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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Amy Sarah Sue Price entitled "The perceptions of selected older adults about the impact of a university adult education program on their lives : a phenomenological study." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education, with a major in Educational Psychology and Research.

Ralph G. Brockett, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Katherine Greenberg, William Poppen, Loida Velázquez

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Amy Price entitled "The Perceptions of Selected Older Adults about the Impact of a University Adult Education Program on Their Lives: A Phenomenological Study". I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education, with a major in Adult Education.

Dr. Ralph G. Brockett, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
And recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of The Graduate School

THE PERCEPTIONS OF SELECTED OLDER ADULTS ABOUT THE IMPACT OF A UNIVERSITY ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAM ON THEIR LIVES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Education
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Amy Sarah Sue Price
December 1999

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Sue Marcum Price and Coy Harold Price, and to the 12 visionary older learners who were participants in this study.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank my committee: Dr. Ralph Brockett, Committee Chair, Dr. Katherine Greenberg, Dr. William Poppen and Dr. Loida Velázquez. Also, I would like to thank Annette Anderson and Dr. Michelle Howard-Vital for making this study possible in an educational setting. I have appreciated all the friends and family who have encouraged me in this study: Dr. Bertram Henry, Dr.Ogie Oliveria, Dr. William Conwill, Dr. Donald Dickinson, Dr. Talbot Rogers, Wayne Jackson, John Horton, April Phillips, Jan Beyma, Gail Boyer, Joy Whitlock and a special thanks to Neil Black for his computer skills and support.

Abstract

This study was designed to gather thick, descriptive, and in-depth qualitative information concerning an education program designed for older adults known as the Longevity Leadership Program (pseudonym). The intent was to explore and create an awareness of the various issues that affect current education programming for older adults through examination of the participants' expressed experiences in the program and their perceptions of how these experiences have impacted their lives.

Two key research questions were developed for the study: (1) What was it like to participate in the Longevity Leadership Program? and (2) What impact do the participants perceive that the program has had on their lives? This study was a qualitative phenomenological study; therefore, an open-ended interview schedule was utilized to collect the data needed to answer the above two research questions.

Twelve graduates from the Longevity Leadership Program were interviewed. Analysis of the interview data revealed four basic themes: (1) Recognition; (2) Belonging; (3) Satisfaction and (4) Maintaining the Status Quo. From these four themes, the following 12 categories were identified: (1) selectivity of participants; (2) affiliation with the university; (3) access to the "movers and shakers" in the community; (4) graduation ceremony; (5) volunteerism; (6) making new friends/social aspects of the Longevity Leadership Program; (7) learning; (8) rewards; (9) lack of minority participation; (10) economic and education status; (11) course content; and (12) Longevity Leadership Program Alumni Association.

An overview of the four themes and 12 categories yielded the perspective that participating in education programs such as the LLP can be a valuable and rewarding experience. The data also revealed that current programming has the potential to exclude certain groups of older adults. Undoubtedly many current programs respond to the education needs of older adults. However, the adult education literature is lacking in providing data about existing programs and the learning needs of older adults. Further research is needed to link education institutions and programming with the needs and wants of all older adults. Additional research in this area may promote a more progressive type of programming leading to a unified end.

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Chapter 1

Introduction to the Study

In the United States, it is no longer unusual for individuals to live beyond the age of 100. We are becoming a nation with an increasing population of older adults. In 1994, 32.2 million Americans were already over the age of 65 and by 2030 over 20 percent of the population will be 65 or older (Hobbs, 1996). Many of these older adults are retired and want to make contributions to their community through volunteer and entrepreneurial activities. Education programs seem to provide older adults with avenues through which they can get involved and make contributions in their community. Increasing numbers of older adults are turning to education programs for social support and education in the areas of health, finances, coping, retirement planning, and many other issues pertaining to their cohort group. In one study, two most frequently mentioned benefits of participating in education programs for older adults are lifelong learning opportunities and community service opportunities (McKenzie & Manheimer, 1994).

Education programs for older adults have developed primarily from the adult education movement that is based on social, cultural, and political concerns of the time. In the 1950s, surveys of education programs for older adults indicated a wide availability of instructional courses, but many of the programs began by including older adults in the courses that were already being offered (Donahue, 1955). The 1960s were greatly influenced by the 1961 White House Conference on Aging (U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1961).

This conference helped to create an awareness of the growing social concern for older adults and their educational needs. Instructional efforts for older people took on a social service orientation (Moody, 1976), emphasizing the crisis of adjustment to retirement and the need for assistance to overcome the stress of role change. The purpose of programs emphasized the needs of older adults and the responsibility of social institutions to meet these needs through programs designed for them.

The 1970s gave way to a major development that included a rapid growth of education programs designed for non-traditional students (adults' age 25 and older). Much of this growth came from the GI Bill of Rights that allowed 2.2 million returning service men and women to attend college (Henry, 1975). During this time, accessibility to higher learning became increasingly available to all persons regardless of age, sex, income, ethnic origin, religion, or handicap (Bowen, 1982). Many colleges modified their scheduling and curriculum in order to accommodate the increased enrollment. Colleges began to provide programs and courses characterized as leading to personal and social satisfaction (Ventura and Worthy, 1982). McClusky (1971) described the shift from a social service orientation to a new perspective where the positive nature of education and the potential of every person, regardless of age were emphasized. As a result, many colleges began offering opportunities for continuing education for older adults (Jones & Baumhover, 1977).

One of the programs demonstrating this emphasis is Elderhostel. The Elderhostel program was established in 1975 for students over the age of 55. It was constructed as a one-week program designed to offer liberal art courses. These courses included

discussion, instruction, and entertainment and were offered by colleges and universities across the nation (Knowlton, 1977). The idea was to focus on the expressive and transcendental needs of the students in an environment that was away from daily routines. Generally, the students live on campus during the program. Today, the program may extend up to two or three weeks and is no longer confined only to campus settings. Many Eldershostel participants are taking part in traveling abroad in order to help with organizations such as Habitat for Humanity International, Global Volunteers, and Oceanic Society Expeditions Forest Association (Lamdin and Fugate, 1997). As Lowy and O'Connor (1986) state: "the program's growth rate-from 200 to over 100,000 participants in just over ten years-indicates that it fills an apparent void for such learning experiences among older adults" (p. 81). Today, there are over 300,000 registrants per year and approximately 1500 colleges and universities and other learning institutions in the U.S. who participate in Elderhostel (Lamdin and Fugate, 1997).

Another example of programming during the 1970s was the Institute for Retired Professionals (IRP) of the New School for Social Research in New York City (Lamdin and Fugate, 1997). This program was designed to serve well-educated, professional, community leaders through a variety of academic course offerings and unique opportunities such as participating in the Institute's art exhibits or contributing to the Institute's literary journal. Today the program continues to offer similar course work and educational opportunities. The operation of the program has remained the same. Courses are administered and taught by older adults and participants are expected to contribute as both learner and teacher.

Nearly two-thirds of the participants in the IRP are over the age of 70 and the average age has been rising (Lowy and O'Connor, 1986). In 1994, the Institute faced opposition by traditional students at the New School who did not want older students to change the culture of the campus. Because of the renowned status of the program the Institute received a great deal of feedback from older adults and adult educators. The final result was an expansion of the New School's program for older learners, granting more autonomy to the learners (Newman, 1994).

Until the 1980s, the focus of education for older adults was mainly on "formal" learning experiences such as Elderhostel and the IRP. However, the 1981 White House Conference on Aging changed the emphasis of programming to stress the importance of self-directed (self-initiated, self-designed) learning. The emphasis of programming within this context resulted in the development of instructional programs that increased problem-solving abilities, especially those that could be used in the workplace or in volunteer roles. Employers, state government, and community organizations were encouraged by the federal government to offer courses that will assist older adults in holding or obtaining active, contributive roles in the community (Maddox et al., 1987).

Today's education programs for older adults reflect this history of societal and programmatic changes by involving a wide variety of program types and purposes. Due to the heterogeneity of program types, participants, sponsors, and content, there is no central system that supports or monitors these programs. However, education programs for older adults have developed to the point where we can now begin to identify implications for the future and gain some perspective on their growth.

Although many colleges and universities recognize the "graying of America" trend, how it will affect the way that colleges and universities design and implement programs for older adults is uncertain. Because of the demographic shift, society now is in the position of contemplating how to meet new educational needs of its older learners. There are many examples of how colleges and universities are offering multiple opportunities for older adult learning. Nevertheless, despite examples, there continues to be an enormous gap between what is happening and what could be happening in higher education for older learners. Higher education has the potential to become an integral part of the lifelong learning system. According to Fischer, Blazey, and Lipman's (1992) *Students of the Third Age,* higher educational program planners need to take responsibility in helping older generations to understand today's values, culture, and technology; acting as a catalyst for mobilizing older adults to maintain productive post-retirement roles; fostering diversity in intellectual, cultural, and social life by educating students of all ages about aging and ageism; and fostering the effective use of society's limited resources by reducing older adults' need for health and social services by increasing their mental vigor through education (p.17).

Fischer et al. (1992) believe that if these four points are followed, colleges and universities can become an integral part of the lifelong learning system. In addition to these responsibilities, colleges and universities can take steps toward serving older adults without greatly altering the institution's current structures and priorities. As the number of older adults increases, more and more institutions will be faced with the task of

recognizing the needs of older adults and planning and providing education programs accordingly.

Because of potential for more and more older adults to pursue education in the future, development of knowledge about the older adult learner and the design and implementation of education programs for older adult learners are necessary for the continued growth of lifelong learning. Future trends in education will most likely be affected by the increasing number of older adults in the population. Clearly there appears to be a need for ongoing research in the area of education for older adults. One way to conduct such research is through qualitative studies such as this one. This study requires the active involvement of older adults by extrapolating data directly from them through their words and by examining their experiences.

Problem Statement

According to the projections of the 1992 Bureau of the Census, older adults are the fastest growing segment of the population in the United States. In terms of education, these older adults most likely will present new challenges to adult educators and educational institutions in designing and implementing appropriate education programming. As the older population grows, so does the need to understand their learning needs (Thornton, 1992).

Previous research has been able to describe what, when, where, and how older adults learn and we already have some understanding of why they learn. However, there continues to remain a gap in our understanding of older learners themselves. This gap is created by the convergence of diversified developments – technological, social,

economic, and political that have collectively changed the direction and future roles of older adults in our society. If we could gain further insights into older adults as learners and as a cohort, it could stimulate further research in this area. Most adult decisions to engage in learning are directly related to changes in their lives- "changes affecting their careers, family situations, health, religion, or leisure opportunities. Going back to school is less significantly a transition in itself than a consequence of some other change, actual or anticipated, in individual circumstance" (Aslanian and Brickell, 1980, p.9).

Evidence shows that people are living longer, opportunities to continue learning throughout the later years are increasing, and the need for education programs and services for the mature adult will increase (Pearce, 1991). There are a number of organizations providing learning opportunities for older adults; however with the change of the evolving type of older adults (better-educated, healthier, and wealthier), education programs may also need to change. To illustrate for example, it may be necessary for educators and institutions to create better connections between the older learner's needs and interests, increase availability, and find ways to disseminate the institutions' messages out to the community where older adults live.

While there have been significant contributions to our understanding of older adults, there is a lack of research from the context of older adult experience. There is a need for additional research about the efficacy of programs designed for older adults utilizing older adults' perceptions and experiences to better address their learning needs and facilitate growth. Additional findings may also show adult educators that they must be flexible and that education programs may not need to be standardized for biological

age but rather standardized more for where older adults are in their own lives. Hopefully by doing so, older adults can maximize future potential and growth whether it is through self-directed, informal, or formal learning.

The research questions (described below) reflect a need to know more about education programs designed for older adults such as the LLP through an examination of the participants' expressed experiences of participating in education programs and their perceptions of how these experiences have impacted their lives.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine the experiences of older adult learners who participated in a university-sponsored program (Longevity Leadership Program) and to consider how these experiences impacted their lives. Within the framework of a phenomenological study, I collected data and conducted a qualitative analysis in order to grasp an in-depth view of the Longevity Leadership Program (LLP) participants' perceptions of their experiences in the program. The intent is to explore and create an awareness of the various issues that affect current education programming for older adults through an investigation of the older adult learners' perceptions and experiences.

Research Questions

In order to gather rich, detailed data from the participants in this study, two research questions were developed: (1) "What was it like for the participants to complete the Longevity Leadership Program?" and (2) "What impact do the participants perceive that the program has had on their lives?"

Answers to these questions can provide valuable information about the participants' likes and dislikes, wants and needs, and expectations of an education program. The continuing development of knowledge about the needs of the older adult learner in education programs will not only be helpful to educational institutions, but to a variety of community settings where assistance to older people is provided and where their talents could be useful.

Need for the Study

The university sponsored Longevity Leadership Program and its participants could be considered representative of many other adult education programs and learners throughout the United States with similar concerns about the education of older adults. As the enrollment of older adults' increases, higher education institutions are becoming increasingly aware of the need to develop special programs that meet the needs of older learners. Due to this increase, program administrators recognize that accommodations to the unique characteristics of older adults are imperative. Also, the stereotype of the "old" senior citizen is changing.

As this realization reaches the institutions, major modifications of the usual administrative and instructional procedures will be demanded. The research that I conducted will demonstrate a variety of expectations of older adults who chose an education program sponsored by a university. The findings revealed that program participants' have expectations about the content, the method by which the content is presented, and that the program will be developed to suit their interests and preferences. As an educator, it is important to consider that older adults come to learning situations

with a lifetime of experience and rich backgrounds. Their commitment to continue learning creates an atmosphere of growth and development at a time when most people assume older adults would be relaxing and letting life pass them by. Because of their active pursuit of learning opportunities, they are modeling a new vision of old age for society. If we support the idea that education programs designed for older adults and learning could be good for the individual and for society, then we should look for ways to encourage and support such learning.

The role of education and advocacy is becoming critical in preventing isolation and marginalization of older adults. There is an urgent need to explore ways to create appropriate education programs for older adults and to establish low-cost, accessible, and meaningful programs that will interest and attract them. Often older adults are neglected in terms of productive work or contributions that they could offer to society. Improved and appropriate education programs could ensure social integration and give them a voice.

Education can provide ways for adults to participate in community and the social integration of older adults and enable them to make active contributions to society. According to the United Nations (UN) document *The World Aging Situation* (1991), social development will require participation by all sections of the community: this includes participation in decisions about societal goals and the allocation of resources (United Nations, 1991).

Learning is seldom an end in itself; it is a vehicle through which a person can meet a variety of personal and developmental goals (Adair & Mowsesian, 1993). This

realization challenged me to attempt to understand what factors influence a participant's choice of education programming or a specific course.

Significance of the Study

Although this study is not a comprehensive look at the phenomenon of learning for adults 55 and older, it does address issues regarding education programs designed for older adults from the perceptions of a group of older learners. It also addresses older adults' interests, likes, and dislikes, as well as the role the university/college may play in fostering continued learning for older adults. Specifically, the study will contribute to our understanding of older learners in the following ways:

1. As a researcher I hope that the study will open a door for future researchers to build on my findings in order to further advance our understanding about what the needs, concerns, and issues of older adults are and how education programs for older adults should be structured.

2. The world is changing rapidly as evidenced by reported demographics and census reports, it is important for educators to be aware of the changes that are currently taking place and plan programs that reflect these changes. By examining current programs, educators may identify and evaluate the relevance and success of current programs and how these programs respond to the needs of older adults. Undoubtedly many current programs respond to the educational needs of older adults. However, the adult education literature is lacking in providing data and information about existing education programs and the learning needs of older adults. Additional research in this area could promote a more progressive type of programming leading

to a unified end. This study provides one example of a program designed for older adults. The aim of this study is to contribute knowledge that is both relevant and responsive to today's experiences to assist educational institutions in their efforts to improve and/or build learning opportunities for older learners.

Limitations

The findings of this study were limited to the perceptions of participants of the LLP as presented in the interview tapes, newspaper clippings, and formal and informal observations of the researcher during the interviews. The population is limited to older adult learners 55 and older who participated in the Longevity Leadership Program from 1991 to 1998. Since the participants were selected from one particular program during a seven-year period, the results may not be generalizable beyond the LLP. However, it is believed that the university sponsored program is a relatively typical university program and that its population of older adult learners is representative of other higher education institutions based education programs designed for older learners.

In terms of my own bias, a bracketing interview revealed that I believe there is value in education for older adults. I therefore come to this study with the preconceived notion that the LLP as a viable resource for older adults. My bias does not hinder me from reporting the data but it does limit my views toward education in that I do see education as an avenue to enhancing the lives of older adults.

Theoretical Framework

This study falls into the category of qualitative research and is phenomenological in design. Data were collected via phenomenological questioning and the data was collected and analyzed using qualitative methods. An examination of these concepts is crucial to understanding the theoretical framework of this study.

Qualitative research focuses on meaning, as participants in their social environment perceive it. Researchers who conduct qualitative studies utilize a phenomenological base in that they believe both the perceptions of the participants and their own perceptions are equally important to understanding social phenomena. Phenomenology as described by van Manen (1990) is "the descriptive study of lived experience in the attempt to enrich lived experience by mining its meaning. The phenomenologist is concerned with understanding human behavior from the actor's own frame of reference. . . .. The phenomenologist examines how the world is experienced. . . . The phenomenologist seeks understanding through such qualitative methods as participant observation, open-ended interviewing, and personal documents"(p.38).

"This method yields descriptive data which enables the phenomenologist to see the world as subjects see it" (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975, p.(2) Phenomenology is the belief that what exists is based on the individual's personal view of the world. The rich quality of the interviews and experiences discussed by the participants provided me with insight into their lives and served to lay the groundwork for new probes into what the personal effects of the education program (LLP) were for them. Merleau-Ponty (1964) states that "The perceived world is the always presupposed foundation of all rationality, all value and all existence" (p. 13).

Throughout this study, the main focus was on the participants' responses to open-ended questions that were designed to elicit detailed answers to the research question. The open-ended questions centered on the ways in which the Longevity Leadership Program impacted their lives. Since the study was aimed at identifying *what* the participants experienced, phenomenological research was the most appropriate method. Phenomenological research seeks understanding for its own sake and looks at *what* instead of why. Utilizing the method of phenomenological research to study the LLP, I was able to gain a deeper and clearer understanding of what it was like for the participants to experience the LLP.

Finally, a phenomenological study requires rich, descriptive dialogue from the participants. Phenomenological research methods are designed to yield clear and accurate descriptions of human experience. The LLP participants were logically expected to be able to respond to the research questions with descriptive and detailed answers. Their reflections of participating in the LLP and consequent life changes, if any, provided a rich base of data for analysis and discussion. Through their participation in the LLP they were expected to have considerable knowledge of the program's design including the program's activities and schedule, programs purpose the program's role in the community. Equally important, they were able to describe their personal experience and perception from actively participating in the LLP. Their experiences appear meaningful through their expressed thoughts and feelings.

Definition of Terms

Below are definitions of terms used throughout the study:

Education: "The knowledge or skill obtained or developed by a learning process" (American Heritage College Dictionary, 1997, p. 436).

Formal learning: "learning that takes place in any formal or organized setting: a school, university, or other learning program that has a predetermined structure" (Lamdin and Fugate, 1997, p. 84).

Informal learning: "self-initiated and planned or takes place within an informal group that structures its own learning projects (e.g., local library reading groups, discussion groups, etc.)" (Lamdin and Fugate, p. 84).

Learning: "To gain knowledge, comprehend, or command of through experience or study" (American Heritage College Dictionary, 1997, p. 773).

Older Adult: A person who is age 55 years of age or older.

Participant: An older adult who had completed the Longevity Leadership Program.

Phenomenology: "The descriptive study of lived experience in the attempt to enrich lived experience by mining its meaning" (van Manen, 1990, p. 38). "The perceived world is the always presupposed foundation of all rationality, all value and all existence" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 13).

Subjects: Individuals who have participated or are involved in a research study.

Volunteerism: Service to others for non-monetary gain (Lamdin and Fugate, 1997, p. 84).

Organization of the Study

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 presents the introduction, problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, need for the study, significance of the study, limitations of the study, theoretical framework and research design, and definitions of terms. Chapter 2 includes: explanation of qualitative research method, sample selection, interview schedule and process, data collection procedures, data analysis, bias statement, and conclusion. Chapter 3 is divided into two sections: setting and participants. This chapter provides a detailed description of the program and a brief description of each of the 12 participants in this study. Chapter 4 contains a presentation of the data and a review of selected literature pertaining to the data. This chapter also contains a discussion of the findings. Chapter 5 summarizes the findings, states conclusions and offers recommendations pertinent to adult education.

Chapter 2

Method

As stated in the previous chapter, the purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of older adult learners who have participated in a university-sponsored education program and how these experiences have impacted their lives. This chapter describes the method by which the study was conducted. It begins with a brief look at the study setting and participants. This is followed by a discussion of qualitative research design and the procedure through which data were collected. Finally, a personal statement relative to my own background and experiences is offered.

Setting and Participants

A state-funded university sponsors the Longevity Leadership Program (LLP). All seminars conducted for the LLP take place on a university campus. Most of the class meetings are held in the same building and same room throughout the eight-week program. Additionally, parking is available to all participants. The university makes an effort to provide a room that has adequate lighting, comfortable climate, and paper and pencil for those who wish to take notes during the class sessions. Breakfast and lunch are served during each class and the LLP alumni are in charge of food selection. They try to insure that the menu includes fat free items and meets the expectations of the participants. Classes are offered weekly on Thursdays during the months of February and March.

Twelve participants were selected for this study. All 12 were graduates of the Longevity Leadership Program. They each had to meet certain criteria including: age 55

or older, must be a resident of the county, and be active in the community or have interest in becoming active in the community. A profile of the participants is presented in the Chapter Three.

Design of the Study

This investigation is a qualitative phenomenological study. My understanding of qualitative research is that the researcher conduct his or her research in such a way that depicts the world as the participant sees it. Qualitative research involves gathering verbal and visual data. The researcher becomes the instrument and the words become the data. "The emphasis must be on attending to and accurately recording events which, when systematically analyzed, will offer insight into the dynamics of the situation as it is experienced by its participants" (Bondy & Hatch, 1982, p. 88). I believe this method provided me with the information needed to obtain a rich description of the program through the experiences and perceptions of the participants. "Methodology must be tied to research purposes, it must accordingly respond to the variety of purposes that exist" (Howe & Eisenhart, 1990, p.4).

Qualitative research is the study of human experience. The focus is on experience based on the belief that all knowledge is ultimately grounded in human experience (Husserl, 1970). The perception of individuals in their social environment is the foundation of qualitative research. Taylor and Bogdan (1984) hold that qualitative research is part of a phenomenological paradigm where individuals or groups within a social context define reality. Since the LLP was formed by a group of individuals who experienced it together, qualitative research was used to provide the participants

experienced insight into the dynamics of the group as it. The research participants experienced an education program designed for older adults located on a university campus but had never shared their experiences in depth with adult educators, with each other, or with a researcher. As a result of their program participation, these older adults have contributed to their community by becoming active in volunteer opportunities, becoming more active in community politics, the school system, law enforcement and numerous other community activities. The reflections of the LLP participants have not been studied previously, and without such a study, a unique insight into the knowledge gained by their participation in the LLP could be lost. "Qualitative studies are meant to be compared and translated to other groups" (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984, p.5). I believe that qualitative studies of education programs that are already in place to serve older adults are valuable in providing guidance to other institutions and may lessen the challenge in developing and designing more successful programs for the future.

Although there is research that addresses education for older adults, there is less research that focuses on education programs designed for older adults. The process of converting an older population to a community asset needs further research also. There appears to be a gap between what is happening on campuses and what could be happening. The steps to filling this gap may be as simple as going to the older learners for the answers. Their answers may assist higher education institutions in their responsibility to become an integral part of the lifelong learning system via meeting the emerging needs of older adults. Through this research I hope to add to the knowledge base regarding older learners and education programming for older adults.

In conclusion, by following a qualitative research design, I was given the freedom to structure research and to make changes when necessary to avoid any rigid procedure that may hinder the study. As stated by C.W. Mills in *The Sociological Imagination* (1959): "Be a good craftsman. Avoid a rigid set of procedures. Above all seek to develop and use the sociological imagination. Avoid fetishism of method and technique. Urge the rehabilitation of the unpretentious intellectual craftsman, and try to become a craftsman yourself. Let every man be his own methodologist" (from Bogdan & Taylor, p. 40).

Procedure

This investigation is a qualitative interview study (McCracken, 1988) and the primary method of collecting data was the audiotaped interviews of participants. Basically, the focus was on the responses of the participants to an open interview schedule that was designed to elicit detailed answers to the two research questions concerning the ways in which the LLP has affected their lives. In addition to the open-ended interview schedule, I developed 12 additional probing questions to be used if necessary (see Appendix B, p. 151). However, I did not find it necessary to utilize the probing questions. The remainder of this chapter will describe the following: the bracketing interview, gaining access to participants, the interview schedule and process, data collection and data analysis, validity statement, and a personal statement from the researcher conducting this study.

Bracketing Interview

In October 1998, a bracketing interview was conducted to reveal pre-developed notions about the research questions (Tarsi, 1998). The interview provided me with insight into personal motivations unknown to me, and emphasized my perceptions of adult education programs designed for older adults. I discovered through the interview that I firmly believe that programs designed for older adults are the appropriate method for the active incorporation of older adults into society. As an adult educator, I came to this study with the belief that education programs for older adults can provide a combination of stimulating atmosphere, congenial company, and an opportunity to get involved in the community. I believe that every person regardless of age can benefit from being involved in lifelong learning. Finally, I believe that higher institutions that provide education programs to older adults need to consider the unique characteristics of older adults when designing educational programs for older adults and take into account the personal differences among the aged.

Although I have quite a few years to go before I reach the age of 55, I have had personal involvement in the lives of people who are 55 and older including my parents who are both well over 55. My personal and professional experience with educational programs designed for older adults led me to believe that adult programming plays a crucial part in the future of education and of our society.

I strongly believe that a qualitative phenomenological framework applies to the goals of this study. Since qualitative research methods are highly personal and interpersonal, ethical considerations are associated with this type of research. Qualitative inquiry tends to be more intrusive and involve greater reactivity than surveys, tests, and

other quantitative approaches (Patton, 1990). When using in-depth interviewing, ethical considerations should be given. The researcher must understand that they are not in the field to judge or change values and norms but rather to understand the perspectives of others.

In order to get valid, reliable, meaningful, and useable information the researcher must have sensibility and respect for differences (Connor, 1985). Connor states that sensitivity to and respect for other peoples values, norms, and worldviews is as needed at home as abroad. According to Kimmel, (1988) the following ethical issues are related to qualitative research: (1) Promises and reciprocity, (2) Risk assessment, (3) Confidentiality, (4) Informed consent, (5) Data access and ownership, (6) Interviewer mental health, and (7) Advice. The researcher has the responsibility to protect the participants of a study. In the end, maintaining ethics, states Punch (1986), "My answer is that we should rely on common sense – a characteristic that some may not readily attribute to academics in general ..."(p. 82).

According to the program director, participants, and the sponsoring university, this study did not appear to present any danger or ill effects toward the participants. Certainly, anonymity and respect for the confidential nature of the interviews must be prudently respected.

Gaining Access

I gained access to the Longevity Leadership Program facilitated by the director of Public and Extended Education at the university. The director introduced me to the LLP participants by allowing me the opportunity to speak to them as a group about my proposed study in an effort to get volunteers to participate in the study. I was also given

the opportunity to speak to participants from the LLP individually at the end of several scheduled LLP meetings. Several LLP participants volunteered to be part of this study; others came through referral from other LLP participants. I used the purposeful sampling procedure beginning with some of the individuals who volunteered to be interviewed. Additional participants were selected based on recommendations of previous interviewees. Also, random volunteers were selected based on their completion of the LLP.

Interview Schedule and Process

All interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participants. Each interview utilized an open ended interview schedule. It was important to arrange a location free from interruptions for the participants. The first interview lasted approximately one hour. A second interview/meeting was scheduled in order to allow participants to review the first interview data and add any additional information that they felt should be included. A third meeting was scheduled for those whose age or stamina prevented us from completing our sessions during the first two meetings.

The second interview lasted approximately one hour and the last interview/meeting lasted approximately one hour. Interviews were not structured in terms of having predetermined questions such as a questionnaire, but the interview had enough structure to elicit answers to the research questions. The interview/discussion was based on the following two questions; "Tell me about your experience in the Longevity Leadership Program" and "What impact do you perceive that the program has had on your life"?

Interviews were tape recorded and reviewed as soon as possible in order to check for clarity. Equipment used in this study included one small, high quality audiotape machine and one back up machine. Following completion of the interviews, the tapes were transcribed, double-spaced, with lines numbered for later reference, and a wide left margin for coding and notes (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). A transcription machine was used to expedite the transcription of data from the audiotapes. During the study I made handwritten field notes and collected newspaper clippings and information regarding the LLP and/or the participants. These notes along with the audiotapes and consent forms will be stored in a locked filing cabinet drawer for seven years following the completion of this study. Confidentiality will be held with the highest regard. Pseudonyms have been used to identify participants.

Data Collection Procedures

Each individual who agreed to participate in this study was asked to do the following: (1) Read the "participant information sheet" (see Appendix: "Participant Information Sheet). (2) Read and sign the "informed consent" (see Appendix: "Longevity Leadership Program Phenomenological Study Consent Form"). (3) Ask questions about the study throughout the interview process. After the participants expressed an understanding of the study and the forms were signed, the audio taped interviews began. Each interview ranged from one to two hours in length. Once all of the interviews were completed and transcribed, each participant was given a copy of their transcript for review.

I gave each participant between two and four weeks to read the transcript. I then met with each participant individually to discuss their reaction to the transcript and to

make any changes/additions necessary. Participants were reminded that their participation was completely voluntary and that they could withdrawal could occur at any time.

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis includes collecting the data and identifying an accurate, precise, and informative structural description. In qualitative data analysis the researcher must consider the causes, consequences and relationships presented in the data. It is important to remember that emphasis should be on illumination, understanding, and extrapolation.

Data analysis is the heart of phenomenological research. Its purpose is to describe the essential features of the participants' experiences. In order to analyze the data from a phenomenological perspective, the researcher must first examine his or her own attitude toward the subject being studied. This process is called Epoche (Katz, 1987). "Epoche is a process that the researcher engages in to remove, or at least become aware of prejudices, viewpoints or assumptions regarding the phenomenon under investigation. Epoche helps enable the researcher to investigate the phenomenon from a fresh and open viewpoint without prejudgment or imposing meaning too soon. This suspension of judgment is critical in phenomenological investigation and requires the setting aside of the researcher's personal viewpoint in order to see the experience for itself" (Katz, 1987, p. 37).

Once the researcher has considered his or her viewpoint, it is necessary to bracket out the world and presuppositions in order to identify the data in its purest form. Then the researcher must decipher from the examples an accurate description of their contents

and the particular structural relationships that binds the elements into a unified experience. The steps to analyzing the data vary according to the researcher; however, a similar series of steps are generally followed. In analyzing the data in this study, a continual process of reading and rereading transcripts and interviews was undertaken in order to search for commonalties. Once this was accomplished, the commonalties were used as a basis to code the data. I used acronyms for such coding. A category such as "community involvement" was recorded on the appropriate transcript as "CI". A separate tally was kept of the occurrences of categories throughout all the interviews in the study. Originally there were over 20 categories that appeared but eventually they were combined and reduced to a manageable number of basic themes. Through these themes a formulation of at least a partial answer to the research questions emerged.

The main focus of qualitative analysis should be on presenting a "thick description" (Denzin, 1989). The goal of qualitative data analysis is to go beyond what a person is saying to what a person is experiencing through interpretation of their experiences. "A thick description does more than record what a person is doing... It goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings . . . It establishes the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in question" (Denzin, 1989, p. 83).

A thick description should not only allow for the researcher's opinions and speculations in the analysis but more importantly provides the readers with clear and rich data so that they can make their own decisions and judgements. As the researcher

collects the data, the daily reading of the information helps to establish connections throughout the entire study. Data collection and analysis takes place simultaneously. Once the researcher has become familiar with the transcripts and field notes, the content analysis begins. "Content analysis is the process of identifying, coding, and categorizing the primary pattern in the data" (Patton, 1990, p. 381).

In my research, I established a data index by first labeling segments. I found that it was important to develop a systematic and comprehensive classification scheme. Within the scheme I identified general categories and sub categories. By using numbers and letters to code the data, I was able to organize the entire process. The purpose of classifying qualitative data for content analysis is to facilitate the search for patterns and themes within a particular setting or across cases. The entire process begins with analysis, then interpretation, and finally presentation of findings (Patton, 1990). I followed this process throughout the analysis of the data. It is important to reduce the volume of information by identifying significant patterns and then constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what data reveal. I began with over 20 themes and eventually reduced them to a small number of themes. The biggest challenge is that "we have few agreed on canons for qualitative data analysis, in the sense of shared ground rules for drawing conclusions and verifying their sturdiness" (Miles and Huberman, 1984, p. 16). In other words, there is no set of rules in data analysis except to do the best one can to represent the data and present it in a way that will reveal the purpose of the study.

Validity

In conducting phenomenological research, the researcher needs to be concerned with whether the findings can be trusted and used as the basis for actions and future research. The concept of validity generally refers to whether the findings of a study are well grounded and well supported; therefore, they can be trusted and a plausible interpretation unfolds. Howe and Eisenhart (1990, pp. 2-9) cite five standards to follow in order to give a study validity: (1) The fit between the research questions, data collection, and analysis should be evident; (2) Data collection and analysis should be applied effectively; (3) A knowledge of background assumptions should cohere to the study; (4) An "overall warrant" should be had by adherence to the first three principles, as well as examination of outside theories, including a review of unacceptable theoretical explanations; (5) External and internal value constraints. External value involves "the worth of research for informing and improving educational practice... Internal constraints imply ethical repercussions to the subjects and may affect the validity of the study accordingly" (pp. 7-8). To insure internal validity, all field notes, archival materials, transcript, and tapes need to be dated and labeled.

With regard to interviews being valid, interviews are systematic. Prior to the interviews, potential questions used in the evaluation are available for inspection and the interview is highly focused so that the participants' time is carefully used. All interviews are taped and notes are taken during the interview.

Researcher's Personal Background Statement

The following section describes my relationship to the program and includes a brief introduction of the program being studied. This phenomenological research was

based on data gathered through interviews with participants from an adult education program that is currently being offered on a campus at a state funded university located in the United States. In order to protect the anonymity of the institution and the participants being studied, I used a pseudonym name for the program (Longevity Leadership Program, LLP) and pseudonyms for the participants involved in this study. The LLP Program is designed to provide educational opportunities to learners 55 and older who want to learn more about community organizations, environmental issues, government agencies and policies in the southeastern United States.

LLP's primary goal is to bring older adults together with community experts to learn more about problems, issues, and future plans for the region. The program encourages future involvement of participants in the community and/or entrepreneurial activities. Dr. O'Reilly who is an adult educator created the program. Dr. O'Reilly's influence has been instrumental in designing programs for older learners and increasing awareness of the importance of recognizing the untapped wealth of expertise and experience among retirees and employed seniors. He assisted the Vice Chancellor at the University of USA and the program director from 1991 to 1997, in designing and implementing the LLP. The program was implemented in the Spring of 1991 and continues to serve older learners. Each year, 35 participants are selected according to geographic area, past occupation, and gender. Typically participants consist of 1/3 female and 2/3 male.

There has been an expressed need to increase the female participation and minority participation in the program. To date, the program has had over 200

participants: 2/3 male, 1/3 female, and two African Americans. However there appears to be the potential to include many more participants. The census of older adults living near the University is increasing rapidly. If the program is successful, the University will have the opportunity to assist these older adults in becoming active members of society and to improve the quality of life for them as individuals as well as for the community.

As an adult educator, I believe that I have a responsibility to promote and provide learning opportunities for people of all ages in the most effective, exciting, enlightening, and enriching way possible. In order to fulfill these responsibilities, I feel strongly about the need to examine and research adult education programs through studying the design and implementation of programs as well as studying the learners' experiences and perceptions. In the area of adult education for older learners, I think this is especially true. While reviewing the literature in search of educational programs that are located on institutional campuses that provide services to older learners, I discovered a program sponsored by the University of USA known as the Longevity Leadership Program. To learn first hand about the program I applied and completed an internship in August 1997 at the University of USA. I elected to complete this internship as partial fulfillment of my course work in the doctoral program in Adult Education through the Psychoeducational Studies Unit at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

During my internship, I gained valuable insight into the concepts and processes of the LLP. I met with LLP members, LLP alumni, completed a survey for the Interim Program Director with regard to programming ideas for Spring of 1998, and met with speakers who participated in the program. There seemed to be an overall interest and

enthusiasm of the LLP participants, university faculty and staff, and the community about the program.

As a researcher, I had to consider my bias toward the LLP. In an effort to suspend my impressions during this study, I completed a bracketing interview in relation to my research questions. According to Wolcott, (p.164) it is imperative for researchers to be aware of their personal biases. Because of my own experiences in adult education, I approached this study with certain assumptions about older learners and adult education programs designed for older adults. See page 26 for a detailed description of the bracketing interview.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of participants in an educational program designed for older adults and their perception of the impact the program has had on their lives. This chapter described the method that was utilized in this study, including gaining entry to the setting and selection of the participants. In the following chapter, the method utilized in the study is looked more closely by delving into the setting and participants in detail.

Chapter 3

Setting and Participants

The setting and individuals that participated in this study are introduced in this chapter. Both the Longevity Leadership Program and the site where the program took place are described in Chapter Three. In order to give an accurate description of the Longevity Leadership Program, the outline for this chapter will include: a description of the LLP; how the program was financed; who and how many participants have been served; who the presenters were; content offered in the LLP; and the LLP evaluation. Once the program has been described, a brief description of each of the participants who were interviewed for this study will be presented followed by a summary. I used pseudonyms for the participants consistently throughout the study.

Description of the LLP

The Longevity Leadership Program was established in 1991 and was modeled after a program at the University of North Carolina at Asheville. An educator from UNC Asheville brought program ideas to a state funded university on the East Coast and proposed a similar program. A federal grant provided initial support to get the program started. Over the past eight years the LLP has become financially independent.

In the Spring of 1991, the LLP began as a pilot program. University staff that year selected all of the participants. Participants were chosen according to their roles as senior community leaders. Each participant was awarded a grant to fund his or her

participation. Thirty-two participants were chosen the first year. Most were long time residents of the area.

The primary goal of the program was to bring older adults (55 and older) together with community experts to learn about issues, problems, creative possibilities, and future plans for the region. According to the current program director, the goal has not changed. Content of the program was much the same as it is now: focusing on the educational, business, and cultural aspects of the community. Seminars also continue to operate much the same way as they did in 1991. They are offered weekly on Thursdays during the months of February and March. The seminars consist of a seven hour presentation, and include breakfast and lunch. Once the two-month program is completed, the LLP Alumni Association offers continuing lectures on a monthly basis to alumni members who are interested.

Community experts present seminars from the state government, education, the medical community, and the media. Many of the speakers who presented in 1991 still continue to offer their expertise. Every year, leaders from the community are identified and invited to share their expertise with the LLP participants in order to provide them with the most up to date information. Seminars continue to take place on campus and are usually conducted in the same location. The university also extends parking and library privileges to all participants.

Following the first two years of the LLP, several changes took place. First, funding for the program became the responsibility of the LLP program itself. Thus, participants were required to pay tuition for the program. Second, the participants chosen

for the first class were long time residents of the area. Over time, the focus of the LLP became to provide newcomers in the area with information about the area and opportunities to get involved in the community.

Third, participants from the class of 1991 and 1992 came together to create an alumni association. The purpose of the alumni association was two-fold. Alumni wanted to establish an alliance with the university to ensure the future of the program. Next, the participants elected to make decisions about the program through a voting process rather than through a consensus. LLP alumni members wanted to have more control over the operation of the program and to become more involved in future programming in order to maintain the level and quality of information that had been offered to them.

Finally, the alumni held a meeting in April 1992 and elected the first LLP Alumni President. As a group, they wrote a memorandum of understanding stating that the LLP was not part of the university, but that the university was kind enough to give them use of university's facilities, therefore they would uphold the university's policies and would serve as representatives for the university.

Once the ground rules for the LLP alumni were established, an advisory board was elected. They planned the curriculum for the upcoming class, chose participants, handled the finances of the program, and took care of advertising for the program. Also, the committee served as a liaison between the university and the LLP.

Currently, a new committee is elected each year from the LLP Alumni members and new graduates of the LLP. This committee works jointly with the university to plan all program speakers for the upcoming year. The committee also has a treasurer who

keeps track of finances. Other committee members are in charge of recruiting new participants through advertising the program in local and community newspapers, the university newsletter, and through radio announcements. Many of the alumni also recruit participants through encouraging friends and neighbors to apply.

Today, the LLP continues to flourish. To date, there are 261 graduates of the program and more than half are active (have paid dues) alumni association members and continue to be active in the alumni association by serving on committees or boards. More than 175 alumni members volunteer in various community, government, educational, and nonprofit agencies.

Individuals who want to enroll in the LLP must apply through the extended public education department at the university. Since the content of the program is mainly designed for newcomers to the area, newcomers are encouraged to apply. On average, 40-50 individuals apply each year and a maximum number of 35 are selected to participate. Participants are chosen according to geographic area, past occupation and gender. Past enrollment shows a trend that fewer women apply than men do and the class usually consists of 1/3 female and 2/3 male. There is an apparent need to increase the female participation and minority participation. According to several of the participants, lack of participation of females and minorities is due to attitude and past history in the area. A discussion of issues regarding lack of participation among minorities is presented in Chapter 4.

The LLP course lasts for two months and cost approximately $250.00 per person. Most of the money goes toward food that is served during the program. Only the opening

speaker, who continues to be the same person since the implementation of the program, is paid because she administers the Myers-Briggs personality test (Myers, 1962).

As one way of increasing participants' understanding of themselves and appreciating the diversity of the group, the Myers-Briggs is administered during the first session of the LLP each year. I did not have access to the results of the Myers-Briggs test results from the participants of this study; however, many of the participants explained that the profile matched their opinion of themselves. Also the participants' stated that they enjoyed sharing their profiles with each other. The instrument measures preferences in perception, decision making, life work style, and energizing. It is based on the concept that people have preferences, which differentiate them from others. The psychologist who administers the instrument to the group encourages them to share some of their information about themselves with fellow participants in order to learn about each other and appreciate the rich diversity of the group.

The program consists of seven sessions (8a.m-3: 30p.m). A different seminar is presented each session. The following is an example of the topics for the seminars implemented in 1998: Discover the Possibilities, Regional Growth and Development I, Criminal Justice/Regional Growth and Development II, Education, History and Government, Health and Human Services and The Cultural Arts and Media of the region. Sessions began at 8 a.m. with a continental breakfast followed by lunch and sessions concluded by 3:30 p.m. See Figure 3.1 for a graphic illustration of the progression of the LLP beginning with the program's conception in 1990 through 1998 depicting the program changes that have taken place over the past eight years.

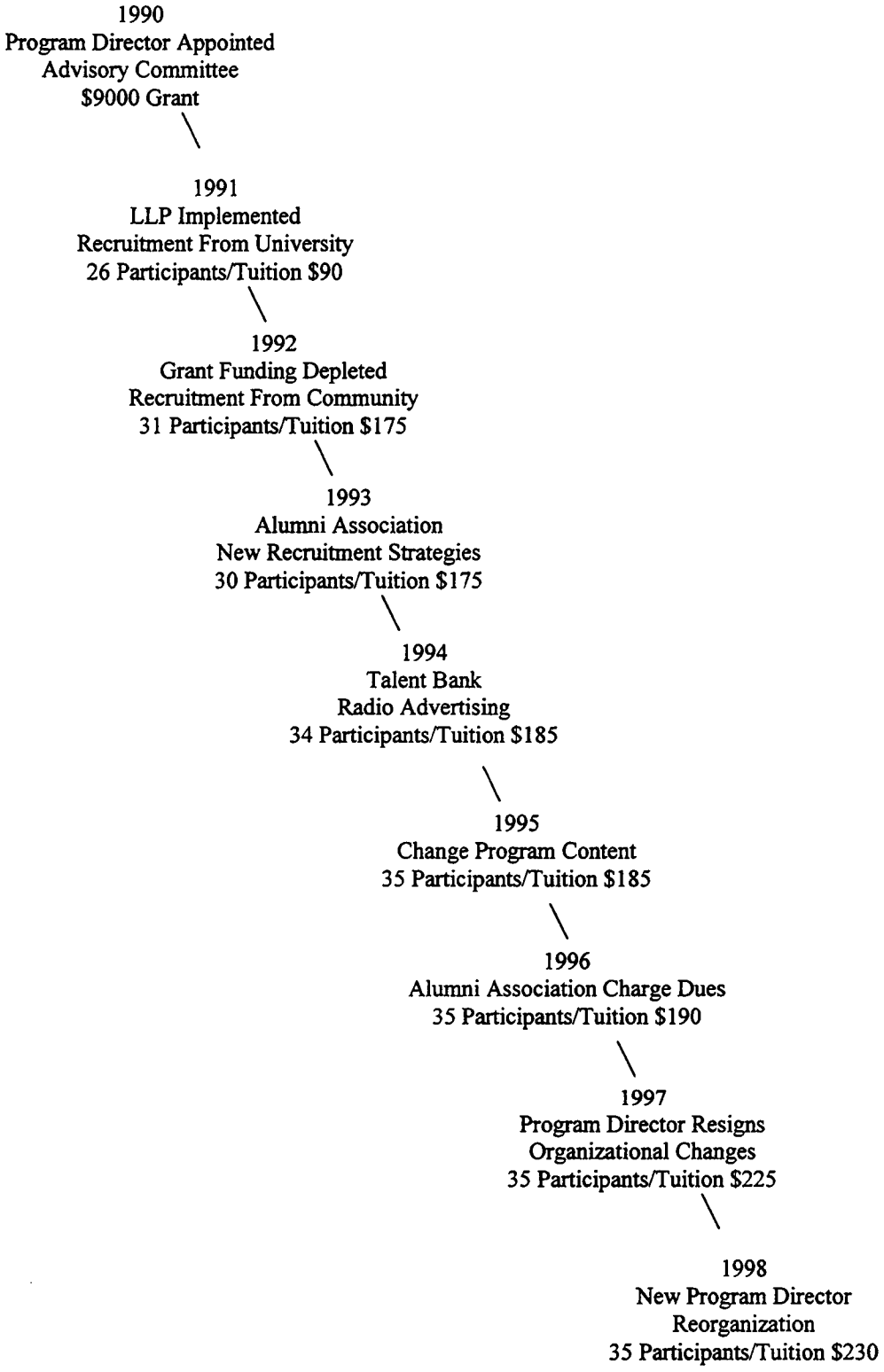

Figure 3.1 Longevity Leadership Program Timeline 1990-1998

Today as in the past, seminars take place on campus and are usually scheduled in the same room when possible. The classrooms that I observed were neat and clean, well lighted and ventilated, and care was taken to maintain a good room temperature. Water was usually served and pencil and paper were readily available for participants who wished to take notes. Finally, the university provides parking at no cost to the participants.

Once all seminars are completed an evaluation is requested from each of the participants. The evaluation questionnaire is geared toward obtaining information about the program that may enhance or improve future programming. Some of the evaluation questions address the physical setting of the program, the presenters, the content of the program, and suggestions for future programs.

At the conclusion of the classes a graduation ceremony is held. Ceremonies are planned by the participants in the class and are often times elaborate. Some classes choose to present programs that include skits, music, or outside entertainment. Others may choose to have a formal dinner and invite influential leaders in the community such as the mayor, chief of police, or superintendent of the school system. For example, the Class of 1997 decided to compose a sketch based on the future. They decided to perform a skit projecting what the town would be like in the year 2007. Each of the participants in the skit represented a specific issue or location in town and cleverly found ways to give a glimpse of what they think the future of their town will lead them in the year 2007. Whatever program is chosen for the graduation ceremony, it is a social affair and receives

a great deal of attention by the university, community leaders, and LLP participants and alumni.

After graduation, the program participants are deemed LLP alumni. In order to stay active in the alumni association the graduates must pay dues. Money from the dues goes into a scholarship fund for future participants who may not have the money to enroll in the LLP. The scholarship will pay up to 50% of the program cost. Each class chooses a project to work on in order to help the community in some way. The first group created a brochure called "Smart Start" that dealt with teen-age pregnancy. Most of the alumni members continue to be active in the community and remain active in volunteer roles they may have identified while participating in the LLP.

Description of the Participants

Twelve LLP graduates participated in this study. They ranged in age from 59 to 82. Five were women and seven were men. Eleven out of 12 had a college education and 11 out of 12 were retired from their original profession. Ten out of 12 were newcomers to the area where the LLP was being offered. All 12 presented a long work history and interest in learning and an appreciation for education.

The following section describes the 12 participants as they were in 1998 at the time of the interviews. I have used pseudonyms for each of the participants, which remain the same throughout the presentation of findings. Participants are listed in order beginning with the class of 1991 ending in 1997.

In sum, the program is designed to bring older adults together with community experts to discuss issues, problems, creative solutions and future plans; generate lively

discussions among retirees; stimulate thinking about volunteer and entrepreneurial activities that fit past experience and new interest; and acquainting participants with important jobs that need attention in the community" (Pathways, 1997, p. 12).

William

William retired from a long, successful career in TV and radio broadcasting in 1989. After retiring from TV, he worked for a United States Congressman for eight years in a local district office. Additionally, he joined the radio broadcast team for a university men's basketball team and continues in this work. He was 72 years old at the time of the interview.

One of the major differences between William and most participants is that he has lived in the town where the LLP is offered for 44 years. In 1989, the chancellor at the university where the LLP began contacted William with regards to implementing the LLP. William was instrumental in getting the LLP started in the Spring of 1991. He was both a student and moderator.

William described the first year of the program as quite different from what the program has come to be at present in that participants selected the first year were mostly long time residents of the area. Since then, the majority of participants are not native to the area. Most participants have lived in the area from about six months to five years prior to enrolling in the LLP. William explained that the purpose of the LLP was and is to serve individuals who have relocated to the area and who "want to find out who the area movers and shakers are and what makes them tick".

At the time of this interview, William was the President of the LLP Alumni Association. William spoke highly of the program, made a few suggestions for future

programming, and discussed his future plans to stay active in the community and the LLP. See Table 3.2 for a graphic representation of the participants including gender, race, age, previous occupation, and education level.

Jason

Jason graduated from the 1992 LLP class. He was "looking for a vehicle that would give him more information about the infrastructure of the county and the community more quickly, and the LLP as advertised had great appeal". Jason's background includes a career in Marketing and Management for the Health Care Industry. He retired from his profession but came out of retirement to accept a position as director of a center for small business sponsored by a community college.

Although he is currently working, Jason continues to be active in the LLP Alumni Association. He was in the forefront of developing the LLP into what it is today. Jason was elected by a group of peers to lead the organization and he has served as the President, moderator, and volunteered for numerous activities on the university campus. Also Jason is very active in community organizations such as SCORE (Service Core of Retired Executives) and the Senior Center. He explained that there were several facets of the LLP that never were developed to their fullest potential but he feels confident that the program remains an educational program for older adults as well as a social organization.

David

David completed the LLP in 1992. He first learned about the LLP after reading an advertisement for the program in the local newspaper. David and his wife Marisa had only lived in the town where the LLP is offered for one year prior to his enrolling in the program. David was 72 at the time of the interview and retired in 1990.

Table 3.2 Description of the LLP Participants

Name	Gender	Race	Age	Previous Occupation	Education Level
William	Male	Caucasian	72	TV Broadcaster	B.A. Degree
Jason	Male	Caucasian	68	Healthcare Management	B.S. Degree
David	Male	Caucasian	72	Medical Consultant	B.A. Degree
Bill	Male	Caucasian	75	Safety Manager	B.S. Degree
Jacob	Male	African American	70	Juvenile Probation Officer	H.S. Diploma
Georgia	Female	Caucasian	67	Translator	B.A. Degree
James	Male	Caucasian	72	Business Manager	B.S. Degree
Marisa	Female	Caucasian	68	Secretary	GED
Dale	Male	Caucasian	82	Attorney	J.D. Degree
Judy	Female	Caucasian	65	Occupational Therapist	M.S. Degree
Meagan	Female	Caucasian	59	Forensic Scientist	M.S. Degree
Jamie	Female	Caucasian	74	Music Teacher	B.A. Degree

He worked as a research director for a health care company for eight years until he was forced to retire due to a company buy out. Since he was forced to retire before he was ready for retirement, he stated that he needed to find other ways to become involved with the community and government in his new residence.

He explained that he still had the same mentality that he had when he was working so he enrolled in the LLP in an effort to learn ways to keep active in his field of work and identify volunteer opportunities.

Currently he does consulting work in the medical device field and lectures at a university twice a year. Since his graduation from the LLP, he has remained active in the LLP Alumni Association by serving on the LLP Alumni Board of Directors. Additionally, through his participation in the LLP, he is also active in Service Core Of Retired Executives (SCORE), Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), and a Museum Trustee.

Bill

Bill is a former Marine who served in World War II, then pursued a college degree in History in 1949. Following graduation from the university in 1949, Bill was a history teacher and football coach, and then he married and had a family. Due to his economic obligations, he accepted a position with a leading industry and worked in labor relations for eight years.

Finally, he served as Vice President for Public Safety on a major university campus for 30 years. He retired from the university in December 1988 and moved to the town where the LLP was offered in January 1989. He was 75 years old at the time of the interview. Bill stated that he spent an entire year "looking for something to do" but was

not very successful. Then he read about the LLP in the local newspaper and decided to enroll.

Although he discovered that participating in the LLP was a learning experience, Bill stated that initially he went simply seeking for something to do. The paper had promised information on volunteer opportunities and that was his main reason for enrolling. Surprisingly, Bill reported that he soon found that the program had "real meaning" and that he now had "friends".

Also, Bill found a place to "belong" and something challenging. Since graduation from the LLP, he has volunteered on campus in a variety of ways. He has served as the President of the LLP alumni and as the representative from the class of 1992 for five years.

Jacob

Jacob worked as a juvenile probation officer and was promoted to a supervisor of juvenile probation officers prior to retirement. He became a member of the LLP in 1993. Jacob was a native to the area and he had an interest in university programs and "programs of culture". Because of his background as a long time resident and professional background working with youth, he brought an interesting perspective to the class. He had worked with the police department, the city government, the county government, the health department, and the hospital, therefore he knew or was familiar with all of the presenters. Jacob stated that he still learned a lot from the LLP, made new friends, and was able to add his life experiences to the class.

At the time of the interview, Jacob was very active in the Boys Club, the Rotary Club, and the LLP Alumni Association. He has also serves as a volunteer for activities on the university campus.

Jacob is one of two LLP participants who are African American. He commented on the lack of black participants in the program by explaining that he had tried to encourage others to participate in the LLP but without success. Jacob was unclear about the reasons for the lack of minority participation. However, he speculated that the cost of the program could be one factor, and also the location of the course. Many African American people seek learning and social events through their churches. He stated that he would continue to stay active with the LLP alumni association because his curiosity is still there and he continues to find new ways to help out the university and the community and in turn, he benefits personally.

Georgia

Georgia graduated from the LLP in 1993. She had lived in the area for three years prior to enrolling in the LLP. She was born in Germany and had a variety of job experiences these included working as a translator interpreter for a major Swiss company for five years. Georgia then married, had a family, and relocated to the United States in 1964 where she worked as a tutor for foreign students. She provided tutoring to foreign students whose parents had relocated to the United States for employment opportunities until 1987. Georgia was 67 at the time of this interview.

She had been involved in several adult education programs including Elderhostel and a summer school program in Britain. Also, she had taken courses in Sterling, Scotland. Due to her educational experiences in another country, she had high

expectations of the LLP. She compared the LLP to experiences with other programs she had in the past.

Georgia is a history buff so her interest in the LLP was initially to learn more about the history of the area. She stated that after she became involved in the LLP she began to realize that the class participants brought unique life experiences to the class sessions that made the LLP even more interesting to her and consequently she became interested in the group interaction.

After graduation from the LLP, Georgia remained active in the alumni association and worked as a volunteer at the university. She also volunteered as a Docent in a historical Victorian house.

James

James came to the LLP with a background in business. He served as the president of a large company for a number of years. He retired and relocated to the area where the LLP is offered. James is a 1993 graduate who has become extremely active in volunteer work through the Chamber of Commerce.

James states that he has spent his whole life serving others so his volunteer services at the chamber are just an extension of that. He was seeking more involvement in the community and wanted to share his life experiences with others in the most beneficial way possible. He believes he has accomplished this by volunteering with the chamber. He discovered many volunteer opportunities through participating in the LLP but explains that he had to limit himself in order to allow himself enough time for his family. In addition to his work at the chamber, he is also very active with the museum and church.

Marisa

Marisa became interested in the LLP after her husband, David, completed the program in 1992. She participated in the class of 1993. Marisa brought a different background to the group, unlike the majority of participants in the LLP; she did not have a college degree and had obtained a GED when she was younger.

Marisa explained that she was reluctant to enroll in the LLP because of her educational background. She thought that the name of the program and the location of the class on a university campus implied that an individual must have a college degree to be appropriate for the program. Once Marisa became involved in the LLP, she discovered that there were several other participants who were homemakers. Marisa stressed the point that her perception was inaccurate and it is a misconception to think that everyone "has to be well educated to fit in or benefit from the LLP".

As she stated, "that's not the purpose of the whole thing... it's to learn what's going on in the community and I think anybody who's really interested in the community would benefit from the program". She was 68 years old at the time of the interview. She worked as an estate manager for seven years and as a secretary and bookkeeper for 10 years after her daughter completed school.

Dale

Dale learned about the LLP through his wife. He graduated from the 1996 LLP class. In 1995, Dale retired from a career in law and permanently relocated to the area that same year. He described the LLP as a program that introduces the participants to the needs, challenges, and opportunities in the area. Dale enrolled in the LLP to become familiar with the community in order to identify volunteer opportunities in the area.

He stated that the program lived up to its promise to introduce newcomers to the leaders in the area in politics, education, healthcare, and business. Also, he was very impressed by the opportunities that were presented to the LLP participants during the course.

He expressed concern regarding the alumni association in that he believes that the LLP graduates could be more valuable if they worked as a group. Because of his feelings about the alumni association, Dale is not active in the alumni association at this time. Dale states, "I'm not willing to make the commitment of time and effort to go round up first the people I know who would say, yes this is a good idea, and then try to persuade a majority of the remaining members that they should do this". According to Dale, he learned about numerous volunteer opportunities in the area and pursues opportunities that interest him.

Judy

Judy worked as an occupational therapist prior to retirement. She and her husband moved to the area in the early 1990s. She participated in the 1995 class and her husband completed the course in 1996. Both were introduced to the LLP through friends. They were both interested in learning more about the area and the activities sponsored by the university.

Judy became involved with the alumni association. She helped plan courses for the next class, as well as the luncheon series. She explained that the luncheon series is separate from the LLP, but they both take place on the university campus and are offered to older adults. Also, people from one program may introduce someone to the other program. When asked what would she say to a person, who may be interested in

participating in the LLP she said, "It's the best bargain in town... What you learn about the community, it's not just being there with the people but being able to talk to these people and they do take the time to answer questions".

Meagan

Meagan, a 59-year-old female, worked professionally as a Forensic Scientist for 30 years prior to moving to the state where she participated in the LLP. She enrolled in the LLP in 1996 and stated that she discovered the program through reading a local newspaper.

In the past, she kept active in her community through the participation in educational opportunities sponsored by a university; therefore she was interested in the LLP since it was sponsored by a university. She pursued the LLP in an effort "to expand my horizons and expand my knowledge".

Since completion of the program, she has remained active in the LLP through the alumni association assisting with planning the programming for new upcoming classes. Currently she is still working as a forensic scientist and plans to continue to do so for a few more years. After retirement, she plans to become more involved in the volunteer work that she was exposed to through her participation in the LLP.

Jamie

Jamie relocated to the town where the LLP is offered just one year prior to enrolling in the program. She was in the LLP class of 1997. At the time of the interview Jamie was 74 years old. She retired from the public school system in 1984 after 31 years of teaching and directing vocal music and musical theatre and eighteen years directing a community musical theatre.

Jamie became interested in the LLP after reading a brochure published by the university that was included in the local newspaper. She stated that she had always been interested in activities offered by the university. Jamie explained that the LLP gave her something to keep her mind active in retirement and she met "so many wonderful people and made so many friends".

As a result of her participation, she is currently active as a volunteer in a Christian Seaman's Center and Art Museum. Also, she is active in the LLP Alumni Association, and serves on the Board of Directors as a representative from the class of 1997.

Summary

Older adults who live in the area where the LLP is offered and who want to learn more about their local and regional communities have the opportunity to pursue current and up to date information through the LLP. The design of the program is defined by the data gathered for this study. Description of the participants helps us to get an idea of who may wish to pursue a program such as the LLP.

It seems apparent through the increased number of participants and graduates of the LLP that the program has continued to serve learning needs for older adults in the community as evidenced by its growth. Through the data gathered via interviews with the above-mentioned participants, I have discovered similarities in their account of their experience in the LLP. The interviews reveled that four general areas stand out for the participants in their recollection of their experience in the LLP. These three areas are Recognition, Belonging, Satisfaction, and Resistance to Change. The next chapter will

present data and literature related to these areas that have become four major themes of this study.

Chapter 4

Themes and Categories

The previous chapter served to provide a rich description of the Longevity Leadership Program (LLP). Chapter Four will provide an in depth look at each of the themes introduced in chapter three through an exploration of the categories. Additionally, the research literature utilized in the analysis of the data will be presented in this chapter.

The data come from the text, that is, the words of the participants. Transcripts from the interviews with LLP participants were studied in order to search for categories of common experience (Bondy & Hatch, 1982). Through reading and rereading the transcripts, I identified 50 categories that had commonalties. However, the categories began to overlap during the data collection process and eventually were reduced to a much smaller number. The categories were arranged in alphabetical order on charts so that they could be systematically located and citations from the interview data were listed beneath them. Citations consisted of the interviewee's pseudonym name, the page number, and the line numbers. The interview data were also marked with abbreviations representing the categories.

It was eventually possible to narrow these 50 overlapping categories into 12 distinct categories. The categories were compared with each other and again with the interview data, many of them became saturated with overlapping citations. These categories developed into four themes defined as: Recognition, Belonging, Satisfaction and Maintaining the Status Quo. These themes and categories are listed in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Themes and Categories

Themes	Categories
RECOGNITION	Selectivity of Participants
	Affiliation with the University
	Access to the "Movers and Shakers" in the community
	Graduation Ceremony
BELONGING	Volunteerism (Finding something meaningful to do)
	Making New Friends/Social Aspects of the LLP
SATISFACTION	Learning
	Rewards
MAINTAINING THE STATUS QUO	Lack of Minority Participation
	Economic and Education Status
	Course Content
	LLP Alumni Association

The themes generated answers to the research questions and were internally consistent with the categories and interview data.

The themes of Recognition, Belonging, Satisfaction, and Maintaining the Status Quo represent the overall experience of the LLP participants as perceived by the participants themselves. As shown in Table 4.1, each of the four themes yielded corresponding categories. Although the 12 categories are divided and matched to particular themes, an even greater relationship is represented. The first three themes pertain to the participants perceived benefits from participating in the program. The fourth theme pertains to the actual structure of the program and relates to the factors that participants believe have promoted and preserved the continuity of the program. Continuity of the program is preserved through the participants' efforts to make as few changes as possible; therefore, operation of the program remains the same year after year. Participants stressed the importance of operating the program in the same fashion as it has since the beginning in 1991. They state that they are satisfied with the current program and want to continue to offer the same program indefinitely. Continuity of the program seems to be present as a result of the lack of change. Participants are aware of certain areas that need to be considered, however, no actions have been taken to investigate these issues. Lack of minority participation continues to be a concern of participants but no effort has been made to change the situation. Also, there is a concern that participants who enroll in the program come from a certain economic and education status but there is no plan in place to recruit a more diverse group of participants. Lastly, course content has only undergone one change over the past eight years. Some

participants commented that it would be nice to add certain topics to the program but they would not be willing to change the current programming. The categories under maintaining the status quo are the underlying factors that allow the program to continue operating the same from year to year. All of the remaining categories represent the benefits that participants perceive they have gained from participating. Figure 4.1 presents a graphic representation of the themes and categories.

Overall, participants described their learning needs and wants in relation to their emotional and social well being. Research literature shows that education can help meet these needs by assisting older adults in learning ways to contribute to the well-being of others (e.g., McClusky, 1974).

Older adults are faced with constant threats to their sense of being useful. Between the loss of family members, loss of productive roles through retirement, growth of children, declining health or decreased energy, a sense of uselessness and social isolation can develop. Education programs such as the LLP that encourage and provide older adults new ways to contribute and exert influence can fill an important need. Butler (1975) explains that leaving a "legacy," contributing to the heritage or culture and civilization, is important to older adults and a major function of the aged in any society. Thus, an educational program designed for older adults can provide ways for older adults to leave a "legacy" through their involvement in the community. Programs such as the LLP may also alleviate feelings of loss and unproductiveness.

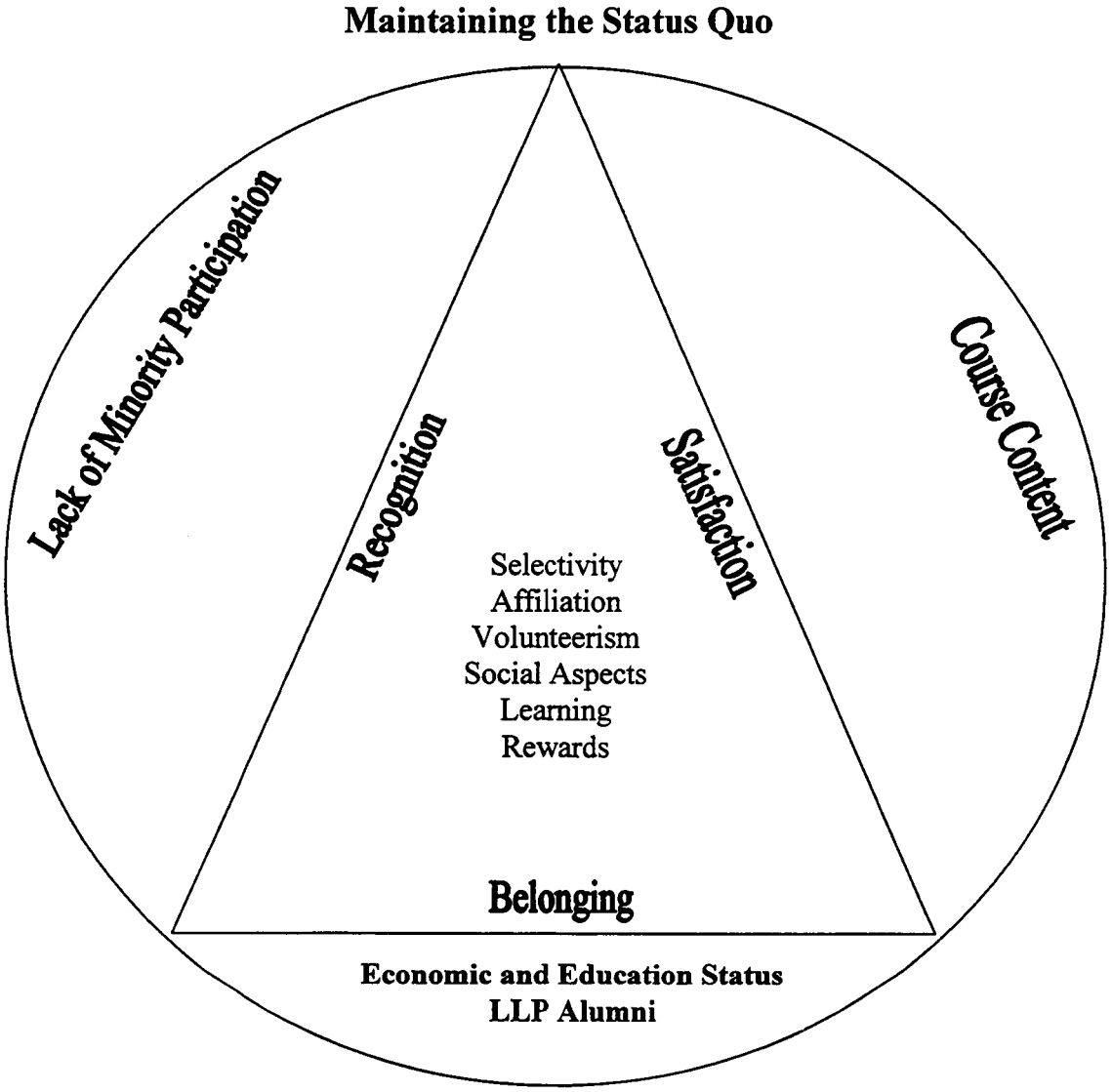

Figure 4.1 Graphic Representation of the Themes and Categories

Research shows that while educators tend to focus on the educational needs of learners, social needs appear to be important when considering planning educational programs for older adults. Moody and Rosenmayr (1983), for example, contend that older adults experience a new sense of freedom from work responsibilities, social obligations, and various responsibilities associated with their lives prior to retirement. Older adults move into a new when where they can explore more fundamental questions of meaning in life, and search for fulfillment in the last stages of life. Moody and Rosenmayr argue that education for older adults should be directed toward the creation and further development of new experiences and knowledge to achieve a deeper understanding of ones self. Evans (1984) suggests that education should be directed toward helping individuals "make sense of themselves." He advocates a post-education society in which the transformed educational system places emphasis on "recognizing and using adults' learning" (p.99). Evans provides a model that describes the educational system as a democracy of learners in which the role of the educational system is "to empower individuals to take charge of their own study" by encouraging and recognizing (through credits and degrees) the self-directed learning of adults (p. 146). It appears that Rosenmayr and Evans are in agreement in terms of the purpose and role of education for older adults. If the role of education for older adults should be to "empower" them, then education for older adults should be directed toward a better understanding of oneself.

Although the LLP is a formal educational program, the content of the program is designed to encourage continued community involvement and learning through self-directed activities. The LLP appears to encompass the above mentioned beliefs of Evans,

Moody, and Rosenmayr. Evans belief that the educational system should recognize the learning potential of older learners manifests itself through the LLP's willingness to design and offer a program specifically for older adults. The LLP seems to recognize the potential of the older adults and cater to their interests and needs. Also, the LLP encompasses Moody and Rosenmayr's belief that education should be developed toward creating new experiences for older adults. LLP participants are afforded numerous new experiences through classroom interaction and course content, campus events and activities, volunteer opportunities in the community, and becoming active with organizations or the LLP alumni association. Through these new experiences, Moody and Rosenmayr believe that older adults will gain a deeper understanding of themselves and that there education experiences will extend to learning experiences far beyond one educational program such as the LLP.

According to the interview data, many of the participants become involved in other learning experiences once they have completed the LLP and attribute their new found interests and enthusiasm to their participation in the LLP. Eleven out of 12 participants are involved in volunteer activities as a result of their participation in the LLP. Three of the male participants have joined professional organizations as a result of their participation in the LLP. Four of the participants are planning to participate in additional educational programming through Elderhostel and private programs offered in the area. Finally, the LLP strives to cultivate a sense of autonomy among older adults. This is demonstrated strongly by the university's efforts to give older adults a voice by allowing program participants to design and implement the program and by giving them

control and choice over their educational needs and desires. Through Recognition, Belonging, Satisfaction, and Resistance to change, the participants of the LLP describe their experiences in the LLP.

Recognition

Recognition means to show awareness of, approve of, or appreciate as defined in the American Heritage College Dictionary (1997 p. 1141). Research shows that some older adults seek status and recognition by identifying with "action", hoping to be heroes, or winning (Kaplan, 1979). Recognition provides older adults with a sense of self by enhancing their self-esteem, giving them a purpose, and helping them to define their role and identity in the later years.

In this study, recognition appears to be linked to social integration. Social integration is defined as the process of relating to and merging with individuals in the community and society (Heidrich and Ryff, 1993). A major goal of the LLP is to promote social integration. Through active participation in the LLP, participants receive recognition in a number of ways. First, participants are recognized as part of a group chosen for the LLP. Second, recognition comes from community leaders, participants are given access to the "movers and shakers" in the community. Third, participants gain recognition by becoming involved in university and community activities that allow for high visibility (e.g., presenting lectures to students at the university, serving as a docent for the art museum or serving on a planning committee at the chamber of commerce). Lastly, the graduation ceremony provides recognition for all LLP members who participate.

Through the participants' description of the LLP, the program appears to provide opportunities for recognition. Findings related to the importance of education as it relates to helping older adults to become more aware of their identity, abilities, and roles in the later years came about through recognition in the LLP.

The theme of recognition yielded four categories including: (1) selectivity of participants; (2) affiliation with the university; (3) access to the "movers and shakers" in the community; and (4) graduation ceremony. In the following sections, each category listed above will be presented and data from this study will be included.

Selectivity of Participants

Each year 30 to 35 five participants are selected from the approximate 40 applications submitted for the LLP. According to the program director, selection of participants is based primarily on their previous occupation, gender, and residence. One of the previous LLP presidents explained that the group is more successful if participants have a variety of backgrounds with different life experiences. Residence is considered because the university and the LLP would like to get more communities involved in the program versus only one or two counties. The program is designed to serve newcomers to the area so that they can learn about their new place of residence. Generally, two-thirds of the participants are male. Fewer women than men apply for the program. Minorities are also encouraged to apply but historically only two minority individuals out of 250 have applied and both were selected.

Due to the limited number of participants who can be chosen each year (approximately 35) and the above mentioned criteria used in the selection process, participants who are allowed to participate voice a sense of recognition resulting from

being selected. Several of the participants stated that it was an honor and a privilege to be selected for the program. For example, look at the following excerpt from Dale regarding selectivity:

> In 1996 there was a waiting list so the person in charge had to exercise some selectivity in deciding who they would take and I was one of the fortunate ones to be selected.

Another account of being accepted comes from Jamie. Jamie stated:

> I saw this class advertised and so I filled out the application and sent it in and got a note back saying "sorry we're filled up for this year but I'll keep your application for next year" . . . . Which she did and she sent it back to see if I wanted to add anything to it from what I had given her the first time. And, so then, I got confirmation that I was to be in the class. I was very thrilled about it and because it just sounded so interesting and like it would really be something that I could learn from.

Jamie used the word "thrilled" to describe her feelings when she was informed of her acceptance into the LLP. Another LLP participant, Meagan, used the word "fortunate" to describe her feelings toward being selected to participate in the LLP. Meagan stated: "Fortunately I was able to get into and started into the program."

Being selected to participate and becoming a member of the LLP provided recognition in itself. Once a person was selected for the LLP they automatically became or belonged to a group of peers who were recognized in the community for their contribution to society as well as their newfound friends and acquaintances in the LLP.

Jamie described what it meant to her when a person outside of the LLP recognized her and remembered a particular event that she had been involved in. This recognition was important to Jamie as evidenced by her describing this incident as "the most memorable event" that resulted from her participation in the LLP. Recognition also came from participants themselves during class discussions and interaction (peer recognition). For example, Bill explained how he gained recognition during of the class meeting by coming up with interesting questions for the guest presenter. Bill said:

> Recognition comes about by asking question . . . not just for what you want to know but what all of us sitting in the group of 30 or 35 . . . I want to challenge some of these colleagues of mine here for the discussion we will have afterwards. So recognition came because all of a sudden they say, "ok, yeah I know who Bill is."

Later in the interview Bill gave a different example of recognition that he gained from being part of the LLP. Bill explained:

> Recognition is not by seeing your name in the newspaper but it's with whatever group you are associated. Someone walks up to you and gives you a pat on the back and says, "Hey that was a great job." That's recognition within your own little group.

Each year after participants complete the course they seem to create a connection and bond as a group. They develop cohesiveness as a cohort initially and then tend to expand out into the alumni group.

As I analyzed the data, I found many instances where participants would speak for the group. Although not all participants felt the same way about various issues regarding the LLP, many participants assumed that everyone held the same views and ideas about the program. Also, they spoke of friends or relatives who had not participated in the group and how they sometimes allowed them to attend some of their luncheons or functions even though they are not part of the group. There may also be a gap between classes based on what participants stated about their specific class and how their class had something special that the other classes may not have had. Dale stated: "The group in 1996 was an impressive group in terms of their experience and capabilities." Jason stated: "The 1992 group was, I think as a group, probably somewhat more assertive, more dynamic, and quite honestly a little bit younger I think than the earlier group." It is interesting to observe that recognition from being associated with LLP not only came from being selected and being a participant but that recognition also came from relationships within the group and each individual class.

Selectivity process itself – being selected– represents one of the ways mentioned above in the interview data that promotes recognition for the participants' in the LLP. Recognition can also come about through affiliation with the university. Interview data from this study demonstrates how affiliation with a university can contribute to recognition both for the participants and the university.

Affiliation with the University

Conducting educational programs for older adults on campus can bring together people with common interests whom otherwise may not have the opportunity to share their ideas and experiences. Through this exchange of ideas and experiences, participants

of programs such as the LLP may receive recognition from their peers. Those who actively participate in the LLP on campus tend to be enthusiastic about the university, its students, professors, and course offerings. Participants explained that they enjoy the recognition they receive from being associated with the university. Many appear to take pride in their affiliation with the university, attending university functions, purchasing university merchandise, supporting its teams, and contributing to its fund raisers. Several of the participants of the Longevity Leadership Program expressed their thoughts on the importance of being associated with the university and being "chosen" to participate in the program. Dale, a retired lawyer had this to say:

> Some of the graduates, including myself, feel a strong tie to the university. The university is one of the reasons we came to this town, the fact that there is a major university here. We use the university auditorium for various musical programs, we use the library so we thought it was you know, appropriate and this idea of time or to encourage the use to the university services, activities, facilities was exactly right.

By opening its doors to the LLP and older adults in the community, the university is recognized for contributing to the community's quality of life. At the same time, LLP participants are able to offer their experience and talents to the university and to the community. They are a primary source of volunteer work for many community organizations, as well as the university. Not only do they give their time and experience but they invest money into the local economy. They tend to be generous to the university at fund raising time and are active voters in the political arena.

Bobby, a retired Juvenile Probation Officer stated: "I was interested because I am interested in programs of culture. You know, whatever's going on at the university has some interest to me. Seminars, lectures, that kind of thing I usually attend."

Jason, a business consultant explained how the program was first set up and discussed the involvement of the university from the beginning of the implementation of the LLP:

> The first thing we did was to draw up a memorandum of understanding. What this was intended to do was to set some ground rules and say "hey, we are not part of the university but the university was kind enough to give us the use of their facilities, a place to be etc." In recognition of this, we must be very conscious of not doing anything that would misrepresent the university or misrepresent ourselves. . . . We were privileged to attend and serve as monitors, ushers, and marshals . . . and assist the university by our presence and knowledge of the facility and so forth. And that was also a great joy I think to many if not most of us.
>
> I respect the fact that the university has been kind enough to be very supportive of our efforts and our program. Now it's a two way street. The university always seeks more and newer friends.

To add to what other participants shared about their feelings toward being affiliated with a university, Bill expressed his feelings as well. Bill stated:

> All retired people are seeking to do the same thing that I was, to do something. But when you get involved with an organization that is

> associated with a university, because whether you like it or not, whether we think some of the professors are a little wacky, the university is a scholarly institution made up of young, bright minds that to me are worth listening to and exploring. Even though you may not agree with them lots of times. But I think it's great. So that's the thing, number one is that you're with the university and then all of the offsets the university has.

James held a similar view on the theme affiliation with the university. He stated:

> I think it's neat that the university supports the LLP. That in itself is important and there is a lot of support that's growing. There are approximately somewhere around a hundred and fifty to two hundred alumni from the LLP since 1992. With this increase in enrollment, higher education institutions have begun to recognize the importance of creating a positive atmosphere for older adults. Many college and university campuses can offer an atmosphere and facilities that cannot be duplicated in most outreach locations of educational programs for older adults.

Through the affiliation with the university, the LLP is able to attract local politicians and civic leaders as speakers for the program. This leads to a connection between the community, the LLP members, and the university matching the LLP participants' talents and interests with the needs of the community.

In examining the research literature concerned with educational programs for older adults that are affiliated with universities, I found several examples. There are several programs that are similar to the LLP that have been successful due to their

affiliation with a college or university. The University of North Carolina in Asheville hosts the Center for Creative Retirement (CCR) directed by Ronald Manheimer. It is affiliated with the university and has a unique connection with the university through a program called the Senior Academy for Intergenerational Learning (SAIL), which matches retired professionals with university undergraduates as tutors and mentors. It connects to its community through Leadership Asheville Seniors (SAS) which, with civic leaders, political activists, and others, explores ways to match older adults talents and expertise with community needs (Manheimer, Snodgrass, & Moskow-McKenzie, 1995).

Another example is Dartmouth College, which supports a variety of learning opportunities for retirees in their community. A survey conducted by Dartmouth found 95 percent of respondents felt that the close proximity of Dartmouth to their residence was a great asset. Many of their participants felt proud and confident that they received recognition from being affiliated with the university.

Although the above data suggest a positive association between older adults and affiliation with a college or university, there is another side that was presented in the interview data and in the literature. Most of the LLP participants came from college education backgrounds; therefore they felt comfortable in the university setting. However, participants such as Marisa who did not have a college education discussed her concern about her ability to learn and the appropriateness of her attending the LLP program. As Marisa explained, many older adults have limited educational backgrounds that result in feelings of insecurity concerning their ability to learn. She goes on to say "I feel that the name of the program scares some people off and I've seen it happen. When I

hand the brochure or talk about it, they will say, "Well, I'm not interested at this point in my life". She stressed the point that her first impression of the purpose of the LLP was inaccurate and it was a misconception to think that everyone "has to be well educated to fit in or benefit from the program, that's not the purpose of the whole thing . . . it's to learn what's going on in the community and I think anybody who's really interested in the community would benefit from the program".

It appears that conducting educational programs for older adults on campus can bring together people with common interests who otherwise may not have the opportunity to share their ideas and experiences but there may also be potential to discourage participation of others. Universities and colleges may have to consider the implications of offering course work to older adults on campus and work on ways to appeal to all adults and encourage participation of older adults. One way to entice older adults to participate in programs on campus may be to offer them opportunities to meet community leaders and give them access to people that they would most likely not interact with in any other setting. It would be a way to give older adults a voice in the community, a chance to be recognized - to speak up for themselves and for others. Also, affiliation with a university can lead to greater involvement of community leaders and provides a forum for older adults to learn and share ideas that will hopefully improve the community for everyone.

Access to the "Movers and Shakers"

Older adults typically are not seeking credentials as a means of achieving employment, but rather are more interested in personal development or social interaction (Peterson, 1983). Moody (1993) stated that older adults have interests, wants, and needs

during their later years. He explained that the interests, wants, and needs of older adults could be met in such a way that both older adults and society could benefit. According to Moody, the first way to meet the needs and wants of older adults is to offer intellectual stimulation that promotes continued growth and enables individuals to function in society as well-informed citizens. Intellectual stimulation is offered to the participants of the LLP through their exposure and interaction with community leaders (referred to as the "Movers and Shakers" by the participants and the program brochure). Also, the information that is shared with the participants enables them to become well-informed citizens in their community. Moody's second suggestion in working with older adults is to provide them with a sense of personal meaning and life purpose through activities that engage the mind and body while in fellowship with others. Evidence supporting Moody's second suggestion is present in the interview data of several participants. By allowing participants an opportunity to interact with the "Movers and Shakers" of the community and work together as a group to improve or solve current problems in the community, participants are engaging in mental and physical activity as well as enhancing their sense of personal meaning. The third suggestion of Moody is that older adults need to have life goals that generate self-fulfillment and that may lead to contributions to society whether through artistic expression, volunteerism, or social activism. Clearly, the LLP encourages and offers participants numerous ways to contribute to the society. Access to the "Movers and Shakers" plays a major role in the decision for participants to choose volunteer activities or become involved in organizations or activities in the community. Information disseminated during one of the

LLP meetings with a "Mover and Shaker" may influence several participants to get involved with a particular community effort or program that will lead to personal self-fulfillment from their involvement and contribute to society as well. Finally, Moody suggests that the realization that one is never too old to learn is important to keep in mind. From the increased enrollment in the program and repeated willingness for community "Movers and Shakers" to continue presenting information to the LLP participants, there seems to be no doubt for those involved in the LLP that older adults are not too old to learn.

The LLP provides access to the "Movers and Shakers" in the community. Program coordinators accomplish this by offering lectures conducted by specialists or panels of experts who can illuminate different views of topics of current concern. Lectures generally include information about current issues in politics, economics, the environment, constitutional concerns, the arts, justice, and crime. By incorporating presenters from the community who are experts in their field, whom the program brochure and several participants refer to as "Movers and Shakers", the majority of the above mentioned methods were included in the programming of the LLP. First, intellectual stimulation was created by booking interesting, sometimes famous, knowledgeable speakers to present information to the participants. For example, Dale described a session with a master sergeant from Air Force One: "The retired master sergeant who had been the chief steward for Air Force One for at least four and possibly five presidents came in and chatted about that". He went on to say that

> The fact that local politicians, all of the heads of local groups, the head of the hospital, the head of the airport, were all willing to come and talk each year to a group of thirty to forty people indicated that they thought that we were important.

Another participants explained the value of meeting the "movers and shakers" in the community. Meagan stated:

> I found it interesting from the point of view of bringing in the top people in the community and all the different phases of the community from education to criminal justice, to cultural areas. And actually, as a new person coming down here, it kind of gave me a new perspective on what this area has to offer.

David had similar views of the program. He explained:

> It was an excellent program. Not knowing what format was going to be we knew there was a different subject every week but we didn't know we would get to see and meet all the "Movers and Shakers" from around here. From the head of superintendent of the schools, to the police chief, to the sheriff, to all these individuals.

Second, speakers from the community were very aware of volunteer opportunities in the community and the needs of the community so they were instrumental in recruiting participants to get involved. John, a past president of the LLP Alumni Association stated:

> One of the things we stress when we put our speakers together is to, at the end of their presentation is to say, look, here's what you can volunteer for,

> please let us know. So the volunteers are just very important to have. It's very important not only for the city to have, it's very important for the volunteers to do. I've said many times, you can sit and do nothing when you retire or you can contribute. And when you are blessed with so many things in life you want to give some back and that's the reason for it.

Jason gave an excellent example of how he became personally involved in volunteer activities from his participation in the LLP. He stated:

> The LLP may help highlight an area of interest that you have and then you will go seek the volunteer activity if that's what you want. To be specific, I heard a presentation on the Service Corp of Retired Executives, which is called SCORE. . . . The following day I went down to SCORE and met with them and applied for a volunteer status. There was another lady from the department of aging, the RSVP group that is the Retired Senior Volunteer Program. One of the things the program is suppose to do is expose the people to the opportunities for volunteerism. So that was the first exposure I had and I am still a member of that advisory board. But anyway that was the first thing I was enticed into as a volunteer. And as I say I still am.

As a result of the above stated ways that the program provides access to the community, participants reported a sense of fulfillment and self-worth. Through involvement in the LLP, many participants reported a sense of purpose-something to do with their lives.

One of the participants provided a clear example of this in his description of the LLP. Dale stated:

> The program lived up to the brochure, that it is truly a program which introduces the participants to the, as they say here, the needs, challenges, and opportunities, in this area. It was impressive in that they were able to get the leaders in the area. In politics, in education, in healthcare, in business to come and talk to the group. So, the speakers were excellent.

Participants discovered that they could still learn and continue to be an asset to society. By providing access to leaders and speakers who are knowledgeable about the community, older adults may be empowered with information they may otherwise not be privy to. Jason described how the content and speakers/presenters of the LLP helped him to understand the community:

> First of all, it helped me understand the nuances of the community I was in. It gave me first hand contact with the principals in the community who were taking the leadership roles. It allowed me to hear, understand, and indeed question the statements that they made and the things that they reported. It helped me form some opinions and fashion some ideas about what level of interest that I would have in it as a result of having heard them.

All twelve participants commented on the importance of having the "Movers and Shakers" in the community serve as the speakers and presenters for the course. Again, since they have the opportunity to meet and become familiar with community leaders, the

LLP participants view this category as another form of recognition both through their acquaintance with community leaders and recognition they receive from their personal involvement in the community.

The final category of the theme of recognition differs from the above mentioned categories in that recognition came from interacting with outside sources. However, recognition can also come from activities directly linked to the program itself such as the graduation ceremony. Each participant chose to describe their graduation experience in terms of their role in the ceremony and focused on the community leaders and guests who were in attendance. Through the attendance of important community leaders, the LLP participants felt a sense of recognition for their completion of the program.

Graduation Ceremony

One of the planned activities of the LLP that provided recognition was the graduation ceremony and invitation to join the LLP Alumni Association. To many of the participants, the graduation ceremony represented another social function whereas other participants viewed graduation as an opportunity to be creative and get involved in the ceremony. Others considered graduation as closure of their experience in the LLP program and the beginning of involvement in the community. Several participants became involved in designing programs for upcoming classes whereas others who joined the alumni association became more active in the community. For the most part all of the graduates of the LLP continue to be active in the organization, the university, and the community.

The following quotes clearly show the emphasis the LLP participants placed on the graduation ceremony. Jamie presented a very detailed description of her graduation experience, a portion of which follows:

> After the seven weeks of classes, classes are six weeks and the seventh week is graduation and that always occurs in the evening. Well, nobody was volunteering or saying anything, you know, about doing something and so after class one day I talked to the moderator and I said 'I'll be glad to help' and he says 'your it'. And so he announced that I was in charge of the graduation and would anyone like to help me...
>
> So there were six or seven people that said they would so we got together another day and tried to decide what we wanted to do for graduation. Well one of the fellows got the brainstorm. Let's take 10 years from now and see what this town will be like, so we took the year 2007 because we were the class of 97.... It was more fun and everybody got such a kick out of it. But it went over very big.... It wasn't actually in the learning process but it was something that kind of stands out because we had so much fun doing it.

Another participant described his graduation experience. William stated:

> Each class has a graduation ceremony. They put together their own graduation ceremony and they have a lot of fun.... They pass out diplomas, maybe have some singing, a class poem, or song, whatever may be. There's some very original people and some ideas...and they have

> hors d'oeuvres and it lasts about an hour and a half and it's fun. They get little diplomas from the university.

James spoke about the LLP graduation ceremony during the interview and gave the following comment:

> If I were to choose one thing I remember the most about the program, it would be graduation where we had a neat thing at graduation. And it's up to the class to determine what to do. You could jab at the LLP; you could just have fun. Dress up as whatever you want but that's a minor thing. That's done and gone, it's what happens after the LLP. That's one thing I remember.

In summary, the data from the transcripts certainly present a vivid picture of how recognition is obtained through participation in the LLP and the importance that recognition played in the experiences of the 12 participants of this study. With regards to the categories associated with the theme of Recognition, the data shows that the LLP participants felt a great deal of pride in their association with the program. Words such as "honored" and "fortunate" were used to describe their feelings toward being selected to participate in the program. All 12 participants discussed their feelings toward being affiliated with the university and the meaning that it had for each of them. Several participants described the graduation ceremony as an event that stood out in their mind when reflecting back on their experience in the LLP. It is apparent that recognition in its many forms certainly had an impact on the perception of the experience as expressed

through their reflections. In addition to recognition, the theme of belonging became apparent through the words of the participants.

Belonging

Belonging has three definitions (American Heritage Dictionary, 1994) that apply in terms of the LLP. The first definition states that belonging is a "close, secure relationship" stems from emotional support. Emotional support provides people with a sense of love, reassurance, and belonging. When individuals feel they are being listened to, and valued, they develop a sense of self-worth (Israel and Schurman, 1990). The LLP fosters an environment where there is an exchange of information and a sharing of ideas. There is ample opportunity to be heard and in some cases encouraged or supported. Participants are reassured by other participants, the university, or community members. Since community leaders are the presenters, the participants are being heard by important, influential people in the community. This interaction creates a bond between the community leaders and the LLP participants. The participants feel listened to and their opinions are valued thusly creating a feeling of belonging.

Second and third definitions of belonging include "to be a member of a group" and "to be a part of or in natural association with something". Both of these definitions apply to the LLP. First, individuals become members of the LLP, and secondly, they become members of the community through their association with the LLP. Many participants view their association with the LLP an honor and a privilege. They join the alumni association, which is an extension of the LLP, so that they remain part of the group. They acquire a sense of "belonging" on the university campus, as well as, the

community through their association with the LLP. The LLP participants view themselves as a close knit group who are bonded together through their association with the LLP.

A major way to "belong" in a community is to become involved in the community. The LLP offers many volunteer opportunities and information on how to become involved in the community through volunteer activities. Through volunteer work, participants gain a sense of value and self-worth through their contributions.

For older adults who are retired, the method of becoming involved in the community may differ somewhat from the younger, working generations. The study found that community involvement was a large part of the attraction, participation, and success of the LLP. Through participation in the LLP, the participants were exposed to education, participation in civic affairs, cultural activities, fellowship, and overall, a reason to go on, a purpose.

Another connection between older adults and the community comes from programs designed to promote self-help/improvement. Such programs may result in increased problem solving abilities, especially those that can be used in the workplace or in volunteer roles. Many of the programs that are federally funded are encouraged to offer course work that will assist older persons in holding or gaining contributive roles in the community.

Educational programs today seem to recognize the ability that persons have to grow and develop throughout their lives. In the past, many programs focused on coping with retirement versus lifelong planning. As the number of older adults who enroll in

education programs increase, the more opportunity older adults will have to contribute to the community through sharing their knowledge and talents. Most of the LLP participants are retired professionals and express interest in community involvement. David, a LLP participant reflected on the affect the LLP had on his involvement in the community and consequently belonging in the community. David stated: "It makes you feel important, it makes you feel like you're doing something that's worthwhile. I could do something of value for the community I mean and you become part of the community." For this study, the theme of "Belonging" encompasses two categories: volunteerism and making new friends/social aspects of the LLP.

Volunteerism

Havighurst (1961) suggested that continued social participation, either in paid work or free time activities, offers older adults opportunities for creativity and enjoyment as well as becoming popular and earning prestige. The 1971 White House Conference on Aging emphasized the need to generate awareness about the talents and worth of older adults as a national resource and to encourage older adults to participate in volunteer activities. In 1981, the White House Conference on Aging continued this theme adding that older adults are a resource for the country and volunteering is one key to utilizing their knowledge, experience, and talents (Maddox et al., 1987).

Older adults can participate as volunteers in many arenas and capacities. They can play volunteer roles in membership organizations that either promote service projects or act as an avenue to recreation and social interaction or both. Volunteer activities sometimes present opportunity for older adults to become advocates for certain causes.

Gustaitis (1980) reported that older adults are particularly effective advocates for programs that benefit their own age group.

Volunteerism includes exposure to various civic organizations in the community, finding something meaningful to do, fellowship, helping others, meeting people, and making friends. Volunteerism is one of the outcomes of educational programs for older adults (Lamdin & Fugate, 1997). In this section, I will show examples of how the LLP participants identified meaningful activities and were provided with opportunities for fellowship through volunteer activities. Additionally, there will be a section that addresses the social aspect of meeting people and making friends inherent to the Longevity Leadership Program.

Bill, who was accustomed to a very busy schedule as a vice-president of safety for a very large university, suddenly found himself with a lot of idle time upon retirement. Bill stated:

> I spent the first year trying to find something to do because all of a sudden nobody called me on the telephone to ask me anything. I wasn't participating in decision making. All the things I had done for 30 years of my life. . . . I went to the LLP because I was seeking something to do and it indicated that they would provide volunteer activities and what have you. It has given me knowledge, of some, some volunteer opportunities within the area. It has allowed me to get involved in some campus events. Now, I thoroughly enjoy this because I spent thirty years of my life working on a university campus so this was natural. I spent thirty years of

> my life being challenged by young people and enjoyed every minute of it. Well, some of my work out at the university has allowed me to share that same thing in retirement. In retirement they say nothing happens so the LLP was the first thing when I came here that offered me a group to become associated with and feel like I was a member of and as an individual I need that.

Jason, a previous president of the LLP Alumni Association, explained that the first class of the LLP from 1991 decided that they were capable of offering volunteer services to the sponsoring university. Following completion of the program, several alumni members decided that they could offer their knowledge and services to staff at the university. Jason described how the initial volunteer idea was presented to the university:

> In the Fall 1992, a skills register was presented to the Chancellor who communicated it to his division heads and said, hey, here are a group of people who are willing to volunteer with skills and knowledge in respective disciplines across the board that you might find useful both inside or outside the classroom.

Once the LLP participants were invited to volunteer on campus, many participants became and continue to serve the university in a variety of ways. Jason's experience was as follows:

> I was privileged to go into a couple of classrooms and make business presentations at the request of the instructor . . . One of our groups had a person who was a nuclear engineer, he also made some presentations over

> at the science department. One gave his time monitoring the language laboratories. We oversaw some student elections and took part in student registration and orientation.... We were privileged to attend and serve as monitors, ushers, marshals, whatever for the university graduation.

David tells of a similar experience:

> We participated in graduation as monitors if you may, whatever it was. That was a lot of fun to see all the students graduating each year. We became involved in some of it had to do with student loans. In fact, I worked one time around the holidays in the philosophy department as the secretary. I know some people have worked in the computer lab and things like that. So we became more involved in some of the things we could be involved in at the university.

John, a retired business professional joined the LLP initially because it promised a review of volunteer opportunities in the city. John explained:

> Well, first of all I liked it because it was a review of what we can do or what we can volunteer to do in the city. We bring in people from all over the state and the city region growth development, the judicial system, the medical area, all kinds of thing. After those seven sessions then you can determine in your own mind where you really want to get involved and you can get so involved that you're doing something every day of the week.

According to the research literature as well as the results from this study, the opportunities to volunteer abound. In terms of the LLP, the university as well as the community offers opportunities for older adults to volunteer in a variety of settings including campus classrooms and events, local and government agencies located in the community, community organizations such as the library, hospital, or museums. Volunteer opportunities are available and encouraged through the LLP. As many of the participants in this study explained, the LLP provides them with information about volunteer opportunities in the community as well as information on how to become involved in these opportunities. On a larger scale, the federal government has been instrumental in creating and sponsoring many volunteer opportunities for older adults. Several were mentioned in the above excerpts such as RSVP or The Retired Senior Volunteer program that was launched in 1971 for the purpose of recruiting volunteers aged 60 and over and placing them in nonprofit social service programs. Senior Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) was also mentioned. It is an organization created to organize older groups for service roles. Additional organizations include the Senior Companion Program, Senior Community Service Employment Program, American Association of Retired Persons, and the National Council on Aging. Marisa, for example, stated: "Volunteer opportunities abound. I mean, for me I have found a lot of things." Jamie gives an excellent illustration of how the LLP led her to volunteer opportunities. Jamie stated:

> I've just gotten into different things because of getting started in this class and what it has led to. And one of the things they had one day, we had a

> speaker form the state ports talking about what the ports are and what happens there and what products are that go out in of there. And as a result of that, my husband and I have gotten active in the Christian Seaman's Center and we volunteer there one day a week for three hours. I would have probably never gotten involved, particularly in the seaman's center.

In summary, volunteer activities do provide opportunities for older adults to get involved in the community and/or organizations. Consequently, a sense of belonging may develop through this involvement. Research studies show that about 5 million of the 28 Americans over the age of 65 engage in volunteer work (Haber, 1994). This does not take into account the number of older adults who do other types of volunteer work such as helping a friend or neighbor. All 12 participants of this study were and continue to be involved in volunteer activities. Many older adults are engaged in providing hands-on assistance in their communities usually supplementing services that are already being provided by professional workers in understaffed nonprofit agencies and institutions. "Clearly a university or college can play a meaningful role in promoting preparation for and direction toward substantial volunteer roles. Other institutions may, similarly, be able to play this role, such as chambers of commerce and community leadership programs. . . . By combining lifelong learning with leadership and volunteer programs . . . programs are able to tap an affinity group, cultivate internal leadership, and foster the concept of creativity as one that links reinterpreting the past through continued learning and community service" (Manheimer and Snodgrass 1993, p.585-95). Data in this study

includes evidence that the university plays a role in the volunteer activities promoted by the LLP as well as the chamber of commerce, museums, library, and several organizations mentioned earlier in this chapter.

The following quote from T. Franklin Williams (1993-94), which I found in the literature, sums up my sentiments toward volunteer activities as it pertains to older adults and the findings of this study. T. Franklin stated: "Continuing to be useful, having something significant to do with one's life, and providing a service to someone else that otherwise would not be performed might take away some of the fear of growing old (p.3). Considering the research literature and the findings of this study, volunteerism appears to plays an integral part in the lives of older adults, providing them with ways to stay connected and creates a sense of belonging.

Making New Friends/ Social Aspects of the LLP

Participating in education programs provides an opportunity for older adults to interact in a group, meet new friends who share similar interests and who are interested in learning new skills, developing new insights, creating a positive self image, and so forth. Education programs can provide a new life direction for retired older adults. Retirement usually changes the social roles of individuals and many older adults have difficulty adjusting to retirement. Education programs such as the LLP can help to establish a support system for retirees. The LLP brings together older adults who are new to a community and provides them with a support system that would facilitate adjustment to the new community. Since they are struggling with the same issues of retirement and relocation, they can be a great source of support for each other. Most LLP participants are seeking ways to become active in the community and develop a sense of belonging.

They want to make new friends and find a place in the community. In order to do this, they need role models that are practicing or attempting to practice the life style that they are seeking.

By participating in the LLP, they are introduced to active retirees in the community and active older adults who are involved in a variety of community organizations, both civic and social. Sharing the commitment to become involved with a wide variety of people often can instigate support, as well as useful social pressure, from others. It may motivate other individuals as well, who can then join in a collaborative effort, thereby strengthening everyone's purpose.

Judy explained that the LLP was recommended to by other people who had taken the course and her husband encouraged her to enroll. Judy's comment about her enrollment in the LLP is as follows:

> I just enjoyed it so thoroughly and I enjoyed meeting the people there. We have a luncheon series that goes each semester and it's separate from the LLP but many people from the LLP will continue to go to these luncheons and there you have a speaker and again you have a chance to ask questions. It's just a nice way to get together. Both the programs have, they offer that too, everybody to just be able to meet one another and sometimes do things socially. And a lot of the people who go to the luncheons who have never heard of the LLP some of those people get excited as I did and they join into the LLP.

Jason explained his social experience with the LLP. Jason stated:

> On the social basis, I like to say I made 33 or 32 new friends and it's I think has proved to be a crucible for bringing those persons who do have leadership potential and leadership skills into the main stream of the community. Time and time again I can look at organizations.
>
> First of all, it is almost impossible to go anywhere in town and not see one of these people, virtually impossible. Secondly, many of them have taken on very, very active roles. Some in political life, some in education, some in the cultural side. All of these people have kind of gotten out there and done what they wanted to do. It's almost as though you know someone wherever you go. Even though I did not grow up in this town, I did spend a lot time here, met a lot of people, but this was kind of the frosting on the cake.

Bill spoke about the social side of the LLP:

> There was another factor too, that about the third meeting and this is just by happenstance the way you sit down at the table the first day I sat next to three fellows who to this day we still meet for lunch six, eight times a year. And that became very interesting because now I had "friends". Then you start all the nonsense that friends do in kidding one another.... That became of interest because that's the way you operated when you were in the real world. That, so I think between the friendships and the fact that I got absorbed in the program made the thing extremely interesting. I looked forward to going every Thursday morning.

William, the Alumni Association President at the time of the interview, spoke about the lasting relationships that have come from participating in the LLP as well as his personal experience:

> I think it was the class of 96, there were about fourteen ladies in the class who started having lunch together and still have lunch. And they will have around seven to ten depending on whose in town or who's feeling well and they have built some close friendships out of it. And there are four or five men out of one of the earlier classes I think it was the class of 92 who still get together for lunch. It's the "L & O" group or the "O & L", I don't know the "Liver and Onions".

Jacob briefly stated: "As I view life I have concluded that a person can only have a few friends. I feel like I made many acquaintances in the LLP." Another participant described how the LLP gave her a chance to meet new people. Meagan stated:

> And then the second thing was, of course, the individuals that I met in the class. People from various backgrounds, most of them from places outside of this area, and it was a nice mix of people to meet. And not only to meet, but the fact that we have an alumni association where we can actually get together each month and see each other again. And not only our own class but people from the other classes which makes it very nice. And in fact, the women in my class, there are about ten of us, and we meet once a month for lunch and have since the program was over. It is very nice, so we keep in touch that way. . . . I got to meet a lot of people that

> way. Probably even more so, because it expanded from the LLP into other groups that other people belonged to that would ask me to speak so I got to know people from those groups so it just kind of broadened my horizons that way. And probably being involved in this group (LLP) that all of that happened. And it was a way for me probably to meet more new people and expand my horizons a little bit in finding about other groups and other things.

Marisa explained her connection with the LLP participants in the following excerpt:

> I did sign up with the urging of my husband and I met some wonderful people. We are still friends and that is one of the perks of the LLP. In our class we had 35 people I think. Some people did not care to become friends but many of us did. It was a close knit group and every class has this same feeling the people kind of bond together. One of the classes even goes out to lunch monthly and my husband and his class goes out to lunch occasionally.

David speaks about the importance of meeting people through the LLP. David stated: "I think the major thing that happened was we met some very good people who became very close friends and still are friends."

As evidenced by the above excerpts and additional examples found in the data, a major reason for joining social organizations is to "belong". The program or content may be central, but it may not be the most important focus for the participants. The LLP participants placed much emphasis on the social aspects of the program. Several of the

LLP participants addressed the benefit of getting to meet new people and socialize. Judy said, "It's just a nice way to get together". Bill explained how joining the LLP gave him "friends all of a sudden", and William spoke of "lasting relationships" that he has built because of his participation in the program. All of these examples demonstrate the social aspects of the LLP.

Social support can be defined as the perceived caring, esteem, and assistance people receive from others (Eng & Young, 1992). Participation in an education program such as the LLP can provide social support in at least two areas: (1). Emotional support provides people with a sense of love, reassurance, and belonging. When individuals feel they are being listened to, and valued, they develop a sense of self-worth (Israel & Schurman, 1990); (2) Informational support is the provisions of advice, feedback, and suggestions to help a person address problems (Revicki & Mitchell, 1990). Emotional support is evident in many of the above mentioned quotes as well as examples of informational support. For example, Jason stated that the LLP "has proved to be a crucible for bringing those persons together who have leadership potential and leadership skills into the community". According to Jason, the LLP provides information to the participants in the program making participants aware of their strengths and abilities and sometimes even limitations which allows them to either help other people or find ways to get help for themselves. In essence, the LLP provides opportunity to develop new skills or find new ways to help other people in the community as well as find ways to get help or support in areas where they may need help themselves.

Social networks are defined in terms of structural characteristics: number and types of social linkages and frequency of contacts. The size of people's social networks does not correlate with the quality of their social support. Researchers have shown that support can come from a small number of confidants or from a large social network (Sarason et al., 1983). The LLP provides opportunities to build social networks. First there is the network of the LLP class of the year that usually involves 35 participants. They form a social network through meeting weekly for eight weeks and interact socially within the context of their class. Second, there is the alumni association that is made up of participants who have completed the LLP. The alumni group currently has over 250 members and meets monthly. Alumni members create a social network that is separate from a particular LLP class. It gives all previous LLP participants a chance to join a larger group and continue to be active in the community, stay in touch with friends, meet new friends, and remain connected with the LLP and the university. Third, smaller social networks develop from the LLP class or the alumni association. The "Liver and Onions" group that is made up of class members from 1992 is one example presented by William, and Meagan described a social network of ladies from her class who meet on a monthly basis to have lunch and "keep in touch".

Participation in the LLP appears to present many opportunities for "belonging" in a social context whether it be in the LLP or in the community. A sense of belonging is created through volunteer activities and social networks both of which are offered to individuals who participate in the LLP. From these experiences there may be a general purpose for living that is difficult to define but may be linked to satisfaction – an

affirmation of oneself. The following section will present data from this study that supports this notion of satisfaction.

The following Figure 4.2 provides a graphic representation of the social network described in the above section. It begins with two circles that show two different groups of individuals who enroll in the LLP. The first group includes residents who are native to the community where the LLP is offered. New community residents comprise the second group. Next, these two groups of individuals come together to participate in the LLP. Once they have completed the LLP they join the LLP Alumni Association, which is an even larger group. From the Alumni Association, several individuals create smaller groups who meet for lunch or other social functions outside of the LLP organization. The end result is that all of the participants return to the community involved and active and are united by the LLP.

Satisfaction

Satisfaction is the third theme that arose from the data. Generally, satisfaction is defined to mean contentment with something or someone (Watson, 1982). Many older adults express high satisfaction with interpersonal relationships and daily activities. Satisfied older adults tend to be highly motivated to maintain some control over their lives in the later years and are relatively confident that they have succeeded in shaping their lives. They participate in organized groups and avocation activities. Some may engage in a wide variety of activities in order to substitute new activities for old ones, for example, becoming more active in community affairs after retirement (Neurgarten, 1968).

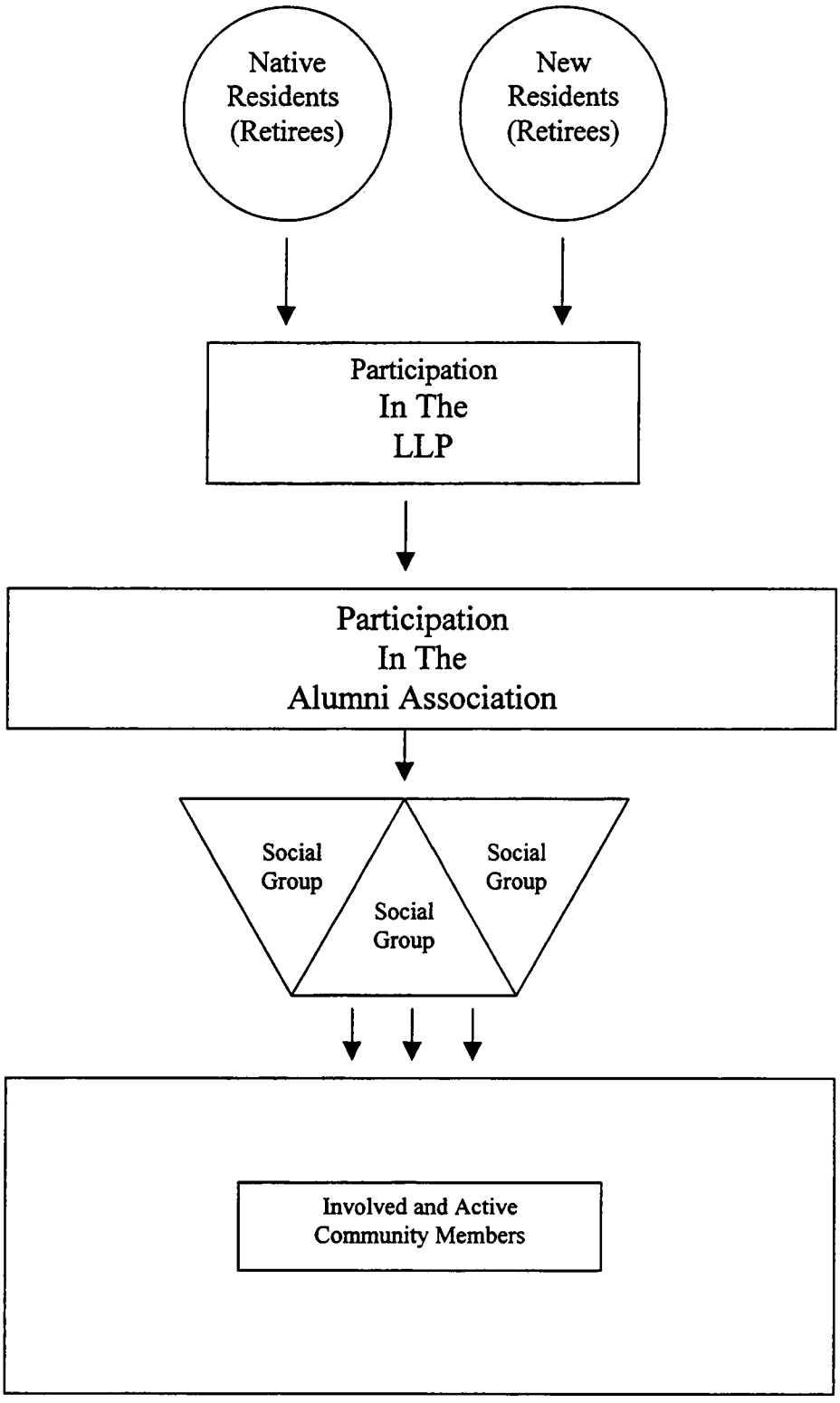

Figure 4.2 Graphic Representation of LLP Social Network

Research suggests that occupational choices made earlier in life may make a substantial difference in how one does in later life.

Considering that the life expectancy in the United States has risen from 45 to 75 during the last 100 years, the answer to the question of how to live life during these additional years becomes more urgent (Manheimer, 1994). How do older adults find ways to live their lives in a productive, enjoyable, and meaningful way so that life is satisfying to them? Some answers to this question were revealed by the data of this study through the explanations of what satisfaction meant to the LLP participants and how the program created an opportunity for them to live more productively, happier, and fuller lives.

Activities included in the LLP offered participants a variety of ways to find satisfying activities. Some participants gained satisfaction from volunteer work at the university or in the community. Others were satisfied with getting to make new acquaintances and build new friendships. Many participants got satisfaction from leadership roles and/or responsibilities extended to them through the LLP alumni association. For this study, two categories arose from the data that represent the meaning of satisfaction for the participants. These categories include learning and rewards.

The following two excerpts from the participants clearly define their meaning of satisfaction and how the LLP contributed to their feelings of satisfaction. Bill stated:

> An old professor told me that if more nights that not when you put your head on your pillow and look up towards the Lord, you can say, I gave it my very, very best thank you, I'm satisfied with what I did. It's whatever

> I do that brings me in contact with people, and I'm a people person. Whether it be two people or 22 people, if there is some way through discussion, chit-chat, lunch, coffee, whatever excuse might be to get together and I mean honestly, cause at my stage in life, I love an excuse to say "ok, let's meet for coffee at nine o'clock tomorrow morning. It takes an hour so we "b.s." for about an hour. But if through these informal discussions, there is some way that either I might know of a person or a program, or a past experience that fits in with whatever this other individual may need or something he is questioning or just looking for this to me is satisfaction. I can't tell you how much joy I get out of it.

Another participant defined what satisfaction meant to him. James stated:

> If you could do things to help somebody else then that's a satisfaction. That's why I agreed to have this interview. I think the main thing, if you are really looking to see what the LLP does, it gives people an opportunity to help others where they have an interest in helping.... Interest to match, and we are all given certain talents and they are God given talents, and it helps you to determine what they are. And if you feel good doing something, it just happens to be that I fell into the service area.... Having your sight on a goal and doing the little things to achieve that goal which was finding out where we could volunteer.

Learning

Learning is the first category under the theme of "Satisfaction". The term learning is used quite frequently throughout the interviews of this study, and can be linked to the satisfaction experienced from participating in the LLP. Learning has been defined as the acquisition of a novel response or message in the repertoire of an individual's behavior; or as a modification in a mode of behavior previously learned (Watson, 1982, p. 390). Learning is a cumulative process. The more knowledge and skills an individual acquires, the more likely it becomes that his new learning will be shaped by his past experiences and activities (Postman, 1973).

Many of the participants of the LLP have college degrees and verbalized their belief in education and the importance of learning and continued learning. Jason stated: "I think the whole underlying concept of lifelong education is both supported and expanded by this type of program because it really does give real meaning to the fact that you can and should do it for a lifetime". According to Postman, past education may shape learning in the later years. For the participants in this study, it appears that they have engaged in learning throughout their lives and are expecting that retirement will not be any different. For the participants in this study, learning focused on the need to find out about the community and ways that they could become active in the community. Participants explained that they applied to the LLP in order to learn about the community, ways to become involved in the community, and learn how to meet other people in the area. Results from the study present evidence that learning did take place, that participants gained satisfaction from learning, and that they found what they were looking for in the

LLP. Several participants spoke of learning about the community or helping others to learn. William stated:

> To help people learn about this area and maybe change misconceptions they have about this area has been very beneficial to me. I have enjoyed teaching people or helping people learn. . . . Maybe teaching isn't the word but helping people to learn about this community and about this area and the different things there are to love about it and reasons to stay here. Helping them learn and want to be active in the community and stay here is very satisfying to me.

Judy also discussed learning about the community. She stated:

> I was very happy that I had gone through this program because I really learned a great deal about the area I was retiring in. And had I not had something like that, I'm not sure that I would have learned (the same) through the newspaper, or maybe through other organizations. I don't know that I would have learned as much in such a short period of time as what I did in this program. I'm satisfied that I learned what I needed to learn and will be able to contribute much more to the community than I would have had I not taken this program.

Dale described what it meant to him to learn about the area. Dale stated: "I really came away feeling that I did understand those areas that we covered. That I did understand the political issues that were troubling the area right now. I felt satisfied that I did learn what I had wanted to learn".

Data from this study not only reveals what participants learned but also the effectiveness of the information presented. Without an exchange of information or successful learning situation, participants would not have found what they were seeking and consequently would have not been satisfied with the outcome of their experience in the LLP. Also, the impact that the LLP program had on their lives came as a result of effective program planning and the abundance of learning opportunities.

Considering the best method for older adults to learn may require taking a closer look at the needs and capabilities of older adults. A place to begin may be to define what learning is for an adult. Andragogy is the art and science of teaching adults based on a set of assumptions about learning that are different from traditional learning (Knowles, 1984). Knowles (1980), an adult educator, focuses on the needs of learners whether it be an individual, group, or an organization. Adult education, according to Knowles, exists to fulfill needs. In order to fulfill these needs, adult educators and education institutions may want to go to the individuals who want to learn and research what they need and want. This is especially true with older learners. Since older learners bring life experiences and certain expectations to the educational setting, it would seem that appropriate programming for older adults would necessitate the involvement of older learners in the planning process.

Another adult educator who has researched the nature of adult education is Stephen Brookfield. His study of adult education led him to several assumptions about education for older adults. Brookfield (1990) presents the following assumptions: (1) Active involvement on the part of older students is preferable to the more traditional,

passive student role. Older adults learn best when actively participating in an experience, such as setting goals and planning instruction. (2) Peer interaction is encouraged by peer support, information, and assistance. Education programs that allow for peer interaction are more effective than those that rely primarily on didactic educational techniques. (3) Self-selected, doable, and measurable objectives. Education programs with self-selected, doable, and measurable objectives are more effective at accomplishing changes in behavior than those that rely of instructor selected objectives, unrealistic expectations, and vague goals.

Educational goals in the later years involve a significant effort to interpret personal experiences and life meaning. Education programs can provide ways for older adults to achieve these goals through activities that contribute to the development, socialization, and re-socialization of participants. Reaching these goals bring a sense of satisfaction to older adults. Satisfaction can be achieved through learning new knowledge and skills, thereby increasing their functional competence; increasing their opportunity to meet new friends; and help them discover more about how to cope with retirement, widowhood, depression, and other problems associated with aging.

Through an examination of the literature and an analysis of the data of this study, the LLP seems to incorporate several learning strategies associated with adult education methods. According to the data collected for this study, the Longevity Leadership Program appears to incorporate McClusky's (1971) five major goals for education in later life, which include: (1) to help older people fulfill their lifetime potential; (2) to assist older people in contributing their wisdom to society: (3) to promote older people as

models of lifelong fulfillment; (4) to help older people meet particular needs; and (5) to gain access to older people who are hidden or isolated from the mainstream of the community.

The LLP is an education program that recognizes the importance of learning and the role it plays in all aspects of the program. Data revealed that learning occurs through information presented by the speakers, through interactions with community leaders, learning how to get along with each other, and learning ways to become involved in the community. Also, there are numerous opportunities for reintegration through their participation in the LLP. Many of these opportunities have already been identified in the volunteer section of this chapter or the social aspect section.

Education programs for older adults have developed to such a point that we can begin to gain some perspective on their growth and to identify implications for the future. From my data, I have identified the following: (1) we are living in a learning society where everyone will be required to continue to expand their knowledge and skills, regardless of age, in order to survive and prosper. (2) the rationale for educating older adults has grown from programs that only deal with difficulties of old age to emphasizing the ability that persons have to grow and develop throughout their lives. (3) the stereotypical image of the older adult is gradually changing from older adults who are unproductive to individuals who have potential and who can contribute and serve . This change in attitude has led to many more programs oriented toward self-actualization and growth. Hopefully, this change and the knowledge acquired through research will

develop programs where learning opportunities are provided and will enhance life satisfaction for older adults.

Learning can be a rewarding and enriching experience at any age. The benefits gained from learning can be considered rewarding to individuals. For example, learning about a volunteer opportunity and learning how to be a volunteer can lead to people helping each other, which may prove to be rewarding not only to the person being helped but also by the person providing the help. Many of the LLP participants used the term "rewarding" when describing their experience in the program.

Rewards

Reward is defined as "something given or received for worthy behavior" (American Heritage Dictionary, 1994, p. 706). In the case of older adults, the emphasis on reward is typically found in activities other than work experiences. The rewards can be psychic, emotional or even physical. Some rewards are intrinsic while some are extrinsic. For example, an extrinsic reward may be better physical condition after exercising. Another example may be intrinsic, such as the reward that a person gets from reading a newspaper or watching the news on the television showing that they are "keeping up with the world". Participating in the preparation for a church function may be its own reward, expressed as being a "good person". Such experiences assist in finding a general purpose in living; a term that is difficult to define but often used by older adults.

Rewards can come in many shapes and forms. Learning in itself can be rewarding to some older adults. Learning enables older adults to enrich their own lives as well as give back to the community. For many LLP participants, learning was viewed as

a "rewarding" experience. They were rewarded by praise, encouragement, being welcomed in the community, and gaining new knowledge presented through the LLP. Learning provided them a way to become integrated into the community and strongly enhanced their quality of life.

In addition to learning, serving others through volunteer effort was seen as rewarding. All of the participants emphasized the rewards gained from volunteering, and becoming more active in the community. Several of the participants explained that retirement can be a time of loneliness, sadness, and depression however; getting involved in an organization or activity can change the entire retirement experience.

Through education programs such as the LLP, older adults are given the opportunity to become productive during retirement and experience fulfillment and personal satisfaction through their actions. The LLP participants defined rewards in terms of positive feelings that they experienced through the program. These feelings are linked to personal growth and development, volunteer opportunities, meaningful use of leisure time, and staying active and carrying on an intellectual life. All of these benefits stemmed from learning and impacted the quality of life of these individuals. It is important to consider that in most cases none of these experiences would have taken place without their active participation in the program.

Studies show that rewards are associated with the close interaction of actively participating members of a bonded group. Havighurst (1972) described his view on rewards of active participation for groups of adults over the age of 65. Older adults who choose to remain active in a groups may be rewarded by feelings of achievement-

something is going on all the time, satisfaction from the economic and social power, and satisfaction from the repetition of behavior patterns already learned.

It appears that the key to building a strong connection between older adults and the community is to provide educational opportunities that promote active participation and self-actualization and growth. By participating in the program, the participants learned about the community and about themselves as individuals. The participants are given the chance to learn how to be active and productive in the community, as well as, gain a better understanding of their own individual needs and wants. This new knowledge assisted participants in making informed choices about their lives in the future. Participants expressed their appreciation for the learning opportunity that the program afforded and described the outcome of their experience in the program as rewarding. The following excerpts demonstrate the role the LLP played in providing opportunities for the participants to get involved in activities and the feelings of satisfaction and reward they received from their active involvement.

> David stated: Well, it makes you feel important, it makes you feel like you're doing something that's worthwhile. I could be doing something of value for the community I mean, and you become part of the community.... I think the LLP group was the catalyst for that. I think that's the purpose it should serve. It should serve to introduce you to the community and from then on, it should, and you might pick something that somebody sparks in you... I think everybody has different skills that they can impart and different interests. But anyway, I think primarily it

> makes you feel good, what you are doing and you owe it to the LLP and the people you met there. I think it's been very worthwhile, very rewarding. Retirement is another life, you know. It's kind of hard for you to realize that, but it is another life. And boy, strive for it because it's really great. I wish it for you.

Georgia had similar views on the reward and satisfaction that she received from participating in the LLP. Her rewards could be considered intrinsic. She stated:

> It has definitely enriched my life in every possible way. Whether I have learned a lot or met new people or made new friends. That I think is the most important thing that I got out of it. It enriched my life. My life has become fuller. I live alone, I mean I am a widow. When my children come, I hope we talk about interesting things, with my grandchildren. I just try to be active and alert. I understand this is very good for your health.

Another participant describes her experience as "fulfilling". Meagan stated:

> It has been personally very fulfilling for me, the class, the people I have met, the area, I just love. I just think it has all been personally fulfilling and fortunately I can keep in touch because of the alumni association.

James explains how helping others is rewarding to him:

> Helping others is as much rewarding as anything else is. I really think that means a lot. When I see the kids look up and have that desire to learn...or when I am able to help someone get to their seats in the theatre hall. They

probably know where they're sitting but it's fun to be there to help them up and down the isle and be there in case something happens.

Jamie expressed the same feelings of reward and satisfaction, however, her reward and satisfaction came from learning (knowledge whereas many other participants gained reward and satisfaction from personal experience and meeting others. Jamie stated: "Very rewarding and very enlightening, and just a knowledge about this area." In terms of reward and satisfaction, the conclusion that arises from this data is that LLP participants' perceived intrinsic rewards from their participation in the program thereby creating a sense of satisfaction for their overall experience in the LLP.

Maintaining the Status Quo

The previous three themes - Recognition, Belonging, and Satisfaction - can all be linked to the social construction of aging. The fourth theme "Maintaining the Status Quo" deals primarily with the LLP's participants' resistance to change. After analyzing the data, the program seems to preserve the status quo in four ways: (1) Lack of minority participation; (2) Economic and education status; (3) Course content; and (4) LLP Alumni Association.

Lack of Minority Participation

Minority groups are defined as "sub-units of society with distinct physical and cultural characteristics" (Gelfand, 1982, p. 14), wherein strong ties exist and lifestyle is distinct from the majority of the society. For the purpose of this study, two minority groups will be mentioned-Blacks and Hispanics. Historically, African Americans have not achieved high levels of education due to racial discrimination against Black

admissions to public and private schools, and deep economic poverty of individuals and communities of Black Americans (Watson, 1982). Even though Black Americans have increased their level of education, there are still many who have been left behind (Boggs, 1965). Most older minority adults grew up without equal rights and protection under the law. Job discrimination has left minorities "with less resources to cope with in their old age and a legacy of poverty, and living in substandard housing that generally translates into poorer health in old age" (Yee, 1990, p. (2) This history of discrimination also affects the minority older adult's willingness to access education programs such as the LLP.

In 1990, about 85 percent of people aged 65 and over were Caucasian; eight percent African-American; four percent Hispanic, and about three percent other (AARP, 1992). According to Yee, the 1990's minority population aged 65-five and over is expected to double by 2050. With the increase in the number of Black older adults, educators need to recognize their learning needs as a minority and older adult.

Education programming for minority older adults need to consider the following: (1) Community members need to be involved in program development and implementation; (2) Factors affecting accessibility must be identified and addressed; (2) Language should be familiar, concise, factual, and specific; (4) Non-print formats, such as videotapes, audiotapes; presenters and slide shows should be encouraged; (5) Communications should acknowledge and incorporate cultural beliefs, and visual images should include familiar people, settings, and symbols; 6). Efforts must be sustained and reinforced over time (Dorfman, 1991). For other minorities such as Hispanic older

adults, education programs need to include Spanish language services and presenters need to be sensitized to the beliefs and culture of the Hispanic older adults.

To date, there have been over 261 LLP participants and alumni members. Only two black men have participated in the LLP since it's implementation in 1991. No other minorities have participated according to the information I have gathered. I interviewed one of the African American participants who gave his thoughts on why there has not been any minority involvement in the LLP.

> Jacob explained: I see myself staying involved in the alumni for a couple of reasons really. Now, well the truth is I have tried to encourage some other Black people to get involved in the program but for some reason, one or two reasons they did not become involved so now their is only one other Black person involved in the program. A lot of it might have to do with the tuition cost, I don't know.

> William stated: It has been very difficult to get Black participation. We've had two gentlemen, African Americans who have taken the course. We have contacted any number of people in the Black community, talked to them, tried to encourage them to get some of their friends or anybody they knew and pass out a brochure to them. It is very difficult to get Black participation the reasons I don't know. But we have tried to talk to a number of influential people in the Black community, have passed out our application and since then, we have only had two participants and they haven't been able to get anybody in either so I don't know what it is about

the program or the people. When we first started out we ask another program about Black participation and they said they had not, there just seemed to be no interest in the Black community so maybe it's the type of thing there is not much interest in although, the two men have taken it, one of them was in the class of 1993 and he had lived here for a good number of years and he has stayed active and he is on the board of them alumni and stayed active in the alumni.

Dale stated: There have been almost no Blacks in the program. They would like to have Blacks but they have not had an affirmative action program and there were none in my year 1996. I know of two graduates in prior years. whether there are others I don't know but that was a disappointment. It's a disappointment to the university. They would like to see a broader mix in every respect I think particularly racial.

According to the data gathered in this study, it would appear that steps taken to increase African American enrollment have not worked. As Dale stated above, there has been no affirmative action program in place to assist in attracting more African Americans to participate in the LLP. Since the programs implementation in 1991 only two African Americans have applied. The data tend to present a lack of knowledge about why there is a lack of minority participation and a lack of effort to resolve this issue.

Economic and Education Status

Lack of inclusiveness also involves the economic status of participants. As Jacob stated above, tuition costs may have something to do with the lack of participation for

some people. This not only pertains to African Americans but may be true for other older adults who would like to enroll in the LLP but do not have the finances to do so. According to Jason, past president of the LLP, there is one scholarship that can be awarded each year to an eligible participant. However, the scholarship only covers one half of the tuition costs. He explained that this is done so that the participant has a personal investment in the program. He stated: "We might give somebody a max of $112.50 and they would have to put it the rest thinking if you don't invest you really don't have any interest". The participants who addressed the tuition fee did not place a great emphasis on the cost. They seemed to view the tuition fee of $225.00 as an insignificant amount. For example, Bill talked about the lack of participation in the alumni association and stated: "You know all paid only a couple of hundred dollars to take it, they're so busy with so many other things that this may not take priority". Judy presented a similar view towards the program cost:

> There is a fee you have to pay, it's like a tuition and people who cannot pay that amount, not that it is that exorbitant, but you don't want to cut anybody out, there is money set aside to help people who might need financial help to get into the LLP. The years I've been helping to plan it they do sometimes have to use that money but not every year.

Not only does the economic status of the participant have the potential to affect enrollment, but it may also prevent them from being selected to participate. According to the program director and two past presidents, selection of participants is based on previous occupation, gender, and residence. Many individuals may not be selected due to

a lack of professional job history consequently limiting their finances and status in the community. Along these same lines, educational level may be a factor in the lack of participants who are selected to participate as well as prevent some individuals from applying. One of the first lists given to me when I began this study was a roster with all previous LLP participants that included the year they attended the class, their address, and previous occupation. The list was quite impressive. Everyone on the list had worked in some capacity and the majority of members held professional jobs prior to retirement. The program director explained to me that the list is distributed at the beginning of each class. It is possible that this type of list is intimidating to some individuals who may not have similar backgrounds. The lack of inclusiveness might be explained by the educational and financial standards of participants that have been upheld thus far. The name of the program has also proved to be somewhat of a hindrance in recruiting individuals who are lacking a higher education. As Jason explained: "I've often wondered if the word associated with the program, "Scholars", has a negative or questioning impact on a lot of people because I think they relate the word scholars to a high intellectual pursuit." Marisa described reluctance to enroll in the program because she was not a college graduate. She explained that the only reason she decided to pursue the program was because her husband completed it the previous year and encouraged her to sign up. Marisa stated:

> I was a little hesitant because I was not a college graduate, and not well educated as my husband. Actually, I had gotten my GED because I quit

high school. I just felt like the name of the program did not fit my persona and he (husband) said "no, no, no."

Despite the concerns expressed about the exclusiveness of the name of the program, the name of the program has remained the same since its conception in 1991. There are currently no plans to change the name. Another facet of the LLP that has not changed significantly since the beginning of the program is the content.

Course Content

Content of the LLP consists of activities in preparation for positions of leadership, advocacy, and volunteerism. The course content focuses on the community and ways in which the older adults can become active and responsive to the needs of the community while enhancing their retirement experience. The Longevity Leadership Program prepares older adults for effective participation in civic or political activities in the community while enhancing their own lives. Course content is instructed through the use of presenters from the community. Presenters for the program are community leaders and professionals in their field. Each presenter has his/her own style and is expected to present in a manner that promotes group interaction and discussion as well as dissemination of information. Occasionally, a peer will serve as a presenter. The LLP also plans special events such as their graduation ceremony and Christmas social. Once a LLP participant has completed the course, they are invited to join the LLP Alumni Association.

The course content seems to be a concern for the LLP. Each year a course evaluation is completed by the participant and the board of directors reviews the results.

According to the program director, the planning committee utilizes evaluation results when planning the following year's program. Members of the LLP alumni association are responsible for planning the course content with the support of the university. Since the content is specific to the local area, only certain older adults who have an interest in learning or getting involved in the community usually enroll. Even though evaluations are taken each year, the content has not changed since the beginning of the program in 1991. Jason, a previous president, stated "The content of the program was much the same as it is right now". He goes on to explain that a major function of the alumni association is to "focus on maintaining the level of information and the quality of program content that has been presented in the past". William, the current president, stated that there have been minor changes in the program content but "the basic core of the course has stayed the same. He goes on to say:

> It gets refined a little by little. I think one of the things we have found is if you take something out or if you want to add something what are you going to take out and that's when it really gets into a big discussion. "Oh you can't take that out, this is good" everybody has their own ideas so it usually stays the same.

An important point to keep in mind is that older adults generally do not have to engage in learning, they do so because they want to. This is an area where education programmers can work with older adults in order to identify the needs and means necessary to interest them and make their participation a rewarding experience. As time goes on, older adults may have to work and will require specific learning opportunities

such as new vocational skills. A discussed earlier in this study, rewards tend to be intrinsic or internal. Additionally, studies show that the amount of education an individual has may dictate their desire for education in the future. Older adults who have less education may lack confidence in their ability to learn and may not seek out education programs such as the above mentioned programs or the LLP.

Research literature on education programs designed for older adults in higher education institutions shows that there are many strategies being utilized in order to increase or attract older adult's participation. Institutions can offer reduced or waived tuition, courses may be designed specifically for older adults, and support services such as counseling or orientation workshops are sometimes included. The LLP does not appear to be attempting any of these strategies despite the fact that the program has very low minority participation, potentially excludes people who cannot pay tuition, and limits content to a specific audience who can and are willing to volunteer in the community and donate time and or money to the university/community.

LLP Alumni Association

The LLP Alumni Association offers continued learning through monthly meetings in order to stay in contact with community leaders and be aware of community needs. They also plan the program for the upcoming year and keep the course going as expected by all previous and future participants. The major work of connecting older adults with education programs can be done by the older adults themselves. They are capable and motivated; they just need to be encouraged. Such is the case with the LLP Alumni Association. Alumni members are expected to take an active role sometime during their membership. They are required to take part in carrying out the program, either by

coordinating a specific topic and presenter, planning meals, working on the budget, or sitting on a committee that is responsible for some portion of the coordination of the LLP.

The LLP alumni association seems to also preserve the "status quo" of the program. As Jason explained previously in this chapter, the main focus of the alumni association is to "maintain the level of information and the quality of program content that has been presented in the past". Elected officers of the alumni association tend to be members who were active in their class. Judy stated "The alumni, like most alumni associates, are made up of pretty much the same people who were active in the LLP".

One of the participants expressed his concern that the alumni association could collectively do more by uniting in one cause instead of individual's volunteering and working towards individual goals. Dale explained:

> If we focused it (energy and experience) we should be able to use it in a meaningful way within the community and I think each of us may have ideas as to what might be done . . . so it seems to me that if this group of two hundred plus people say, a hundred of them, were to identify a project and say that it was the LLP alumni who were undertaking this effort it would get the attention of the people who had come to talk to us.

Marisa stated: When I talk to people about the LLP I emphasize that the LLP is one phase of it and the alumni is another phase of it and it just goes on from there. You can participate if you want to, you don't have to participate if you don't want to.

The alumni association grows each year as new members join but the organization and implementation of the program seems to stay the same despite the tension that seems

to be present for some members. The majority of participants in this study had ideas about changes that would improve the alumni association. Dale explained that in his opinion, the alumni association would be more productive if they united in a cause or effort instead of everyone "doing their own thing". Bill expressed his opinion about the alumni association: "One of the weakest parts of the program is the alumni. We are not involved enough with the university activities". Jason described the alumni as "unyielding". He went on to say:

> "It would have been my idea to have organized the LLP alumni along functional lines and let those people with the respective interest in education or politics, or cultural form subgroups and meet on their own monthly. Perhaps just have one large alumnus gathering, that is all people quarterly.

William shared his thoughts on membership of the alumni association. He stated:

> The alumnus in one way is a close group in another way it's a very loosely knit group. We have had maybe 225 people take the program, the alumni dues are ten dollars and I think we now have 130 paid alumni members . . . it's like anything else, some people loose interest in the program, some take the program and say, " ok fine and don't care to join in on the alumni activities".

Summary

From the data gathered in this study, participants presented several ideas as to why they pursued a program such as the LLP and how the program impacted their lives.

These reasons included the desire to learn, a chance to assume planning and leadership roles, interest in studying current events, and making their own talents and skills available to the community. The data also depict an organization that aims at maintaining the status quo. Diligent effort is put forth to assure that minimal changes are made from year to year.

According to the data, the LLP played a role in providing the program participants with a social circle, opportunity for interaction and for formulation of attitudes toward self and others, expectation of participants to perform specific functions in the group or community, and status for the participants. The data indicate that the social role of a participant was not based solely on the individual but was based on a system of relationships within the LLP group. A social circle was created through the existence of common values. These values were educational, political, social, economic, and/or recreational. The performance of a role implied a reciprocal relationship based on the shared value.

In as much as the LLP would allow for individual roles, participants became conscious of their own self and how others regarded them as an individual. These roles led to specific functions that need to be performed by the participants within the group. Participants earned the rights and privileges associated with belonging to the LLP and the LLP Alumni Association by their involvement with the program and their activities after its conclusion. Several participants defined these rights and privileges in terms of honor, status, and prestige.

The final section of this chapter presents data on "maintaining the status quo" of the program. All 12 participants presented data that supports the idea that the LLP has an investment in maintaining the status quo of the program. From analyzing the data of this study, it appears that there is not much room for change in the design and/or implementation of the program. As one participant explained, the role of the alumni association is to preserve the program and keep the program going as close to the previous years as possible. Several participants discussed their ideas on ways to improve the program but no one voiced any plans to take action. Still others complained about current concerns they have regarding the operation of the alumni association yet none have plans to act upon their concerns. Two previous presidents of the program chose to explain the negative consequences of taking action or making changes if there is not a consensus. For example, a previous president was asked to resign after he tried to make changes to the course content and proposed additional functions for the alumni association. His efforts to make changes that were not acceptable by everyone involved in the LLP apparently resulted in a major disagreement and carried serious consequences for himself and others who were in support of his actions. Several of the members involved chose to no longer participate in the alumni association and since this particular incident no significant changes have been proposed or taken place according to the program director.

To summarize, the 12 categories and four themes (see Table 4.1) help present a vivid picture of the participants experiences in the LLP and how the LLP has impacted their lives. In concluding this chapter on Themes and Categories, I chose a few quotes

from the participants who summed up their overall experience in the program. William stated:

> People to people maybe might be as good as anything. As I said, my career in television was most of it was being on the air and communicating with people and doing interview and finding out different things in the area and this is what this has been. I've met a lot of wonderful people that have moved into the area and I guess people would be about it.

Jacob stated: I see it as another extension of the community for me. I think it has a value. That's some of my value being over there is to find out that things that are needed and if I can find the right kind of person to see if they can be connected. I might be able to find somebody else who can and who would and it might be a value to both the guy I find and the person in need.

Marisa stated: I recommend it highly because I'm constantly passing out these little brochures and telling them how much we enjoy it. And particularly new people coming into the community, because some people have no one and they, this is one way of learning about the community. And you become, because it is a small town, you become very aware of speakers that we see speak at the alumni, not at the alumni but the program. The speakers you know these people, you know their names, and you can put a face with them.

This chapter was intended to provide a comprehensive look at the data collected for this study. In the following chapter conclusions drawn from the study will be summarized and discussed.

Chapter 5

Summary and Conclusions

The previous chapter provided a comprehensive look at the four themes and 12 subsequent categories that emerged from the interview data collected for this study. This final chapter will serve to summarize conclusions drawn from the study, discuss major findings, and present recommendations for future research and practice. The first section presents and summarizes the purpose of the study. Major findings of the study are presented in the second section. In the third section, implications and recommendations for future research and practice in adult education, specifically education programs designed for older adults' are suggested. I will conclude with a final thought.

Summary of the Study

This study was designed to describe and analyze the experiences of older adults who participated in an education program created for them and their perception of the impact the program had on their lives. The outcome of this study is expected to: (1) contribute to the understanding of the needs, concerns, and issues of older adults and how education programs for older adults should be structured and (2) present detailed information about the LLP as experienced by the participants adding to a growing body of research recognizing the increasing number of older adults in our population and the implications these demographic shifts and societal changes will play in our education system.

Twelve adults who had participated in the LLP were selected. Since participants in the study were chosen from a specific program, unique-case selection was utilized. Network-based selection was utilized whereby participants were referred by another. Also random volunteers were selected based on their completion of the LLP. Participants ranged from age 55 to 78, seven were men and five were women. Only one out of the 12 was a minority subgroup member, as African American male. Educational levels ranged from a GED to Master degree level of college education.

An open-ended interview was used to collect data for the study. The interview discussion was based on the following two questions: (1) "Tell me about your experience in the Longevity Leadership Program" and (2)"What impact do you perceive that the program has had on your life?" All interviews were recorded, transcribed, reviewed with participants, and analyzed. From the data gathered, an analysis was conducted and four major themes arose from the data. These four themes were Recognition, Belonging, Satisfaction, and Maintaining the Status Quo.

Major Findings

Two main research questions were proposed for this study: (1) What was it like to participate in the Longevity Leadership Program? and (2) What impact do the participants perceive that the program has had on their lives? From these research questions, four themes developed that help define the reasons why older adults participate in education programs, issues that may prevent programs from changing, and ways in which programs like the LLP may impact a persons life. Recognition, Belonging, Satisfaction, and Maintaining the Status Quo are the four themes that emerged from the

data. Study participants recounted many experiences that they had while participating in the LLP. Their conversations were saturated with reflections of recognition, belonging, and satisfaction. In looking closely at their participation in the Alumni Association a fourth theme arose: Maintaining the Status Quo. An overview of the four themes yields the perspective that participating in an education program such as the Longevity Leadership Program can be a valuable and rewarding experience for older adults.

Recognition

The theme of Recognition can be understood in terms of four major categories including: (1) selectivity of participants; (2) affiliation with the university; (3) access to the "movers and shakers" in the community; and (4) graduation ceremony. Many participants felt "honored or fortunate" to have been chosen for the program. They received recognition from the university, peers, and alumni members by being selected for the program. Affiliation with the university was an important facet of the LLP. Several participants reported that they had some type of previous connection with a university and many had worked for a university. They were in search of a similar connection with the sponsoring university of the LLP. Many participants' felt that it was important to be recognized by the university because of the status that our society places on higher education. Once the participants had completed the LLP they were invited to join the LLP Alumni Association. By joining the LLP Alumni Association they could continue their involvement with the LLP and the university. The LLP Alumni Association is recognized by the university and highly respected in the community. Findings from this research validate studies suggesting that older adults are attracted to

programs associated with colleges and universities (Knowlton, 1976; NCES, 1991, and Manheimer et al, 1995). Older adults take pride in their affiliation with the university, and in some cases, the affiliation with the university or college can be a major motivator for older adults in pursuing education programs such as the LLP.

Recognition can provide older adults with a sense of self through affirmation and the enhancing of self-esteem, giving them a purpose, and helping them to define their role and identity. Atchley (1971) found that older adults discover personal identity through the expansion of new roles during retirement and that retirement itself has become an acceptable role and hence can also provide for greater self-esteem. Since most individuals base their identity on a number of roles including their identity associated with work, older adults may need to focus on new roles in order maintain behavioral stability. Through participation in programs such as the LLP, there are numerous opportunities to develop new roles or expand existing roles in order to fill the gap created by retirement. One way to encourage and facilitate the development of new roles is to offer older adults education programs that provide a broad range of alternative involvement rewarded by recognition. Results from the study show that participants feel certain that they gained recognition from their experience in the Longevity Leadership Program. This finding is consistent with other adult education studies.

Belonging

Definitions of belonging include "to be a member of a group" and "to be a part of or in natural association with something"(American Heritage College Dictionary, 1997, p. 438). The two categories identified under the theme of Belonging are volunteerism

and social aspects of the LLP. LLP participants expressed a sense of belonging through being a member of the LLP and from becoming more involved in the community through volunteer opportunities. Through volunteer activities, participants reported a closer connection with the community that led to a sense of belonging in the community. Many of the participants made new acquaintances or friends through their involvement in the LLP. The LLP participants consider themselves to be a close knit group who are bonded by their association with the LLP and many remain friends long after the actual program has ended. In fact, several of the participants - both men and women - reported that they had created smaller groups that meet on a regular basis for lunch or dinner in order to stay connected.

Data from the study presented an abundance of narrative about volunteer opportunities and the social aspects of the LLP. The finding that older adults tend to receive recognition through community involvement such as volunteer activities and recognition through social memberships and activities is consistent with the research of Kaplan (1979).

Satisfaction

Satisfaction was achieved through participation in the LLP according to the participants in this study. This study validates research findings that satisfaction in leisure activities, including education programs, is needed in order to replace work satisfaction and status as suggested by Neurgarten (1968). Satisfaction for the participants was gained through learning and the rewards brought by their involvement. All 12 of the participants discussed their interest and the value placed in learning. Many

of them explained that they felt the need to continue learning and were actively seeking out a learning experience when they enrolled in the LLP. Several participants stated that staying involved in learning helps them to feel more satisfied with their lives.

It is interesting to note that the majority of the participants were college educated and all had been involved in self-directed learning at some point in their lives. This finding corroborates findings from other educational participation of older adults studies, such as that of the U.S. White House Conference (1973). The proceedings from the conference indicate that individuals with higher levels of education are more likely to enroll in education programs during retirement. The study data indicates that LLP participants attributed their interest in education and learning to the intrinsic reward they get from learning. One participant stated that she wanted to stay informed so that she could converse with her grandchildren on a higher level whereby she would have something interesting and informative to add to their conversations. Two of the male participants explained that learning how to help others in the community was important to them because they could offer their knowledge and time to those in need. Being able to help others due to something they had learned in the LLP consequently lead to many rewarding experiences that in turn created a sense of satisfaction in their life. As discussed in Chapter 4 and supported by research, satisfied older adults participate in more actively organized groups and avocation activities. Some may engage in a wide variety of activities in order to substitute new activities for older ones, for example, becoming more active in community affairs after retirement (Neurgarten, 1968).

Activities in the LLP offered participants' a variety of ways to personally create satisfying opportunities for themselves.

Maintaining the Status Quo

The ultimate success of the LLP remains to be seen. In terms of objectives of the program, it is serving a useful function in encouraging older adults to get involved in community activities and be an active member of society. As far as the overall design of the program, no changes are being contemplated for the LLP in the near future. The program will most likely continue on in its present form until new problems or issues arise. Meanwhile, suggestions from participants are being recorded on evaluation questionnaires as a guide for future revisions. The evaluations reveal that criticisms or concerns have been offered on a few topics. However, most concerns remain intact and there is no evidence that any action has been or will be taken to address these criticisms. The four major concerns that have aroused criticism recently are lack of minority participation, economic and education status requirement, course content, and the functions of the LLP Alumni Association.

Lack of minority participation represents one of the areas that a few participants spoke about during the interview while other participants chose not to address the area at all. The participants who chose to discuss the lack of minority participation did not present any suggestions on how to increase enrollment nor did they voice any understanding as to why there continues to be a lack of minority participation. It appears that the program has accepted this lack of minority participation as evidenced by the absence of plan to find out why there is a lack or participation or any stated plans to take

action to increase the enrollment of minority participants. Thusly, this is one area that contributes to the program's ability to maintain the status quo. Hence, the program keeps attracting the same type of participants.

Course content plays a major role in preserving the LLP and helps the program maintain the status quo. Several of the participants explained that the course content is very important to the success of the program. Each year there is tremendous effort exerted to insure that the content is presented by the same presenters when possible. They explained that the program is always successful every year and that the programs that are scheduled are generally liked by everyone. The schedule leaves very little room for variation. The current president of the LLP Alumni Association explained that if a new presentation were added to the program another presentation would have to be eliminated. Since there are seldom any presentations that are eliminated there is little room for change thus maintaining the status quo.

The decision to not make significant changes in the program is attributed to the previous success of the program. Participants expressed their interest in the LLP due to the content promised in the advertisements about the program. Topics included the educational system, business, and cultural aspects of the community. Content focused on the community and ways in which older adults could become active and responsive to the needs of the community while enhancing their retirement experience.

Citizens of the community gave presentations. Community experts from the state government, educational system, the medical community, and the media donate their time and expertise. Satisfaction with the program was discussed in terms of what was

promised, expected, and offered. All 12 of the participants stated that the program delivered what it promised. Each participant indicated that they were satisfied with the course content and the way in which information was presented. This finding corroborates findings from adult education studies such as that of Hiemstra (1985) that indicate that older adults are looking for more creative modes of instruction with the provision of community forums with guest presenters and less use of traditional modes of instruction such as lectures.

Whether or not the LLP has found the most innovative and creative program possible is left unanswered. However, there is evidence to show that participants have been very happy with the program in the past. It is equally important to acknowledge that few changes have been made to the content of the program over the last eight years leaving room for the exclusion of topics and information that may be of interest for different type of applicants. Due to this lack of change in the content of the program, the LLP is able to maintain the status quo.

In summary, the LLP has developed a reputation for delivering a program that is diverse, offers opportunities for community involvement, and provides a comprehensive overview of the community. On the other hand, there seems to be a lack of community inclusiveness. A major factor in maintaining the status quo is that the organization and structure of the program has undergone very little change. Since LLP Alumnus solely operate the program, there is no room for outside involvement in the program planning and implementation. Because of this, most leadership decisions are based on previous

LLP policies and experience and are limited by planners who are influenced and dictated by the organization.

Despite the limitations that are present in the LLP leadership, the program has grown from 35 participants in 1991 to over 261 LLP alumni members in its ninth year, and there is already a waiting list for next year's program. LLP's continued growth speaks for the need that exists for such a program and that the LLP must be doing something right. However, there remains a need to reach older adults who are not currently being served.

Implications for Future Practice and Research

This study was limited to a specific group of participants who completed an education program on a university campus; therefore, the study has limited generalizability. However, many of the findings may be applicable to other education programs and participants. Implications drawn from the findings of this study may be of interest to: (1) those who provide adult learning; (2) older adults who are learning or who should be learning; (3) those who design education programs for older adults, and (4) those who study adult education for older adults. The following discussion encompasses recommendations for future research and practice based upon this study.

Implications for Practice

Further research is needed to help educators explore and discover new approaches to teaching older adults that would enable learners to gain a voice and play a fuller role in society. As the study and related research literature show, it may not be enough to teach older adults how to do something without considering the social and political factors

involved in the learning activity and the structures of society that control access to these resources. Encouraging participants to play an active role in the learning process, whether it be through acting as teachers themselves, serving as moderators in class such as in the LLP, or helping to design the program format and/or content are just a few ways to accomplish this. Adult educators need to explore the impact that these changed relationships between learner and teacher may have on the success of their programs. Perhaps the key is listening more to the older adults and valuing their experiences, knowledge, and insights. If educators see their work as part of this process, then the issue of those who are not participating in education programs may be of greater concern.

Also it should concern educators that those who are not in reach of the program may not have other opportunities to meet their education needs. Adult educators need to study this situation and attempt to come up with more creative ways to serve these older adults. A great number of older adults are not being served through the education system.

Older adults who are members of minority groups are not being appropriately served in many education institutions. Although, in theory, education is open to everyone, many minority groups are not participating because the programs are not designed to meet their particular needs. Research literature shows that many minority individuals pursue education programming through church activities and or community organizations. However, not all minority individuals participate in church or community organizations, and their educational needs are not being met. Research also presents a gap in the number of older adults who are interested in education and those who actually

participate in education programs. Some of the gap is attributed to socioeconomic status of older adults. Adult educators need to be sensitive to the socioeconomic and cultural factors that influence older learners. Educators need to work with older adults, education institutions, community organizations, and the government in an effort to bridge this gap.

This study demonstrates the importance of involvement, input, and consideration of older adults' needs and wants in designing and implementing programs. When older adults are involved in the planning, the programs generate greater interest, participation, and success. The findings of this study will assist in designing, marketing, recruiting, and implementing programs that attract older adults. Most significant is the finding that attention to previous life experiences, social issues, educational experiences, and the needs and wants of older adults increase participation in education programs and, consequently, lead to a more fulfilling, active, productive and successful life during the retirement years. The inclusion of older adults in planning and implementing programs made the LLP a more successful program. It is crucial for adult educators to involve older adults' in future education programming in order to insure participation and meet the needs and expectations of the learners.

Implications for Future Research

When considering implications for further research, the question of participation should be mentioned. It should not just be a matter of what the participants do in the process of learning but rather about getting others to take advantage of the learning opportunities being offered. Research in the area of developing new formats for classes and groups, new approaches to more appropriate subject-matter, and new ways to

restructure content and methods may improve and provide educators with ways to overcome the barriers to participation.

One way to look at participation is to consider how programs meet the needs of existing and new participants. Research can make us more aware of the barriers to participation for older adults; both for those who are and those who are not in education programs. Educators could play a larger role in increasing participation by learning better ways to meet the needs of those who are not enrolled. On the other hand, increased provision does not always lead to increased participation. Attitudinal barriers will most likely always be present. Researchers and educators need to work together to address these problems and find ways to circumvent the sense of exclusion that so many older adults experience.

While this study provides insight on educational issues of older adults, further research is needed to link educational institutions and programming with the needs and values of the participants. At the same time, research in the area of leadership and program planning for these older adults also need to be pursued. If older adults are given the power to act as program planners by virtue of their organizational position, then should they not need training or guidance to adequately fulfill their role. In the case of this study, a lack of leadership skills created an environment that allowed for limited change and lack of inclusiveness. There is a growing interest in adult education to conduct research that addresses the need for an understanding of program planning. However, the literature seems to focus on "technical aspects of planning and misses discussing the people work, which alleviates the tensions" (Sandmann, 1993, p. 18). As

Wilson and Cervero have found in their research, "no theory can unambiguously determine whether the actual people selected to construct a program are . . .the right people. Rather the planner must make a practical judgement in each and every situation." (1996, p.12). If their findings are valid then how do adult educators assist older adults in becoming effective and efficient program planners? Future research may help to answer this question.

Much of the study findings involve social issues. The three themes of Recognition, Belonging, and Satisfaction are all linked to the social construction of aging. Research in gerontology has helped to document the social changes that have taken place in the aging process; however, past beliefs tended to characterize aging as a state of decline. Also, past beliefs reinforced the image of older adults as a group of unproductive people who have little to look forward to or to contribute in their older years.

Future research in understanding aging and human development in the next century obviously will play a crucial role in documenting and explaining patterns of work and retirement, learning and education, income, health and disease, mortality, family relationships and roles, and religious life among the demographically increasing number of older adults. Over the past twenty years, insights from phenomenology have begun to add to the knowledge base about older adults (e.g., Birren and Bengtson, 1998; Moody, 1993: Abel and Sankar, 1995). Journals such as the *Journal of Aging Studies*, edited by Jaber Gubrium, and *Contemporary Gerontology*: A *Journal of Reviews and Critical*

Discourse, edited by Robert Atchley, have promoted much need research and critical reflection from an orientation of phenomenology.

Assessment and evaluation of education programs for older adults certainly has room for research and growth. The question of whether older adults show signs of development of their talents, a greater sense of autonomy and an improved self-esteem and sense of perspective after program completion needs to be researched. Adult educators many times have problems answering these questions because they loose contact with participants once the course has ended. The effects of learning activities may be delayed and not revealed until a latter time. Nor can educators be certain of the lasting effects of learning. Research may identify ways to address evaluation not only to what the learners can do what they actually do as a result of their experience.

A major finding of this study emphasized the participants' perceptions of the end product. The most frequent means of evaluation in adult education is the outcome or end product of the learning experience. In the case of the Longevity Leadership Program, the majority of participants voiced a sense of increased confidence in their ability to stay active in the community or become active. Several of the participants demonstrated new understandings and new knowledge about the community. All 12 of the participants involved in the study expressed satisfaction with their own part in the program and several stated that they planned to continue striving towards future goals as a result of participating in the LLP. In the end, the participants were the best judges of whether they got what they needed and they all agreed that they did.

A Concluding Thought

The purpose of this chapter has been to summarize the problem, procedure, and major findings of the study, and to offer recommendations for future research and practice. Clearly, older adults have the control in their pursuit and participation in education programs thus playing a major role in the success or failure of education programs designed for them. Their perceptions and experiences make up a major part of their decision to participate or not to participate in education programs. Because the study was phenomenological in design, the data consisted of detailed descriptions of experiences participants recounted. Considering that the data originated from the participants' perceptions of their experiences, the results of the study reflect the beliefs of the participants. Their experiences helped to provide structure and meaning to their identity by establishing layered experiences that could be simultaneously reflected upon, evaluated, adjusted to, and incorporated. Research literature presents the view that identity is built around themes, without regard to time, as past experiences are symbolically connected with one another to have meaning for a particular individual.

Perception is influenced by personal histories and forms the basis for our worldviews - the set of beliefs that we live by from day to day. Thus, in conducting future research in the area of education and older adults, it may be critical to take into account personal histories of those who are being taught as well as the educators. The study emphasizes the impact that education programs such as the LLP have on participants' lives. While it is important to consider the direct experiences of the participants while in the LLP, it is equally important to consider the impact the program has had on their lives once they had completed the program. As a researcher, one of the

most important findings of the study for me is that educational institutions not only have the responsibility for creating and implementing interesting, challenging, and innovative programs for older adults but they have additional responsibilities to older adults and to society.

Findings of the study demonstrated the lasting affects the LLP had on its participants and the potential for impacting the future actions of the participants in context of their own lives as well as the lives of others. As several participants explained, the accomplishments of the program may only begin when the program has ended. It is the hope of the LLP administrators and LLP alumni members that work done while in the program may bear fruit long after the program is completed.

A few comments to other schools planning education programs for older adults of a similar kind may be helpful. First, the program administrators should expect only limited enrollment. This is usual with any new course, and especially true when the program is designed for one specific age group in mind. More effort should be directed toward recruiting participants. Programs of this type for older adults usually lend themselves to group participation therefore, securing group enrollment is very important. Careful consideration should be taken in choosing the topics to be covered and the method in which they will be presented.

This study includes data about older adults in terms of their perceptions, reflecting on experiences in an education program. Several areas of interest emerged from the data including motivation for participating, the social aspects of learning, and the impact education programs can have once the program is completed. It is important to

remember that the study was based on the reflections of participants from a particular education program; however, the program and its participants may be similar to other programs and older adults involved in similar programs.

Most of all, this study suggests the critical importance of recognizing the prospects as well as the problems involved in providing education programs for older adults in the twenty first century. In broader terms, a society worried about the demographic growth of older adults well into the next millenium will recognize that while more adults are transitioning into their later years in life, the enlargement of their opportunities represents s new frontier for them and society. Harry Sky, a retired rabbi states: "we are a society consisting of the old and the young, teachers and learners. Society is a chain with many links. If one link is weakened then the entire chain is in danger of unraveling. Each link has to be examined and strengthened so that the chain may continue to function-as the symbol of unity to our entire society" (Lamdin & Fugate, 1997, p.177).

In addition to the findings of phenomenological research, participation in the process itself proved useful to the participants. The process of engaging in the interview provided participants with a time for reflection in terms of their participation in the LLP. Additionally, the interview gave them the opportunity to examine their beliefs and values, as well as, recognize their role and identity both in their personal lives and in the community and connect it to their experiences in the LLP.

Finally, as the enrollment of older adults' increase, institutions may need to consider offering programs designed exclusively with older adults in mind. Programs

need to be accessible and the content and method designed to suit the interest and needs of older adults. Research shows that there are many benefits for older adults to glean. This study has revealed several benefits as perceived by the participants (Recognition, Belonging, and Satisfaction). There is also significant research in the area of psychology to support the benefits of education for older adults. For example, Erik Erikson (1963) developed a theory declaring that individuals accomplish certain psychological tasks at specific stages in life. The two stages that are related to the findings of this study are the last two stages, generativity and integrity. Generativity is based on the idea that older adults need to contribute to the lives of younger adults. The LLP participants accomplished this a number of ways by working with university students, primary school age children at the museum, and a variety of other community volunteer programs in the area involving younger individuals. Integrity represents the second stage where older adults make meaning of the learning experiences they have achieved. (Kivnick, 1993). They cannot accomplish this alone they need a group of peers to connect socially. The LLP gave older adults an opportunity to connect with others to affirm themselves both through formal and informal groups. From this one example, it is easy to see that research in education can also be related to research from other fields of study. Future research will hopefully become more comprehensive through research efforts across many disciplines.

A background paper on the positive outcomes of educational opportunities for older adults presented at the 1971 White House Conference on Aging presented the following argument: "Education is a basic right for all persons of all age groups. It is

continuous and henceforth one of the ways of enabling older people to have a full and meaningful life and a means of helping them develop their potential as a resource for the betterment of society" (McClusky, 1970).

Research literature shows that the educational level of older adults has risen and more of them are becoming active in the community. Maybe someday older adults will lead the way in the development of creative and cost-effective education programs that will serve all those who need and desire education. Clearly, education has the potential to enhance the quality of life for older adults. Although there are many changes and improvements that need to be made to education programs, research literature indicates that more and more studies are being conducted in the attempt to prepare and provide for the increasing number of older adults. The continuing development of knowledge about older adults as learners will hopefully guide educators, older adults, and society into a new century where the talents, experience, and wisdom of older adults will not be overlooked but rather appreciated, utilized, and celebrated.

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Appendixes

Appendix A

Field Work Documents

Participant Information Sheet

LONGEVITY LEADERSHIP PROGRAM CASE STUDY

You are invited to participate in a study concerning the beliefs, activities, and education program processes of the Longevity Leadership Program. This research is being done as part of the dissertation of Amy Price in the Ed.D. Program at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to take part in two sessions of about one hour in length with Amy Price who will ask you about your perceptions of the Longevity Leadership Program. You will be asked to talk about the ways the program has affected your life in terms of your status or involvement in the community, your personal relationship to the education program environment, and other effects that you feel are relevant to the understanding of the question. You will be asked to reflect on the questions, and to feel free to add your own comments. You will be asked to reflect on the effects your Longevity Leadership Program experience might have on the remainder of your life as a learner. The second hour will be to review your transcript from the first interview and make any additions or corrections necessary.

You will be required to sign a consent form, which is attached, stating that you understand the conditions of the study. The researcher believes that benefit can be gained from your experiences in the Longevity Leadership Program. The researcher hopes that you will also benefit from the study as you think about the questions and respond to them. No risks are expected to you as a participant in this research.

Your responses will be held in confidence by all researchers involved in this study. The interviews will be audio taped, and these interviews will be transcribed into written form. They will be analyzed later in order to develop a perspective on the ways in which the Longevity Leadership Program has affected your role in the community and as a learner does. You may obtain transcripts of your interviews if you wish when they are finished by writing the researcher at her e-mail address below.

Only the person interviewing you will know your name. All audiotapes and transcripts will be labeled with a code name so that your identity will not be known. The materials will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the home of the researcher for a period of at least ten years following the study.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw from participation or refuse to answer specific questions at any time without penalty. The researcher is available for you to contact her at any time if you have further questions about the study or your participation in it.

Thank you,
Amy S. Price
asprice@earthlink.net
Phone 910 392-4664

LONGEVITY LEADERSHIP PROGRAM CASE STUDY
Consent Form

I understand that the purpose of this study is to gather comprehensive, systematic, and in-depth information about the Longevity Scholar Leadership Program in an effort to explore and create an awareness of the various issues that affect current education programming for older adults.

I understand that the interviews will be audio taped, and that all my responses will be confidential. Code names will be used on all data so that my identity will not be disclosed.

I understand that my participation in the study is completely voluntary. I may withdraw from participation or refuse to answer specific questions at any time without penalty. I understand that the researcher does not expect any risks to me as a result of my participation in this study. The benefits to me are in thinking about the research questions and in helping researchers understand more about the education programming for older adults.

I understand that I am free to contact the researcher at any time if I have further questions about the project or my participation in it.

SIGNATURE: _____

DATE: _____

Appendix B

Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule

1. Tell me about your experience in the Longevity Leadership Program?

2. What was it like to participate in the Longevity Leadership Program?

3. What impact do you perceive that the program has had on your life?

Additional Probing Questions

1. Why did you decide to enroll in the Longevity Leadership Program?

2. What were your expectations prior to beginning the program and were they met?

3. What thoughts or experiences do you recall about the first meeting of the Longevity Leadership Program?

4. How did you learn about the Longevity Leadership Program? Have you recommended it to others?

5. If you had it to do over again, would you go through the program? What would you change?

6. You were a member of the community prior to your participation in the Longevity Leadership Program. How did the completion of the Longevity Leadership Program change your role in the community, if any?

7. Can you give a specific instance as to how the Longevity Leadership Program changed your view of education and/or learning as an older adult?

8. Were there any positive ways the Longevity Leadership Program affected your beliefs about yourself, your ability to learn, participate in-groups, being productive in the community?

9. If you have participated in other education programs for older adults, how would you compare your experiences?

10. Are there any areas where you had expectations of the program that were not met and if so, how would suggest the program could have met these expectations?

11. Do you actively participate in the Longevity Leadership Program Alumni? If so, why? And can you name one specific experience that has been valuable to you. If you are not active alumni is there anything that would encourage you to become an active alumni?

12. Do you have anything else you would like to add to this interview? Anything at all.

Vita

Amy Price attended primary and secondary school in Cleveland, Ohio and completed high school in Richlands, Virginia. She obtained her Bachelor of Music Degree and Master of Science Degree from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Work experience includes public school teaching, financial aid and academic counseling and vocational rehabilitation counseling.

She relocated to Wilmington, NC in May 1998 to begin her research for this study. From December 1998 to present she has served as a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor for the State of North Carolina in Wilmington, NC.