the researcher. Neither your name nor any other identifying information will be associated with the audiotape or the transcript. You will be asked to give us a false name which is the only one that will be used. Only the researcher team will be able to listen to the tapes.

The tapes will be transcribed by the researcher and erased once the transcriptions are checked for accuracy. Transcripts of your interview may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in presentations or written products that result from this study. Neither your name nor any other identifying information (such as your voice or picture) will be used in presentations or in written products resulting from the study.

Immediately following the interview, you will be given the opportunity to have the tape erased if you wish to withdraw your consent to taping or participation in this study.

By signing this form you are consenting to:

❏ having your interview audio-taped;

❏ to having the tape transcribed;

❏ use of the written transcript in presentations and written products.

By checking the box in front of each item, you are consenting to participate in that procedure.

This consent for taping is effective until 6 months from today's date which will be

_____. On or before that date, the tapes will be destroyed.

Participant's Signature _____Date_____

Updated 11/26/2007

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC FORM

Nontraditional Student Survey final

1. Name:

2. Please read the following and check the box if you agree:

○ **Please read the following and check the box if you agree: I understand that completing this form may result in an offer to participate in a 60-75 minute interview about my experience as a nontraditional student in a bachelor's level Service-Learning course. I certify that I am aged 18 years or older**

3. Please note your age:

4. Please note your race:

☐ **White/Caucasian**

☐ **Black/African American**

☐ **Latino/Hispanic**

☐ **Asian/Pacific Islander**

☐ **Native American/First Peoples**

☐ **Multi-Racial**

5. Please note your gender:

☐ **Male**

☐ **Female**

☐ **Other**

6. Please choose all that apply - I am a student who....

☐ **Is between the ages of 30 and 50 years old**

☐ **delayed enrollment in postsecondary education (didn't go to college right out of high school)**

☐ **is currently enrolled in college part-time**

☐ **is financially independent of parent(s)**

☐ **currently works full time**

☐ **has dependents other than a spouse (children or parent that you care for)**

☐ **is a single parent**

☐ **did not receive a standard high school diploma (got a GED)**

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE FORM

1. Name of Faculty Member

Name of Faculty Member
2. Name of Higher Education Institution

Name of Higher Education Institution
3. Service-Learning Course Name & Number

4. This course was a three-credit course in a baccalaureate program that runs a full semester

☐　Yes

☐　No

5. If you answered No to Question #4, please explain:

6. In this course, to what extent did you:

	A Lot				Very Little
Engage students in reflection about service they are doing concurrently with the course	○	○	○	○	○
Assign students community service	○	○	○	○	○
Integrate community service, reflection and learning concepts	○	○	○	○	○

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