

GENERATIONAL LEARNING STYLES: A PHENOMENOLOGY

by

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Liberty University

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the unique learning styles of American college students from five of the six living generations (for the purpose of this study, it was assumed that members of the GI Generation, born 1901-1926, are not attending college nor are they an active part of the full-time workforce). The theories guiding this study are behaviorism and generational learning theory as it applies to adult learners. The theorists considered are B. F. Skinner and Karl Mannheim. As this study was designed to understand patterns of learning, communication styles, and pedagogical data as it pertains to the post-secondary multi-generational classroom, the following research questions provide the structure for this study: What are the experiences of students who are learning and communicating in a heterogeneous post-secondary classroom? How do students learn to communicate with teachers from a different generation? What are students' experiences concerning educator's ability to address the specific learning needs of each unique generation? The data for this analysis consists of interviews, documents, and focus groups and was analyzed by horizontalization, reduction and elimination, clustering and thematizing, and validation. The identified goal was to understand learning and communication variations between the generations and establish patterns in order to identify best practices for teachers and learners from different generations. The experiences uncovered themes and new patterns which deviated from the review of the literature. Ageism and feelings, communication, and learning and teaching were recurring topics of the participants, but within these themes, there was a cohesive view of post-secondary education from all generations.

Keywords: Learning styles, communication styles, generational study, post-secondary education

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to all of the God-fearing, fierce, stubborn, and educated women in my life. My grandmother, who taught me how to pursue and retain knowledge in her ladylike way. My mother, who has taught me the value of education and how it is never too late. My daughters, who remind me that my influence is strong, and I need to be conscious of what my decisions and life choices are saying to others. And all of the other women have taught me patience, Godly wisdom, tenderness, hospitality, how to keep going no matter how hard things become, how to stay the course, and how to display dignity and grace in all things. Sisters, see yourself in this dedication. I am forever thankful for the life we have shared and the lessons we have learned together.

Acknowledgments

God created me and God has sustained me. He has provided me with a tribe of many who have influenced this process, and I am thankful for all who have walked the path with me from time to time. My world has become full of scholars who have worked hard to obtain their degrees. They have encouraged and influenced me; however, there are two men who have traveled with me my entire adult life- my husband and my son. They have each taught me many lessons and forced me out of my comfort zone to achieve greatness. For this, I will always be humbled and grateful.

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List of Abbreviations

Brown Regional University (BRU)*

Brown Technological Institute (BTI)*

Brown Consolidated Schools (BCS)*

Project-Based Learning (PBL)

*Pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the sites and participants

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

There are currently six living generations in America who have unique learning, communication, and teaching styles which, at times, are not compatible. Society has adopted the term “millennial” for any younger person with a specific set of characteristics. This study examined five of the six living generations and discovered a multigenerational pedagogy for the post-secondary classroom. Chapter One provides a background setting for this study by offering a brief review of the history of post-secondary education and major issues influencing the generations, which was necessary to understand the cultures in each entity.

Background

Within this background section, the researcher provides historical, social, and theoretical information to support the research. Additionally, this chapter provides insight on how this material relates personally to the researcher, presents the problem statement for this issue, provides the purpose of this study, and why it is significant to society. All research questions and definitions are provided in this chapter.

Historical Context

American post-secondary education has a rich and interesting history. Each generation has its own traits, history, and issues (Novak, 2019; Rickes, 2016; Sherman, 2006; Snyder et al., 2019) which influence the pedagogy of the time. The Mature/Silent (born 1928-1945) generation was plagued by multiple life-changing events such as the Great Depression and world wars. During this time, post-secondary educational opportunities were limited as were the sources to fund them (Keating, 2015; Schuh et al., 2011). Baby Boomer’s (born 1946-1964) experience with education was a bit more positive as the government increased funding

opportunities and post-secondary education began to expand (Aucutt, 2019; Schuh et al., 2011). Generation X (born 1965-1980) saw an increase in funding in the form of grants and loans which made higher education more attainable (Lingenfleter, 2018; Schuh et al., 2011). Each of these generations was devoid of electronic technology in the personal usage sense (Lai & Hong, 2014). Their education was delivered in a more traditional sense which required listening to lecture, handwriting notes, reading text from a book, and memorization without the aid of electronic technology (Schuh et al., 2011). On the other hand, Generation Y (born 1981-1997) and Generation Z (born after 1997) are considered digital natives (Lai & Hong, 2014). They are accustomed to instant access to any information they desire. This has created a tremendous gap between students and teachers in the post-secondary education arena.

The Mature/Silent generation was greatly influenced by the Great Depression and is a generation dedicated to friends and family (Novak, 2019; Sherman, 2006). They work hard at their jobs and are loyal to their companies. They also make up some of the higher-level faculty administrators (Ricketts, 2009) in higher education. The Baby Boomer generation grew up during a turbulent time in history. This generation is confident and questioning. They challenge traditional social rules (Novak, 2019; Sherman, 2006). While the Boomers comprise a larger majority of faculty and administrators in higher education, they also began retiring in 2008.

Generation X is a group that has been described as “cynical and disconnected” (Ricketts, 2009, p. 8). Additionally, they are also described as independent. Many in this generation grew up in a home with both parents working, divorced parents, and/or single-parent homes (Walker et al., 2006). They now make up a large majority of the faculty and staff of institutions of higher education (Ricketts, 2009). It is important to note that Generation X is a smaller group due to societal birth trends (Novak, 2019). Additionally, Generation X’s history includes times of hope,

despair, revolution, a fight for equality, liberation, war, materialism, and the beginnings of the rise of electronic technology. This greatly influenced their parenting styles, work ethic, and social awareness (Novak, 2019; Sherman, 2006).

Millennials, also known as Generation Y, are a group of individuals who were born into reasonably comfortable times. They were planned for and wanted by their parents. As students, they have been raised in a world of electronic technology, excess of choices and material items, and a focus on self (Rickes, 2009). This has influenced their learning and communication styles. They have unique learning and communication styles that can create a challenge for teachers who are not of the same generation. There is a gap in the electronic technology skills of older generations and a disconnect between the communication styles (Lai & Hong, 2014). Higher education teachers need to learn specific teaching techniques to meet the needs of their students. On the other hand, as members of these younger generations become educators themselves, how can they adapt to the needs of older, non-traditional students who may/may not be comfortable with the teaching style and technological requirements of a younger instructor?

Educators now have the responsibility of teaching all generations in a plethora of combinations of student/instructor, but there seems to be a gap (McChesney & Bichsel, 2020; Snyder et al., 2019). This gap appears in the world's use of electronic technology (Lai & Hong, 2014), teaching styles, and communication (McChesney & Bichsel, 2020; Snyder et al., 2019). Educators must address the specific learning needs of these unique generations without compromising their educational integrity. In addition, they must possess the skills to communicate effectively in the classroom environment while creating an inclusive atmosphere for all ages.

Social Context

While the professors in today's colleges may have come from a world devoid of advanced electronic technology, today's college student knows no other way. Students may come from a high school that provided technology that included a laptop for students to access eBooks, email from teachers, and homework assignments. They have smartphones and tablets, are fluent in texting language, and have an app for everything. Sanchez (2016) stated, "The change in the traits and needs of the learner is forcing the educational system to adapt to the learner, and not vice versa" (p. 1). This is a crucial point.

The research in this transcendental phenomenological study focused on the preferred teaching and communication style in addition to the specific learning needs of the students based on the generation they represent. Educators will benefit from the research as it demonstrates the needs of each generation while exploring ways to accommodate each learning and communication style in the classroom setting. This includes technological needs and comfortability as seen through the eyes of the student.

Theoretical Context

The theories guiding this study were a combination of learning theories as they related to each generation's unique learning style. Skinner's (1966) theory of behaviorism, as it applied to adult learners, along with Mannheim's (1936) generational theory provided the scaffolding for study. These theories supported the complicated field of generational learning. In addition, these theories provided a deeper explanation of the psychological needs of the adult learners in each generational cohort.

There is a contradiction between what the research shows is needed for younger students and what is being offered. Skinner (1966) and Mannheim's (1936) works illustrated why the multigenerational classroom is a challenge. Older professors will teach what they know, and this

tends to be lecture or what may be referred to as “sage on the stage.” This approach works for some, but many students are tech-savvy, multitaskers, and quick thinkers with a short attention span. This is the complete opposite of how the traditional college lecture may be delivered.

As the current literature does not address the complexities of communication and learning styles combined in the post-secondary classroom, more research is needed. The literature provides background, history, and characteristics of the generations but is lacking the in-depth connection between these generational characteristics, how to address them in the post-secondary classroom as one cohesive unit, and how students will learn best under these complex circumstances.

Situation to Self

When I was teaching at a small mortuary college, I had the opportunity to take customer service training which focused on the differences between the communication styles and leadership needs of individuals from different generations. I began to consider this application in the classroom as I had students ranging in age from 17-63. I had noticed a difference in preferences for specific assignments and teaching styles. Additionally, I found that students of a certain age would appreciate the teaching style of educators who were of their own generation or were of the same generation as the majority of their previous teachers.

At the end of the students’ course work, they took a capstone-type course. It was a series of reflective activities that allowed the students to express their feelings about the mortuary program, assignments they liked (and did not like), and teaching styles they preferred. I took this data and developed a bi-annual report. This crude research began to reveal patterns in learning and teaching styles. This is where my interest in generational learning styles began. I wanted to further my interests by developing a phenomenological study that will explore these generational

differences while finding ways to combine the needs and preferences of each generation into one, cohesive teaching pedagogy.

Prior research gave us knowledge of the generational characteristics and, as a cohesive group, how they communicate and learn. This phenomenological study was conducted from an ontological perspective employing the pragmatic paradigm as I looked for the causatum of multiple generations in the higher education arena. Pragmatism allowed for the researcher to focus on the issue and allowed the participants to present their experiences without being committed to a specific philosophy (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As the researcher, I sought a solution to the problem which came from the participants. Creswell and Poth (2018) described ontological researchers as individuals looking for “multiple realities” (p. 20) within the context of the research. The research in this phenomenological study provided the experiences of individuals from different generations and discover their experiences and preferences. These experiences provide a great advantage to stakeholders as the experiences gave an insight into generational learning in post-secondary education that has previously not been explored. The epistemological assumption was therefore represented by getting as close to the participants’ experiences as possible (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The extensive interviews and focus groups allowed for this type of detail to be discovered. Axiologically, my own experiences as a college student could lead me toward a bias of which I was constantly aware. The experiences of the individuals guided the research, not my own feelings or experiences concerning generational learning in post-secondary education.

Problem Statement

The problem is there are currently six living generations in America who have unique learning and teaching styles, which, at times, are not compatible. Students may become

discouraged by higher education if it is not delivered in a way that can be understood. Educators now have the responsibility of teaching each unique generation, but there seems to be a generational gap between educators and the ability to understand these students. This may include electronic technology, which can be linked to preferred learning and teaching styles (Lai & Hong, 2014). Considering the age differences in today's higher education classroom could be as much as 60 years or more (Snyder et al., 2019), it was hypothesized the research in this study would reveal ways to create a multi-generational pedagogical approach to higher education.

The research concerning generational learning is copious, but is saturated with data concerning Millennials and has all but overlooked the newest and youngest generation of college students, Generation Z (Allen & Jackson, 2017; Blue & Henson, 2015; Borges et al., 2010; Gerhardt, 2014; Karthikeyan, 2017; Meyers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Rickes, 2009; Sanchez, 2016; Schlee et al., 2019). Additionally, there exists research concerning how to teach each specific generation but not how to create a multi-generational approach in higher education (Allen & Jackson, 2017; Borges et al., 2010; Rickes, 2009; Sanchez, 2016; Wilson & Gerber, 2008). Educators must find a way to bridge the generation gaps that now exist. Failure to do so could lead to high student attrition rates as students may view higher education as too difficult or impossible to understand.

Mannheim (1936) stressed the influential factor of historical-social experiences (Scott, 2000). The historical events that have taken place in each generation have had an effect on their views of education, preferred learning and communication styles, and their view of authority (Scott, 2000). Additionally, the generation gap caused by the electronic technology explosion that has permeated our culture (Borges et al., 2006) creates further barriers. Many students today do not know of any other way than our instantly gratified, overly stimulated culture. Urlick

(2019) recognized there is research concerning how different generations learn in homogenous groups, but there is little research on heterogeneous learning groups. Boyle et al. (2018) recognized generational differences as it pertains to leadership styles and how leaders of specific generations choose to communicate and lead subordinates. This information leads us to recognize there are generational differences in learning styles and communication, but how do we blend this into the post-secondary classroom for the most effective learning?

The research conducted for this phenomenological study provided data from former and current college students from five of the six living generations. For the purpose of this study, the GI Generation was excluded. This generation is currently aged 94-119. Research shows this generation enrolls in postsecondary education at a much lower rate than other students (if at all). It is assumed these individuals would not be attending college at the time of this study. Additionally, any information obtained from this group would be shortly outdated as this generation will not be an active part of the population in the next 10-15 years. The percentage of post-secondary students over the age of 65 comprises 0.3% of all college students (Appendix A) which would include the Baby Boomer generation, but not necessarily the GI Generation. The researcher examined the learning preferences and preferred teaching styles of college students from the Mature/Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y/Millennium, and Generation Z/Boomers. These students were selected using two factors: identified generation and student status. The research included current or former college students from each identified generation.

Currently, there is a tremendous amount of research concerning Millennials (Allen & Jackson, 2017; Blue & Henson, 2015; Borges et al., 2010; Gerhardt, 2014; Karthikeyan, 2017; Meyers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Rickes, 2009; Sanchez, 2016; Schlee et al., 2019), but the lack of

research concerning post-secondary educators teaching heterogenous groups of students from five of the six living generations in the United States is concerning. Colleges employ and enroll individuals spanning an age difference of as much as 60 years (Snyder et al., 2019). Educators and students need to understand each other in order to maximize the learning and teaching environment. This transcendental phenomenological study contributes to the current research in a unique way by providing research on generational learning and preferences while combining these truths into a cohesive, post-secondary multi-generational pedagogical design.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experience of college students who have been educated by a professor of a different generation in three southern Indiana institutions of higher learning. Generational compatibility in higher education will be generally defined as how generationally heterogeneous classrooms communicate and learn. The theories which guided this study are Mannheim's (1936) generational theory and Skinner's (1966) learning theory of behaviorism as it pertained to adult learners in the post-secondary, multi-generational post-secondary classroom. These theories are a combination of learning and generational theory as they relate to adult learners in the generationally heterogeneous classroom.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for many reasons. Discovering the experiences of students from the multi-generational classroom will add to the knowledge base of generational and pedagogical theoretical communities. This research is similar to the studies done by Cox et al. (2019), Polat (2019), and Swanzen (2018) as the researcher considered the experiences of how different generations learn from each other; however, this study provides new information from the lived

experiences of students who are learning in a multi-generational classroom. Currently, there are several studies which detail generational learning in a homogeneous group, but little to no research on teaching heterogeneous classes in post-secondary education has been conducted. Additionally, while there is copious research concerning the Millennial generation (Allen & Jackson, 2017; Blue & Henson, 2015; Borges et al., 2010; Gerhardt, 2014; Karthikeyan, 2017; Meyers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Rickes, 2009; Sanchez, 2016; Schlee et al., 2019), Generation Z has not been fully researched as it pertains to heterogeneous groups in post-secondary education. Incorporating these individuals into the research with the other generations will provide a more comprehensive approach to teaching.

This research contributes to the theoretical fields of generational learning by providing a deeper explanation of the psychological needs of the adult learners in each generational cohort. Skinner (1966) and Mannheim's (1936) work has previously shown why the multigenerational classroom is a challenge, and this study provides a deeper understanding and great detail of the problem. As the participants shared their experiences, the application of the theories of Skinner (1966) and Mannheim (1936) developed a modern-day application not previously known.

Urick (2019) recognized there is research concerning how different generations learn in homogeneous groups, but there is little research on heterogeneous learning groups. Boyle et al. (2018) recognized generational differences as it pertains to leadership styles and how leaders of specific generations may view their subordinates. This information forms the realization that there are generational differences in learning styles and communication (Boyle et al., 2018; Buskirk-Cohen et al., 2015; Scott, 2000; Wilson & Gerber, 2008). This study provides educators and students a detailed analysis of the current generational issues within post-secondary education. Combining previous research with this phenomenological study revealed patterns and

provides pedagogical data which will aid educators, and in turn, students in the post-secondary multi-generational classroom. Additionally, the analysis of the research provided alternative teaching methods for the post-secondary, multi-generational classroom.

Research Questions

As this study was designed to understand patterns of learning, communication styles, and pedagogical data as it pertains to the post-secondary multi-generational classroom, there were four specific research questions that provide the direction for this study.

Research question 1: What are the experiences of students who are learning and communicating in a heterogeneous post-secondary classroom?

Question 1 was designed to completely understand the experiences of students who are learning in today's complex college classroom. The unique characteristics of each generation (Novak, 2019; Rickes, 2016; Sherman, 2006; Snyder et al., 2019) must be understood in order to honor the specific needs of each cohort. The literature details specific learning and communication styles for each generational cohort (Boyle et al., 2018; Buskirk-Cohen et al., 2015; Scott, 2000; Wilson & Gerber, 2008), but what was the student experience concerning these styles? Educators must understand the multi-generational classroom (Sanchez, 2016) in order to provide quality education and communicate effectively with all students. This understanding must come from the student perspective

Research question 2: How do students learn to communicate with teachers from a different generation?

Research question 2 addressed the student's need to understand the educator. If students understand generational differences (Novak, 2019; Rickes, 2016; Sherman, 2006; Snyder et al., 2019), they may develop effective methods of communication and find ways to learn from an

instructor who may seem to be incompatible. It is necessary to understand how (or if) students can learn to communicate with their instructors from a different generation. As post-secondary education is experiencing a declining enrollment (Skylar, 2018), more information is needed about the student experience in order to enhance attrition rates.

Research question 3: What are the students' experiences concerning educators' ability to address the specific learning needs of each unique generation?

Research question 3 addressed the pedagogical understanding (Sanchez, 2016) of educators as viewed through the students' experiences. Educators who are teaching ineffectively may be doing so from a place of misunderstanding. Understanding generational theory and learning styles (Buskirk et al., 2015, Gerhardt, 2014; Taylor & Hamdy, 2013; Wilson & Gerber, 2008) will help educators develop effective curriculum (Allen & Jackson, 2017; Blue & Henson, 2015; Lai & Hong, 2014; Nilson, 2016; Schlee et al., 2019). This couples with research question 2 as the student experience should be the main guiding force for enhancing instruction.

Definitions

1. *Baby Boomers*: individuals born between 1946-1964 (Boyle et al., 2018)
2. *Brown Regional University (BRU)*: *pseudonym* for a traditional four-year public university, offers multiple degree options for college students located in southern Indiana
3. *Brown Technological Institute (BTI)*: *pseudonym* for a two-year community college located in southern Indiana
4. *Brown Consolidated Schools (BCS)*: *pseudonym* for a rural school corporation with approximately 95 full time educators located in southern Indiana
5. *Covid-19*: a respiratory illness in humans caused by a coronavirus, capable of producing severe symptoms and in some cases death. Originally identified in China in 2019 and

became pandemic in 2020 (Thirkell et al., 2021).

6. *Electronic technology*: any informational technology and equipment which may include telecommunication, office equipment, and the World Wide Web (University of Washington, 2019)
7. *Generation X*: individuals born between 1965-1980 (Boyle et al., 2018)
8. *Generation Y/Millennials*: individuals born between 1981-1997 (Boyle et al., 2018)
9. *Generation Z/Boomers*: individuals born after 1997 (Schmitt & Lancaster, 2019) for various levels of enjoyment (Ainley & Ainley, 2011).
10. *Mature/Silent Generation*: individuals born between 1928-1945 (Boyle et al., 2018)
11. *Project-Based Learning (PBL)*: teaching style which involves authentic learning experiences and activities which promote active student participation (Yoshikawa & Bartholomew, 2017).

Summary

We are living in a unique time period in history. We currently have six living generations in America who have unique learning and teaching styles which, at times, are not compatible. Educators now have the responsibility of teaching each unique generation, but there seems to be a gap in the understanding of these students. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to develop an understanding of the learning and communication style variations for college students from five of the six living generations in the United States and discover what their experiences are concerning teaching methods that will engage learners in each generation. The current literature addresses pieces of the problem but does not incorporate it into useful, workable information for post-secondary students and educators of all generations.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A systematic review of the literature was conducted to explore the problem of the unique learning and teaching styles of the six living generations in America. Educators have the responsibility of teaching each unique generation, but there seems to be a void between generations as it concerns learning and communication styles. The disparity includes electronic technology which can be linked to preferred learning and teaching styles which can be substantial considering the age differences in today's higher education classroom could be as much as 60 years or more (McChesney & Bichsel, 2020; Snyder et al., 2019). The aging population is expected to increase by 20% by 2030 (Black & Hyer, 2018), and this complex multi-generational cohort now fills American post-secondary classrooms.

This chapter reviews the current literature concerning this topic. The first section provides the theories that pertain to adult learning and generational theory, which is the basis of the study. In the related literature section, the history of post-secondary education and historical issues each generation has faced are considered. This is followed by specific traits of each generation (Mature/Silent: born 1928-1945, Baby Boomers: born 1946-1964, Generation X: born 1965-1980, Generation Y: born 1981-1997, Generation Z: born after 1997), classroom application, and technological disparities with older generations compared with technological reliance younger students experience. This chapter concludes with known teaching strategies which are found within the literature such as the flipped classroom and project-based learning. It is important to note that none of these strategies include how to teach the multi-generational post-secondary class of students.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework provides the foundation upon which a study is built. The theories guiding this study are a combination of learning and generational theories as they relate to each generations' unique learning style. Mannheim's (1936) generational theory and Skinner's (1966) learning theory of behaviorism will provide the scaffolding for study. Specific aspects of Skinner's work that are considered consist of verbal behavior (Frost & Bondy, 2009; Skinner, 1966) and the social-emotional response to communication (Banks et al., 2013; Skinner, 1966). These theories focus on the experiences of the individual (Taylor & Hamdy, 2013; Yardley et al., 2012) and how these experiences allow individuals to learn.

Mannheim's (1936) generational theory considered the geographical and historical locations of individuals (Connolly, 2019) and stated "the understanding of generations cannot be done merely in a quantitative way...a thorough understanding...relies on...inner lived experience" (Costa et al., 2019, p. 567). Additionally, every generation has specific communication styles (Buskirk-Cohen et al., 2015; Gerhardt, 2016; Wilson & Gerber, 2008) that may collide with the style of another generation causing conflict. Mannheim's (1936) focus was on social interactions between individuals of "organized social groups" (Sagarin & Kelly, 1970, p. 295) who had lived during the same time period in history (Sagarin & Kelly, 1970; Van Rossem, 2019). He believed that historical time periods, and the issues which occur during these periods, influence the perception, ideas, and social change specific generations exhibit (Cox et al., 2019; Duxbury & Ormsbee, 2020). Mannheim (1936) also contributed to the belief that one's generation group greatly influences their perception of the world (Cox et al., 2019; Milkman, 2017; Sagarin & Kelly, 1970).

Mannheim (1936) considered the events that occurred during an individual's childhood and early adulthood as the events that would shape their worldview. Buskirk-Cohen et al. (2016) stated the phrase "emerging adulthood" (p.25) would apply to this time period. Emerging adults are between the ages of 18-25. It is during this time individuals are developing more complex thinking and reasoning skills. These cognitive changes could even be described as revolutionary or dramatic for the individual (Buskirk-Cohen et al., 2016). As groups of individuals of the same developmental stage experience specific historical events, social trends, and political movements, a generational cohort is created (Milkman, 2017). Mannheim's theory is based on this premise. As the brain is developing, these physical and emotional events influence the brain and allow a situation where individuals of a certain age possess similar thought patterns and world views (Buskirk-Cohen et al., 2016; Milkman, 2017). This would include their learning and communication styles.

Skinner's (1966) theory of behaviorism was built on the foundation of consequences or reinforcers. These could be positive or negative (Day, 2016; Vargas, 2017). Individuals respond to the reinforcer in the way they have learned through experience. When an individual is young, he/she will observe the examples of behavior around them (Vargas, 2017) and this would include communication styles. Skinner (1966) recognized that these observed behaviors and the consequences they brought about would evoke an emotional response (Vargas, 2017). When individuals are willing to consider the behavioral responses to communication and include other factors such as generational cohort, more meaningful interactions will take place (Vargas, 2017). It is reasonable to conclude that learned behaviors would be generationally similar considering the historical context.

Experiential learning, or learning from one's experiences (Yardley et al., 2012), and generational theory (Costa et al., 2019; Cox et al., 2019; Mannheim, 1936; Wilson & Gerber, 2008) are linked in a way that cannot be denied. The older an individual is, the more experiences and opportunities for learning have been presented. Of course, this does not mean the individual has learned from the experiences, but the opportunities have been presented. Individuals build knowledge by linking experiences together constructing new knowledge (Polakova & Klimova, 2019). Frost and Bondy (2009) provided a link to experiential learning and communication by applying Skinner's (1966) theory of verbal behavior when they stated, "verbal behavior [is] behavior reinforced through the mediation of other people" (p. 2). Learning occurs when individuals receive a response from another individual. Polakova and Klimova (2019) stated that more effective learning would take place in an environment in which social interaction is the focal point. This may appear to be oversimplified, but individuals who have not had the experiences to learn the appropriate responses may be at a communicative loss. Skinner's (1966) thoughts on behavior further develop this concept as, "behavior is held to be significant only in meeting certain standards or criteria" (p. 213). This would include application to the multi-generational post-secondary classroom.

Considering emerging adults' (Buskirk et al., 2016) brains that are still in development, what they are learning during this time of development would be highly influential and influence the individual over the course of their lifetime. Skinner (1966) advocated for a deeper understanding of behavior in order to predict it, and in turn, control it (Staddon & Bueno, 1991). This would apply to the post-secondary learning arena as pedagogy seeks to "control" the efficiency of the student learning experience. Skinner (1966), in a similar fashion to Mannheim, looked to the behavior of the individual prior to considering what may be occurring at the

neurological level (Staddon & Bueno, 1991). Skinner (1966) and Mannheim's (1936) theories would suggest that the behavior of an individual has been shaped by their experiences and the influence of the world around them. Discovering the experiences of the post-secondary student is the focal point of this research.

Mannheim (1966) believed that studying generations provided a guide to understanding social structure (Hoolachan & McKee, 2018; Parry & Urwin, 2011; Van Rossem, 2019). His theory included two identifying markers for members of a generational cohort - the same year of birth and a common historical location (Hoolachan & McKee, 2018; Van Rossem, 2019). This historical location refers to a location in history rather than a geographical location, though it could include a physical space (Duxbury & Ormsbee, 2020; Parry & Urwin, 2011). These factors would create a similar identity and bond within the historical social context (Hoolachan & McKee, 2018; Parry & Urwin, 2011). These factors would be highly individualized, but also share commonalities.

Experiential learning, supported by the learning theories of Skinner (1966) and combined with the generational theory of Mannheim (1936), explained the differences in how individuals of varying ages perceive information. Lived experiences provide learning opportunities for growth in a cognitive way (Polakova & Klimova, 2019). Older individuals have been provided more opportunities for growth and understanding which may contribute to a lack of communicative understanding with younger individuals who have not experienced as much. These varying levels of understanding could cause strife in the multi-generational post-secondary classroom. This literature review provides details on these theories and their role in the generationally diverse post-secondary classroom.

Related Literature

There are currently six living generations in the United States today. A generation is marked by the years during which specific individuals were born. Typically, this is a period of 20-25 years (Alkire et al, 2020). These generations are intermingled into society bringing their own unique set of characteristics (Novak, 2019; Osterman, 2019; Polat et al., 2019; Rickes, 2016; Sherman, 2006; Snyder et al., 2019) which have been influenced by the historical period in which these individuals have lived (Alkire et al., 2020; Hoolachan & McKee, 2018; Osterman, 2019). Generational cohorts also share cultural identity which may include fashion, music, slang, and a general attitude (Cox et al., 2019; Polat et al., 2019). Mannheim suggested the very thoughts of these generational cohorts would be similar (Duxbury & Ormsbee, 2017; Sagarin & Kelly, 1970). These generations can be seen as the force that moves social change (Van Rossem, 2019), but the type of change desired varies with each generation. Today, multiple generations are in the workplace together and are attending post-secondary education together. It is estimated that almost half of American college students are over the age of 25 and represent the fastest growing college population (Simi & Matusitz, 2016). Additionally, instructors of post-secondary classes span the generations. Older teaching younger, younger teaching older, and same age teaching same age (McChesney & Bichsel, 2020; Snyder et al., 2019). This mixture provides a plethora of teaching and learning combinations.

While there may be individuals who were born prior to 1928 still living today, the G.I. Generation, this generation has been excluded from the research and review. It is assumed these individuals would not be engaging in post-secondary education at a measurable level. Each of the remaining generations has documented traits that influence their communication and learning styles (Novak, 2019; Polat et al., 2019; Rickes, 2016; Sherman, 2006; Snyder et al., 2019).

Generations are comprised of individuals who live alongside one another and exhibit specific trends and traits (Polat et al., 2019). The life experiences, along with the world events and technological advances have developed these generations into groups that have specific communication styles, expectations, and learning styles. Each generational cohort displays these unique likenesses, but the differences between the birth cohorts are vast and must be addressed in order to create a post-secondary classroom which can bridge the void that exists.

Generational Post-Secondary Education History

Post-secondary education and the attitudes concerning its importance have changed over the years. Current events, such as economic crisis and war, have shaped the attitude of Americans toward education (Scott, 2000). Generational cohorts have been greatly influenced based on the current events of their time, but especially the events during the formative years of childhood (Connolly, 2019) and events which could be described as traumatic (Moore et al., 2017). The literature discussed this and provided an outline of events which have developed the attitudes and traits of the generational cohorts (Novak, 2019; Rickes, 2016; Sherman, 2006; Snyder et al., 2019). The literature is consistent concerning the characteristics of the generations, and post-secondary education is one part of the formative events of the generations.

The beginnings of post-secondary education are very humble. For example, well-known Transylvania University began in 1780 in a cabin in Kentucky (Wright, 2019). Its roots were firmly planted in religion as its earliest board members and presidents were leaders in their religion. Apprenticeship was a common form of vocation-based education during this time (Moore et al., 2017), and the early higher educational academics focused on law and medicine (Wright, 2019).

The Morrill Act of 1862 was a “land-grant college system” (Moore et al., 2017, p. 117)

which allowed more colleges to develop additional liberal education opportunities in the fields of agriculture and mechanics (Moore et al., 2017) and aided the growth of higher education.

During the late 1800s, education shifted toward more practical fields of study (Aucutt, 2019).

Slowly, the focus moved from apprenticeships to a more classical model of higher education (Moore et al., 2017). This classical model of higher education is similar to what we see in our modern times.

During the Great Depression (1929-1939), higher education developed a barter system with its students and faculty (Carlson, 2020; Schrecker, 2009). Of course, during that time many individuals were suffering and starving. Mature/Silent era individuals were experiencing these types of hardships. Education was not seen as an absolute necessity, but these formative years of higher education allowed slow-moving growth and careful planning for the future. This gave way to our modern time period which is marked by financial success and commercialism influencing higher education decisions (Aucutt, 2019) with many degree choices.

In 1942, the United States was facing a different kind of hardship- world war. The Second World War impacted secondary education as male students were going to war, not to school (Aucutt, 2019). However, in 1944, the GI Bill brought a surge of enrollments to higher education (Aucutt, 2019). The need was greater for advanced technological training due to advances the war brought to the world (Moore et al., 2017) and many government-sponsored research programs were spawned during this post war time which led to more educational opportunities (Moore et al., 2017).

While the 1950s and 1960s experienced tremendous social change, it was the 1970s that brought about a huge shift in higher education and an increase in enrollment by 227% (Aucutt, 2019; Lingenfelter, 2018). This growth was influenced by the American ideal of attaining more

wealth through education. Additionally, a greater understanding of the value of higher education was emerging (Lingenfelter, 2018). Individuals did not view college as a luxury. College became a practical necessity.

After the great shift and increase in enrollment, post-secondary education became a way for individuals to obtain a greater socio-economic standing (Aucutt, 2019). However, the beginning of the 21st century brought about new changes to higher education (McChesney & Bichsel, 2020; Snyder et al., 2019). Large cuts in funding and tuition increases made college a very expensive choice. Despite this, enrollment grew by 27% (Lingenfelter, 2018; Snyder et al., 2019). Societal changes, changes in an individual's life trajectory, and longer life span has led to a generationally diverse post-secondary learning environment (Simi & Matusitz, 2016).

Socio-economic factors, such as the "burden of baby-boomer retirement" (Lingenfelter, 2018, p. 11) are now changing the focus of federal funding. Younger individuals may find themselves harboring resentment to the older generations who, through no fault of their own, are making higher education more challenging to obtain. These historical factors influence each generational cohort. As they each possess unique generational characteristics, this will influence the attitudes they bring into the post-secondary classroom.

Generational Characteristics of the Generations

As previously mentioned, each of the generational cohorts exhibits specific characteristics (Fishman, 2016; Lowell & Morris, 2019; Novak, 2019; Rickes, 2016; Sherman, 2006). Their historical experiences have influenced their communication and learning styles (Connolly et al., 2019). The literature is consistent as it pertains to these generational characteristics (Fishman, 2016; Novak, 2019; Rickes, 2016; Sherman, 2006). Understanding these generations, in addition to their unique learning and communication styles, is imperative in

the multigenerational post-secondary classroom. This understanding can minimize issues that may arise due to miscommunication (Hu et al., 2004).

As the generations are considered, it is important to note there is some fluidity with the dates of the generations. In order to preserve consistency, the dates agreed upon by Boyle et al. (2018) have been used. Additionally, the generational cohorts are described as a whole, with specific attention being given to attributes the majority possesses. Assuming that all individuals of a specific generational cohort have acquired identical characteristics would be unjustified (Desai & Lele, 2017). It is also reasonable to ascertain those individuals who were born to older parents or younger parents might display characteristics of a generation before or ahead of their birth year. Again, these cohorts are described with the majority in mind. Most studies find more areas of commonalities than differences (Parry & Urwin, 2011).

Table 1 discusses the characteristics of each generational cohort. The table discusses general characteristics, preferred communication styles, classroom learning preferences, and other generations with whom compatibility is suggested by the research.

Table 1

Characteristics of the Generational Cohorts

Generation	Characteristics	May Be Compatible With	Preferred Communication Type	Learning Needs
Mature/Silent (born 1928-1945)	Traditional values	Baby Boomers	Letter	Instructor-driven lectures
	Disciplined Cautious Hard workers Respect for authority Conformity	Gen Y	May be uncomfortable with technology	Structured and predictable

	Command and control leadership			
Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964)	Grew up in a time of conflict and economic reconstruction Overindulged by parents Rebels against conformity Question authority Self-righteous Team oriented Involved Optimistic Personal gratification important Value work	Mature/Silent Gen Y	Love meetings Telephone E-mail	Group interactions and discussions
Gen X (born 1965-1980)	Independent Ambitious Grew up in peaceful world Easily influenced by the opinions of others Team based work Less overregulation High level of education Pragmatic and skeptical Use internet to expand knowledge	Mature/Silent Gen Z	Brief, structured meetings E-mail Text message	Clear instructions Don't waste time- get to the point

Loyalty to self
 Distrust or ignore authority
 Impatient
 Cynical
 Cautious

GenY/Millennials
 (born 1981-1997)

Highly tolerant
 Take part in humanitarian action
 Strong desire to do more
 Social networks and online communication are essential
 Internet main source of information
 Influenced by word of mouth
 Respect authority
 Expect respect returned
 Schedules are important
 Self-confident
 Value conformity and commitment

Mature/Silent
 Baby Boomers

Email, text, instant messages
 First digital natives

Group activities
 Instant feedback

Gen Z
 (born after 1997)

Fast
 Impatient
 Easily transitions

Gen X

Wearable smartphones
 Technology is everything

Clear goals
 Feedback
 Rewards



from activity to
activity
Short attention
span
Know what
they want and
how to get it

(Boyle et al., 2018; Dabija et al., 2018; Houk, 2011; Karthikeyan, 2017; LaBan, 2013; Novak, 2018; Polakova & Klimova, 2019; Sherman, 2006)

The Mature/Silent Generation

The Mature/Silent Generation was born between 1928 to 1945 (Boyle et al., 2018). This group is currently between the ages of 75-92. They were influenced by the Great Depression and are dedicated to friends and family. They work hard at their jobs and are loyal to their companies. Their views of the world may involve conformity, responsibility, and expect younger people to be respectful and quiet (LaBan, 2013). It could also be said this generation believes in doing what everyone else is doing, going with the flow, and not standing out in the crowd. This generation believes in traditional values, is cautious, and loyal (Novak, 2019; Rickes, 2016; Sherman, 2006). They are avid readers of newspapers (Novak, 2019) and make up some of the senior faculty and administrators in higher education (McChesney & Bichsel, 2020). McChesney and Bichsel (2020) stated that 13% of all post-secondary faculty are 65 years and older. This group would be comprised of the Mature/Silent and Baby Boomer generations. While it is true this generation is the smallest of the five studied generations (LaBan, 2013), the influence of this generation cannot be ignored. Many (if not most) of this generation are retired (LaBan, 2013). They have lived through major historical events such as the Great Depression and World War II (Lehto et al., 2006). The experiences of this generation have included many hardships (Lehto et al., 2006). Sharing this wisdom through living and showing empathy with

generations who may have experienced or are experiencing similar issues is valuable. This could be done from the teacher role or the student role.

There are very few studies concerning this generation as it pertains to post-secondary education, but characteristically, this generation values tradition. Education, to them, would be represented by classroom-style teaching (Houck, 2011) with a teacher lecturing to a room of attentive students, and may view student/teacher collaboration as disrespectful. Their traditional view might include books, paper, and pencils which may be hard to find in the modern-day classroom. They may have learned to use electronic technology but would prefer “the way things used to be.” The children of this generation, Baby Boomers, also value traditional education, but with a twist.

The Baby Boomer Generation

The Baby Boomer generation was born between 1946 to 1964 (Boyle et al., 2018). They are currently between the ages of 56-74. They grew up during a turbulent time in history. Civil rights, sexual freedoms, women’s rights, and war all framed this generation (Lehto et al., 2006; Stark & Poppler, 2018). As a result, this generation is confident and questioning and wants to be heard (Black & Hyer, 2018). Unlike the Mature/Silent Generation, Baby Boomers do not appreciate conformity and want to be in control (Fishman, 2016; LaBan, 2013). This generation pushes the boundaries. They challenge traditional social rules (Boyle et al., 2018; Novak, 2019; Rickes, 2009; Rickes, 2016) and are self-righteous and focused on their personal needs (Novak, 2019). Baby Boomers would also like for the community to conform to these personal needs with generation-specific choices (Black & Hyer, 2018). This group is also the first generation who experienced television and divorce on a grand scale (Novak, 2019). While the Boomers comprise “roughly half of current higher education faculty and staff” (Rickes, 2009, p. 8), they

also began retiring in 2008. Their view of aging is also not traditional. They consider themselves the antithesis of getting old (Mellan & Christie, 2017).

Second to Generation Y, or Millennials, Baby Boomers have had a lot of research studies conducted about them (Houck, 2011; Hu et al., 2004; Kumar & Lim, 2006; Lehto et al., 2006; Leiter et al., 2009; Lowell & Morris, 2019). Born during a postwar economic boom (LaBan, 2013), Baby Boomers have sought a lifestyle of overindulgence with a strong work ethic (LaBan, 2013; Stark & Poppler, 2018). Researchers have been interested in Baby Boomer's recreational habits (Kumar & Lim, 2006; Lehto et al., 2006), what they are buying, and how they are living (Lowell & Morris, 2019). They have also been described as "materialistic workaholics" (Stark & Poppler, 2018, p.77). Baby Boomers enjoy having material items that symbolize their success (Mellan & Christie, 2017).

As Baby Boomers began retiring in 2008 (Lehto et al., 2006; Rickes, 2009) their work habits have changed. Although retirement could have begun for some in 2008, in 2011, they were considered the majority in the workforce (Houck, 2011). This is consistent with the research which shows Baby Boomers value work and as mentioned previously, they could even be called workaholics (Hu et al., 2004; Leiter et al., 2008; Stark & Poppler, 2018). In 2006, they were considered to have the highest disposable income of all the generational cohorts (Kumar & Lim, 2006). While Baby Boomers value stability in their career (LaBan, 2013), they are also concerned with spiritual and personal growth (LaBan, 2013). This growth could include higher education. As they retire, they may want to continue their "workaholic" pace and pursue education as a way to spend their time (Mellan & Christie, 2017).

Lowell and Morris (2019) stated that Baby Boomers comprise one of the four most prominent generations in the post-secondary classroom. They could be in a teaching role or

student role. However, their lack of experience with and exposure to technology (Lowell & Morris, 2018; Swanzen, 2018) puts them at a disadvantage. This generation challenges the rules, and this makes anything possible (Boyle et al., 2018; Novak, 2019; Rickes, 2009; Rickes, 2016), but they may be limited in the technology field which is a huge disadvantage. That being said, Baby Boomers are dreamers (Bisciaio, 2020). Mellan and Christie (2017) stated an important way to connect with Baby Boomers is to make them feel valued and recognize the life they have already lived. Their children, Generation X has a more cynical view of life.

Generation X

Generation X was born between 1965 to 1980 (Boyle et al., 2018). The cohort is currently between the ages of 40-55. Most of these individuals were born to Baby Boomers. This group has been described as cynical, disconnected, and independent (Boyle et al., 2018; Fishman, 2016; LaBan, 2013; Novak, 2019; Rickes, 2009; Rickes, 2016; Swanzen, 2018). Many in this generation grew up in a home with both parents working, divorced parents, and/or single-parent home (Novak, 2019; Rickes, 2016; Sherman, 2006; Walker et al., 2006).

Due to a higher rate of single-parent families, Generation X was labeled the original “latchkey generation” (Leiter et al., 2008). The label comes from the reality of children coming home to an empty house often carrying a key around their neck in order to obtain entry into the home. This hallmark of the Generation X cohort was a direct result of the need for both parents to work outside of the home or the higher incident of single-parent families (Lovko & Ullman, 1989; Stark & Poppler, 2018). This factor alone could account for this generation’s desire to be independent and prefer working alone (Leiter et al., 2008).

Though one of the smaller generational cohorts (Duxbury & Ormsbee, 2020), Generation X now makes up at least one-third of the faculty and staff of institutions of higher education

(Rickes, 2009), but as the Baby Boomers continue to retire, this number will increase. It is important to note that Generation X is a smaller group due to societal birth trends (Novak, 2019); however, Generation X and Baby Boomers gave rise and birth to the Millennials (Boyle et al., 2018; Novak, 2019; Rickes, 2009; Rickes, 2016). Generation X's history includes times of hope, despair, revolution, fights for equality, liberation, war, materialism, and the beginnings of the rise of electronic technology. This greatly influenced their parenting styles, work ethic, and social awareness (Boyle et al., 2018; Novak, 2019; Rickes, 2009; Rickes, 2016; Stark & Poppler, 2018). As this cohort could be described as cautious and skeptical, their values do not match the traditional view of the Mature/Silent Generation, who are most likely their grandparents (Fishman, 2016; Novak, 2019). The skeptical nature of this generational cohort is further displayed by their lack of faith in the job market (Fishman, 2016; Stark & Poppler, 2018; Swanzen, 2018).

Education is very important to this generation (Dabija et al., 2018; Houck, 2011; Lowell & Morris, 2018). They view education as a necessary way to attain career goals (Houck, 2011). This generation is also an informed consumer and will make choices about purchases and investments based on reviews (Herrando et al., 2018; Osterman, 2019). Generation X is concerned about their work performance and the titles that may go along with promotions and higher education (Hu et al., 2004). They seek forward movement (Parry & Urwin, 2011) and are ambitious (LaBan, 2013). However, this generation began changing over the workforce to a team approach (Hu et al., 2004). Individual accomplishments are extremely important, but so is the work of the team. Generation X wants a complicated mix of freedom, flexibility, good communication, and a team approach (Fishman, 2016; Hu et al., 2004; Lowell & Morris, 2018; Parry & Urwin, 2011).

Although Generation X wants good communication, one of the negative aspects of this cohort is their abrupt nature (Fishman, 2016; Houck, 2011). This generation wants to get to the point because there is something else they need to do. Adept multitaskers, Generation X is always looking for the next thing to move them up (Houck, 2011; LaBan, 2013) in the world. Their use of technology is a large part of information gathering and an essential part of daily life (Dabija et al., 2018). The quick, instant information provided by the internet appeals to the information-minded, multitasking Generation X. Though not digital natives, they have been introduced to electronic technology at a young age. They have grown up alongside technology's advancement and transformation and have become quite adept with technology (Herrando et al., 2018). Their children, Generation Y, have a very different view of technology and the world around them.

Generation Y or Millennials

Generation Y includes the children born between 1981 to 1997. They are currently between the ages of 23-39 and are the largest generational cohort alive at this time (LaBan, 2013). Generation Y or Millennials (Boyle et al., 2018), were "eagerly anticipated by their parents" (Wilson & Gerber, 2008, p. 30) and have been cared for very well. They have been nurtured and protected from any sort of danger or harm. They have been "buckled, watched, fussed over, and fenced in by wall-to-wall rules and chaperones" (Wilson & Gerber, 2008, p. 30). Sheltered is a word that could also be used. This over-attentive parenting style is likely a result of Generation X's childhood which more than likely included a lot of time spent alone while parents were working (Leiter, 2008; Stark & Poppler, 2018). Most parents had the best of intentions, but they have created a very unique group of young people.

Never knowing a time without advanced electronic technology, this group possesses characteristics of being a native to the digital age: multitasking, dependence on peers and teamwork, short attention span, need for quick responses (or instant gratification), have an aversion to large amount of text to read, have a preference for images, and are goal-driven (Fishman, 2016; Karthikeyan, 2017; Lai & Hong, 2014; Sanchez, 2016; Stark & Poppler, 2018), but not power driven (Parry & Urwin, 2011). They also process some types of information at a rate five times faster than their elders (Herrando et al., 2018). They have been told over and over again that they are special, and the relaxed parenting style of Generation X has produced a group of individuals who prefer recreation and having fun to working hard (Novak, 2019) with an inflated sense of self (Stark & Poppler, 2018). The data also shows that Millennials are less religious than their parents and grandparents (Twenge et al., 2015) which speaks to the relaxed, fun-loving, self-centered nature of this generation. Although they tend to question the future, they do not fear change and move from job to job frequently (LaBan, 2013).

Though some have adopted the term “Millennial” to encompass anyone younger than a Baby Boomer (VanDerWerff, 2018), this has overshadowed the individuality of this generation. Multiple studies have been conducted on this generation, but many studies have missed the mark by including young people who are a part of their own generational cohort (VanDerWerff, 2018), Generation Z. Generation Y is currently between the ages of 23-39 (Boyle et al., 2018); they are not young teenagers. They are, however, technology driven (Dabija, 2018; Herrando et al., 2018). Their desire for technology could even be described as a “reluctance to use anything that is ‘not digital’” (Dabija, 2018, p. 192). As technology is viewed by Generation Y as essential, the rift between previous generations is evident (Houck, 2011). Older generations may

understand technology, but not the need for it to be foremost in one's life (Houck, 2011; Parry & Urwin, 2011).

The communication style of Generation Y could be described as conversational, but also needy as this group prefers constant feedback and praise (Fishman, 2016; Houck, 2011; Stark & Poppler, 2018). This group needs more conversation and direction (Sherman, 2006) which could be frustrating for older cohorts who prefer a more direct and to the point approach (Sherman, 2006). However, Generation Y is also impatient. They want the instant gratification and feedback they receive in their digital world to be duplicated in their relationships (Fishman, 2016; Karthikeyan, 2017).

Generation Z

Generation Z began in 1997 (Boyle et al., 2018). Any individual born after 1997 would be considered a member of this generational cohort and the oldest members of this generation are currently 23. These individuals and their parents, primarily Millennials, are also considered to be digital natives as they do not know of a time when advanced electronic technology was not available (Herrando et al., 2018; Lai & Hong, 2014). They cannot fathom a world without the internet, cell phones, and/or information provided instantly (Herrando et al., 2018; Robinson, 2018). This has influenced their communication and learning styles tremendously. Generation Z seeks genuineness and honesty (Robinson, 2018) and are savvy consumers who have been saturated with ads, commercials, and branding. This has created a cohort who knows what they want and how to get it (Novak, 2019; Rickes, 2016). Generation Z is a private group with a cynicism that rivals Generation X (Grow & Yang, 2018).

Generation Z has been born into a time like no other. In just the past 10 years this generation has seen devastating hurricanes, mass shootings, political upheavals, racial division

(Pruitt, 2020) and a global pandemic. Social and economic instability have surrounded this cohort (Chicca & Shellenbarger, 2018, Pruitt, 2020). This generation is always living on the edge but has a tendency to give up easily when something is too challenging (Moore et al., 2017). Pew Research Center asked teachers to rate their Generation Z students. The teachers overwhelmingly (almost 80%) stated their students were not able to find difficult information (Moore et al., 2017) which supports the idea of giving up when something is a challenge (Moore et al., 2017). This has produced a group of cautious individuals, but also a group who is open to diversity and accepting of differences (Chicca & Shellenbarger, 2018; Swanzen, 2018).

Generation Z desires change (Grow & Yang, 2018) and desires meaningful feedback (Moore et al., 2017). This is a group of individuals who are logical, intelligent, and while they adhere to some traditional values, they are prepared and willing to push social change (Grow & Yang, 2018). As a group, they are more conservative in their view than their Generation Y parents and siblings (VanDerWerff, 2018). This is a complex dichotomy that represents the best and the worst of the generational cohorts.

Generational theory suggests that generational characteristics are repeated every fourth cycle (Rickes, 2016) making the historical parallel to Generation Z the Mature/Silent generation. This can be seen in the resurgence of seemingly antiquated activities such as board games and coloring books (Rickes, 2016). The common theme is a desire to replace technology with tactile experiences. This also forces the participants to engage in communicating with each other (Rickes, 2016). Generation Z also struggles with higher education and views it as expensive. This cohort appreciates lifelong learning and more trade-oriented training (Houck, 2011). This mirrors the Mature/Silent generation's view of education.

Generation Z desires change, but the type of change that sends them back to older traditions and activities similar to what their great, great grandparents may have engaged in. However, studies show that Generation Z is socially immature and may not know how to interact appropriately (Chicca & Shellenbarger, 2018). This creates an intricate social and intellectual quandary. This generation may be challenging to teach as they must also be taught social skills when they reach adulthood.

Differences in experiences, communication styles, and expectations can present challenges to educators who were raised in other generations. Younger people feel the older generations are condescending toward them and may perceive their blunt, to the point communication style as rude (Giles et al., 2010). Younger teaching older and older teaching younger now exists in our higher education classrooms (Snyder et al., 2019). There is a generation gap in communication and learning styles which has, in part, been contributed to by the electronic technology explosion that has permeated our culture. The literature documents the specific traits of each generation and supports the theories of Mannheim (1936) and Skinner (1966). However, there is a deficiency in studies as it pertains to communication, learning, and teaching in the multigenerational, post-secondary classroom and addressing the needs of this complex composition as a cohesive unit.

Post-Secondary Classroom Implications

Higher education can be described as a service and part of the service industry (Osterman, 2019). Consumer perception is important. Today, the higher education classroom is filled with diversity. Students from all generational cohorts are attending college and comprising a multigenerational classroom. In 2017, it was reported that up to 40% of part-time enrollment in higher education was individuals over the age of 35 (Lowell & Morris, 2018). Preferred

learning styles and technology use are just one aspect of this challenging mixture. Older students are all but forgotten as the typical college targets marketing to younger, high school graduates (Simi & Matusitz, 2016). It is only logical to conclude that teaching styles in the post-secondary classroom would be designed to meet the needs of the targeted market, high school students, or Generation Z. This could lead to a higher dropout rate as adult, non-traditional students drop out of college without obtaining a degree at a higher rate (Simi & Matusitz, 2016).

The value of having a generally diverse classroom cannot be overlooked. Adult learners bring qualities to the classroom their younger classmates do not yet possess and are the fastest-growing college population (Simi & Matusitz, 2016). Not only do they bring life experience to the classroom, but they also have their own generation-specific values which add richness to the classroom environment (Boyle et al., 2018; Dabija et al., 2018; Houk, 2011; Karthikeyan, 2017; LaBan, 2013; Novak, 2018; Polakova & Klimova, 2019; Sherman, 2006). In addition to the unique values and experiences, older adult students have a vast variety of reasons for attending college (Simi & Matusitz, 2016). While high school students may graduate and follow the path of higher education because they are expected to, older adult students have specific reasons for post-secondary education. Some of these reasons include changes in marital status, loss of job or career, or even their own children attending college and encouraging parents to return (Simi & Matusitz, 2016). All of these factors add to the professor's teaching resources if they know how to best utilize them.

Sherman (2006) identified issues as they pertain to coaching and mentoring a multi-generational cohort. These concepts translate into the classroom well. The Mature/Silent Generation is more comfortable with one-on-one mentoring and traditional, formal instruction (Polakova & Klimova, 2019; Sherman, 2006). Baby Boomers prefer to be coached in a peer

setting and appreciate public recognition (Sherman, 2006). Generation X prefer merit-based recognition and want monetary rewards for a job well done (Sherman, 2006). Millennials appreciate personal feedback, but also tend to exit an experience that is not meeting their needs (Sherman, 2006). Burton et al (2019) noted that Generation Z need copious praise and want to know their teachers care about them (Miller & Mills, 2019). On the other hand, if professors over saturate young students with praise, the overlooked non-traditional student may feel left out as they need encouragement as well (Simi & Matusitz, 2016).

Communication styles also vary greatly. The Mature/Silent Generation prefers direct communication that takes the form of face-to-face or written (Novak, 2019; Rickes, 2016; Sherman, 2006). This generation will also view the instructor as an authority figure who expects students to raise their hand and to be called upon before speaking (Polakova & Klimova, 2019). Baby Boomers are less formal. They also prefer face-to-face, but phone calls and email are also acceptable (Boyle et al., 2018; Novak, 2019; Rickes, 2009; Rickes, 2016). Meetings are important to Baby Boomers (Houck, 2011) and the social aspect of the classroom for a Baby Boomer could be described as democratic (Polakova & Klimova, 2019). Generation X enjoys technological-based communication and information that “gets to the point.” This cohort is impatient and appreciates content that is relevant (Polakova & Klimova, 2019). They are informal with their communication but prefer communicants to make a quick point (Houck, 2011). Millennials prefer instant feedback (Boyle et al., 2018; Novak, 2019; Rickes, 2009; Rickes, 2016), but only when it is favorable, as they have a difficult time accepting negative feedback (Polakova & Klimova, 2019). They enjoy teamwork, email, chat rooms, and texting (Polakova & Klimova, 2019; Sherman, 2006). Generation Y wants interactive meetings with lots of conversation and collaboration (Houck, 2011). Generation Z is a combination as they

utilize technology in a way the other generations do not, but they also desire face-to-face communication similar to that of the Mature/Silent generation (Rickes, 2016). On the other hand, Generation Z is socially immature and may not possess the skills to interact with other generations at an acceptable level (Chicca & Shellenbarger, 2018). It is easy to see how/why all of these generations in a post-secondary classroom could create conflict (Cismaru & Iunius, 2020).

Conflict resolution is also a concern. Each group possesses characteristics that are to be valued in the post-secondary classroom. However, “younger generations tend to turn task and procedural conflicts into relationship conflicts” (Burton et al., 2019, p. 15) and, as society becomes more reliant on electronic technology, younger generations need to be patient with older generations who may not be as tech-savvy. Baby Boomers and Generation Y tend to be optimistic and could clash with Generation X’s and Z’s cynical nature (Houck, 2011). As these issues merge in the multigenerational classroom, miscommunication and misunderstanding may create friction between students and faculty.

Electronic Technology Use

One issue that produces a glaring disparity is electronic technology use. As Costa et al. (2019) stated, “the understanding of generations...include[s] their social and historical location” (p. 574), in order to understand electronic technology use and the implications of requiring its usage, we must look at generational history and experiences. One study suggested that almost half of the Mature/Silent and Baby Boomer generations are afraid of technology (Hu et al., 2004) and may struggle with the ever-changing technological world (Shatto & Erwin, 2017). The technology expectations of both students and staff could be overwhelming (Lowell & Morris, 2018). It is quite possible that students may be more versed in advanced electronic technology

than their instructors (Clark, 2017). Younger generations are comfortable with electronic technology-based research while older generations may not know where to start (Costello et al., 2004). This could add to the older student feeling left out or behind before they even started (Simi & Matusitz, 2016).

In addition to the differences in comfortability with electronic technology, there is the factor of distractibility. Electronic technology use in the classroom has been found to be a distraction and inhibit learning (Schneider, 2018). Older generations may appreciate this fact and not use electronic technology during classes, but younger generations may be lost without their cell phones (Polakova & Klimova, 2019; Urick, 2016). It is also important to note the means by which assignments are completed.

Research is no longer done with books and library searches, but web-based searches and digital information. This may also produce an instructional issue in the post-secondary classroom- especially for older generations. It may also be challenging for older generations to accept the fact that Generation Z uses web-based searches, such as Google, to find “the solution for every problem” (Polakova & Klimova, 2019, p. 207) instead of using critical thinking skills. Additionally, younger generations prefer to multitask by using multiple forms of their own technology such as cell phones and computers (Shatto & Erwin, 2017). However, as Generation Z looks to connect to the past by revisiting hands-on, technology-free options (Rickes, 2016), the post-secondary classroom may see a need to reintroduce hard copies of textbooks, paper, and pencil. The research supports this method of learning as Swanzen (2018) stated that new technology in the classroom does not necessarily “improve learning and teaching outcomes” (p. 134).

Teaching Strategies

The literature presents specific teaching strategies for each unique generation, which will be considered in this section. However, there is a lack of understanding of how to combine instructional strategies for the multigenerational classroom. As electronic technology has already been established as a complicating factor by the literature, specific teaching strategies for each individual generation will be reviewed. These will be reflected in the communication and learning preferences of each generational cohort.

The traditional college experience could be described as teacher-centered, and “in the teacher-centered classroom, students place all of their focus on the teacher, students generally work alone, and collaboration is discouraged” (Allen & Jackson, 2017, p. 17). This style of teaching may appeal to the Mature/Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, and Generation X, but “students often find teacher-centered classroom boring” (Allen & Jackson, 2017, p. 18). The students described here are more than likely Millennials and Generation Z. These two cohorts are tech-savvy multitaskers who are also quick thinkers with a short attention span (Ricketts, 2009; Ricketts, 2016). They prefer to have their information in shorter chunks, Generation Z is also looking for more face-to-face experiences (Ricketts, 2016) with meaningful life applications (Zimmer, 2018). This is the complete opposite of how the traditional college lecture may be delivered. As these groups have grown up with instant feedback from video games and well-meaning parents, they expect the same from their educators (Wilson & Gerber, 2008). Educators do well to plan well in advance of having the Millennial and Generation Z students in their higher education classroom. One example would be the student-centered classroom (Allen & Jackson, 2017).

Allen and Jackson (2017) described the student-centered classroom as a classroom where “everything is centered on the goal of student learning” (p. 17). It may be hard for older

generations to adapt to this style of teaching. Conversely, the younger generation's learning styles require them to see why they need to learn something. They will not be satisfied with learning for the sake of learning. They also want to have some collaboration or choices in the classroom content (Karthikeyan, 2017; Rickes, 2009; Rickes, 2016). Generation Z is also seeking real-world education and information that has meaningful application in their lives (Zimmer, 2018).

Two forms of student-centered learning are the flipped classroom and project-based learning or PBL. As previously discussed, the younger generational cohorts appreciate collaboration and group work. The flipped classroom changes the role of the teacher (Betihavas et al., 2016; Cukurbasi & Kiyici, 2017). The teacher steps out of the direct instructor role and provides video instruction and guides the students to understanding (Cukurbasi & Kiyici, 2017). The teacher is not providing the information as the content expert. This concept may be confusing for older generational cohorts as they view professors as experts in their field and expect value in their education (Osterman, 2019).

PBL is similar to the flipped classroom as it encourages student-led exploration. The students are led to discover a problem to solve. The problem must be authentic in that it has a real-world context (Yoshikawa & Bartholomew, 2017). Once the example has been presented, the students further their learning by engaging in simulations and industry connections. They dig into the problem in order to find solutions (Yoshikawa & Bartholomew, 2017). While PBL speaks to the need for Generation Z to have practical application of their learning (Zimmer, 2018) just as the flipped classroom may be problematic for older generations, PBL may not be viewed as a valuable type of education (Novak, 2019; Rickes, 2016; Sherman, 2006).

Millennials and Generation Z rely on each other for support, learning, and information (Adamson et al., 2018; Schlee et al., 2020). Collaborative learning is something they are familiar with (Alfonseca et al., 2006). This is a drastic contrast to older generations. Baby Boomers tend to be more individualistic, but appreciate more group discussions (Burton et al., 2019; Clark, 2017). Generation X is not team-oriented and even more individualistic than Baby Boomers (Burton et al., 2019; Clark, 2017). In this varied group, it is challenging for an instructor to find the balance to keep all students engaged. According to Picciano (2019), group work has become more common in post-secondary classrooms. This style of pedagogy meets the needs of Millennials and Generation Z (Schlee et al., 2020), but not the older generations who prefer a more independent approach. Clark (2017) noted that when these preferences differ so greatly, conflict may erupt. Consider, too, the short attention span of Generation Y and Z. They are accustomed to short bits of visual information (Polakova & Klimova, 2019). All of these factors must be taken into consideration.

Once the teacher has a well-planned curriculum, the next consideration would be the students themselves. Karthikeyan (2017) stated, “Millennials are looking for leaders who care about people. Millennials tend to want to know why” (p. 606). Generation Z need real-life application and meaningful lessons (Zimmer, 2018), but also appreciate an instructor who demonstrates a caring attitude (Miller & Mills, 2019). As mentioned previously, Millennials and Generation Z like group work and interaction with their peers. They need instant feedback, but they are also smart. They want to be respected, talked to, be a part of the team, and enjoy structure (Karthikeyan, 2017). This type of teaching and learning style may be viewed as disrespectful to the generational cohorts who have a tighter view of traditional teaching and high respect for authority (Novak, 2019; Rickes, 2016; Sherman, 2006).

Knowing that Millennials and Generation Z have a shorter attention span and prefer interactive, group-based learning (Sanchez, 2016; Seemiller & Clayton, 2019), it is not surprising that they learn well from “kinesthetic and visual learning activities over traditional teacher-centered and text-based practices” (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010, p. 228). This pedagogical truth is demonstrated in the video gaming habits of these generations. Rich, visual games with fast-paced action driven by rewards and bonuses have been part of these generations’ past times (Adamson et al., 2017). It is crucial for educators to note that “studies demonstrate that after ten minutes, students lose interest” (Allen & Jackson, 2017, p. 20). Generations Y and Z learn visually and prefer short bits of information (Chicca & Shellenbarger, 2018). A long, 60-minute lecture is not going to engage these students though it may be expected by older generations who are expecting value for their money as they are informed consumers (Osterman, 2019). On the other hand, the digital native student needs to be involved and given shorter chunks of information to consider (Chicca & Shellenbarger, 2018). They need to discuss it, analyze it, and work through the facts together (Allen & Jackson, 2017; Rickes, 2016). These younger generations need to be nurtured as they are educated (Chicca & Shellenbarger, 2018), and this is a reality that not all post-secondary classrooms are ready for.

As the Mature/Silent and Boomer generations retire, the classroom will naturally change. The “‘sage on the stage’ will be gradually replaced by the ‘guide on the side’ approach” (Rickes, 2009, p. 12), and while this is consistent with the needs of younger generations, it does not meet the needs of older generations. It is necessary for today’s educators to think outside of the box, no matter what generation they were born in. Creating lessons that are more than busywork is vital for engagement, but how to incorporate this with the needs of the older generations and communicate in a universal language is the problem. In order to develop a curriculum that

provides equality, these many factors of generational differences must be addressed (Lowell & Morris, 2018).

Summary

Educators now have the responsibility of teaching all of the living generations in a multi-generational post-secondary classroom. Mannheim (1936) and Skinner (1966) provided the theoretical framework and concepts concerning how these multi-generational individuals learn and interact. These theories are supported by the literature which outlines specific generational cohorts (Novak, 2019; Rickes, 2016; Sherman, 2006). Many younger students are not satisfied with the traditional lecture and a PowerPoint. The literature supports this as the characteristics of the younger generations are considered. Wilson and Gerber (2008) stated that younger generations, and Millennials, in particular, have a “sense of being special” and a “general distaste for doing ‘busy work’ that shows no relevance to personal goals” (p. 33). This fact is a stark contrast to older generations who display higher respect for authority and expect their instructor to be the expert who teaches them everything they need to know (Novak, 2019; Rickes, 2016; Sherman, 2006).

While the professors in today’s colleges may have come from a world devoid of advanced electronic technology (Clark, 2017), today’s traditional, straight out of high school, college student knows no other way. When students enter college, they have high expectations which may include access to eBooks, email from teachers, and access to homework assignments online. They have smartphones and tablets, are fluent in texting language, and have an app for everything. Sanchez (2016) stated, “the change in the traits and needs of the learner is forcing the educational system to adapt to the learner, and not vice versa” (p. 1). This is a crucial point. The instructor must find a way to keep all generational cohorts engaged and actively learning.

This point is further emphasized by the fact that more than 80% of today's high school students intend on furthering their education (Zimmer, 2018).

If institutions of higher learning want to keep their younger generation students engaged, they must make positive changes based on the needs of the students, but these changes cannot exclude older cohorts. Older students may already feel excluded as most post-secondary institutions are marketing to a younger population (Simi & Matusitz, 2016). Many studies have been done on the Millennial generation (Allen & Jackson, 2017; Gerhardt, 2014; Karthikeyan, 2017; Myers & Kamyab, 2010; Pickes, 2009; Sanchez, 2016; Wilson & Gerber, 2008). Society has been oversaturated with studies concerning "what to do" with Millennials. Most of these studies came to similar conclusions. Millennials require a different approach and anyone working with this generation needs to know how to reach them and keep them engaged (Allen & Jackson, 2017; Cismaru & Iunius, 2020; Gerhardt, 2014; Karthikeyan, 2017; Myers & Kamyab, 2010; Pickes, 2009; Sanchez, 2016; Wilson & Gerber, 2008). On the other hand, there is little to no information on how to teach the newest, youngest generation, Generation Z, along with the older generations in the same post-secondary classroom.

Educators must be willing to embrace change. The Millennial and Generation Z learner has a shorter attention span, need for instant results, hands-on projects, and reassurance that what they are learning has a practical value (Sanchez, 2016; Zimmer, 2018). Interactive games, art, music, utilizing electronic technology in the classroom (such as laptops and cell phones) may be ideas for teachers to use to help get started, but older generations may not be able or willing to adapt to this style of teaching. Older generations prefer a more traditional approach that may consist of lecture, note-taking, and tests (Novak, 2019; Rickes, 2016; Sherman, 2006).

Generation Z is emerging as a learning group that prefers both styles but may be looking for a more traditional approach as well (Rickes, 2016).

The gap in understanding between each generation has deep roots. As each generation has had influential world events that have molded and shaped attitudes and communication styles (Aucutt, 2019; Cismaru & Iunius, 2020; Lingenfelter, 2018), there must be a way to bridge the divide. Avoiding the issue could lead to misunderstandings, conflict, and individuals missing out on the wealth of other generational cohorts' skills. Additionally, electronic technology usage is a concerning issue. The post-secondary classroom might utilize forms of electronic technology older generations find challenging while other classrooms may not incorporate enough electronic technology to keep younger generations engaged (Polakova & Klimova, 2019; Urick, 2016).

Educators must be ready to change, learn, and grow from this generation of tech-savvy, fast-paced individuals who have high expectations. This will take patience, tolerance, and communication, but the literature does not address how to accommodate all generations in the post-secondary classroom as a heterogeneous group. This pedagogical truth must be addressed as the learning and communication styles of each generation are so vastly different. Only then will post-secondary education be able to offer exactly what the heterogeneous college classroom is currently lacking.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This transcendental phenomenological study explored the current post-secondary educational issue of communication and learning preferences of multiple generations in the classroom. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the learning and communication style variations from the experiences of college students from five of the six living generations in the United States. These shared experiences provide data which will lead to a greater pedagogical understanding of the multi-generational post-secondary classroom. Each section of this chapter develops the greater details of the research design, the setting, participants, detailed procedures, interview questions, and how the data will be analyzed.

Participants were chosen via purposeful sampling utilizing email. Permission was sought from the colleges' and school corporation's official personnel in order to contact current and former students and employees asking for volunteer participation based on the criteria of being a current or former college student. Interested individuals were given access to a Google form that categorized the individuals based on gender, credit hours completed, whether or not they ever took a class with an instructor from a different generational cohort than themselves, and willingness to participate. Data from this survey allowed the researcher to choose current and former college students from three institutions that have been chosen for convenience. Two to three individuals from each of the five studied generations were selected. Interviews were conducted with each individual and then, focus groups were conducted. The data was analyzed, coded, and studied with an emphasis on patterns the data contained. This study was conducted with all trustworthiness and ethical considerations. This chapter concludes with a discussion on

the credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, and ethical considerations the researcher will employ during the research phase of this study.

Design

This qualitative study utilized the phenomenological study research design. Qualitative research may involve observation of a group in a natural setting (Almutairi et al., 2014; Yin, 2014), but the qualitative researcher also seeks to understand a social issue by immersing his/herself into the world in which the subject of research can be found. The subject of this research was the post-secondary learner from five of the six living generations. A phenomenological study approach was valid as this provided detailed information about a small group, employing methods such as “interviews, observations, documents, and artifacts” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 105). Additionally, this research sought to describe and attribute meaning to the individuals’ experiences, which also supports the phenomenological design (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological study design was similar to a case study in that it will be used to contribute to the current knowledge on topics in the social science fields (Yin, 2014) by attributing meaning to the experience of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). Additionally, the modern phenomenological study researcher has many resources at their disposal including electronic technology and computer programs designed to organize data (Almutairi, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The research has been developed around a “contemporary issue...within its real-world context” (Yin, 2014, p.16), but also, this study sought to develop detailed information concerning the post-secondary educational issue of multiple generations in the classroom. The transcendental phenomenological study design was selected in order to provide a deeper understanding of the experiences of post-secondary students from their specific generational

perspective. This specific design was intended to focus on the phenomenon (multiple generations in the post-secondary classroom) and evaluate the problem of how to teach and communicate in a way that reaches all ages. The data collected during the interview process provided description and reflection on the student experience (Moustakas, 1994). The data is far-reaching.

Research Questions

Research question 1: What are the experiences of students who are learning and communicating in a heterogeneous post-secondary classroom?

Research question 2: How do students learn to communicate with teachers from a different generation?

Research question 3: What are the students' experiences based on educators' ability to address the specific learning needs of each unique generation?

Setting

The setting for this study was comprised of three educational institutions in southern Indiana. The sites were sites of convenience. Individuals from each of these institutions provided the basis for individuals who were considered for the study. The institutions consisted of a university, a community college, and a school corporation. Participants from each institution were selected in order to gain an understanding of generational learning styles from a variety of post-secondary institutions. Purposeful sampling was the selection method. A total of eleven individuals (two-three representatives from each of the studied generations) were selected for this study. After weeks of recruitment, the researcher was unable to find three representatives from each generation. Two participants from the Mature/Silent generation began the participant selection process but did not complete it. The institutions did not influence the

definitive patterns of communication and learning styles of the individuals.

Prior to selecting individuals based on their generational cohort, a general information email seeking volunteers was created. This email asked for any current or former college students who may be interested in participating in a research study to complete a short informational Google form (see Appendix B). The Google form included the self-identified generation of the potential participant. This allowed the researcher to sort potential participants by generation, thus narrowing the field to participants to individuals who meet the study criteria. It is important to note that the sites chosen were that of convenience, but the majority of the participants came from BRU, BSC, and the secondary sampling method of snowballing. Pseudonyms have been given to the institutions to preserve anonymity.

Brown Regional University (BRU), a traditional four-year public university, offers multiple degree options for college students. BRU consists of a student body that is 61% women and 82% white (NCES, 2020). BRU is the only institution in the study that offers graduate degrees. It is important to note that 83% of all graduate students are over 25 years of age (NCES, 2020). A majority of local students obtain their four-year degrees from BRU, even though the graduation rate is a mere 36% (NCES, 2020). The faculty of this university is also generationally diverse (Snyder et al., 2019), and the student-to-staff ratio is 26:1 (NCES, 2020).

Brown Technological Institute (BTI) is a popular two-year community college. Many students begin their educational journey here and transfer to BRU. BTI offers associate degrees in many fields. The student population is 58% female (NCES, 2020). The majority of the students is white at 71% (NCES, 2020). Students of all ages attend this college, and the faculty is generationally diverse (Snyder et al., 2019). The overall graduation rate is 25% (NCES, 2020), but that could be attributed to the transferability of classes to BRU. BTI is smaller in

comparison to BRU but has an impressive student-to-staff ratio of 9:1 (NCES, 2020).

Brown Community Schools (BSC) is comprised of three elementary schools, a middle school, and a high school. It is estimated there are 94 full-time educators (INView, 2021). These educators are current and former college students. The area has a lower percentage of college graduates than other places in the state therefore, utilizing the school corporation, with known college attendees, was a logical choice as a site of convenience to add to the pool of potential participants.

Participants from these institutions were chosen for multiple reasons with the most basic reason being convenience. Narrowing the field to these three provided a logical pool of individuals to consider for the phenomenological study. Additionally, individuals of all generations attended and are employed by each of these institutions (Snyder et al., 2019). As these institutions only provide the setting for the sample selection and are convenient to the researcher, a visit to each site is not necessary. The research revealed specific learning styles and miscommunication between students and educators of differing generations no matter the type of learning institution as was anticipated.

Participants

The general population for this study was college (current and former) students. College students who had completed at least 24 credit hours at an accredited college and who have taken a class with an instructor who is not a member of the student's generational cohort were considered for participation. Participants for this study were chosen using purposeful sampling (Coyne, 1997; Suri, 2011). Creswell and Poth (2018) stated this type of sampling is used when the researcher chooses participants who will provide purposeful information which can "inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (p. 158). The

sample size was based on the minimum requirement of 15 participants which translates into three individuals from five of the six living generations as outlined previously. In the event of participant attrition, the researcher reexamined the initial pool of volunteers to find a replacement for the lost participant. This action ensured the validity of the study and secured the required number of participants.

One male and one female from each generation were chosen, when possible, with no preference given to the third participant whether male or female. A combination of snowball and criterion sampling strategies was used (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Criterion sampling was chosen due to the specific nature of the research questions. Participants met the following criteria: completed at least 24 credit hours at an accredited college and had at least one class with an instructor who was not a member of the participant's generational cohort. It was necessary to specifically choose individuals from each generation to be focused on. Choosing at least one male and one female from each sample allows for equal representation of gender. The secondary sampling method of snowballing was used in order to obtain knowledge of individuals who may not have been previously known as willing participants in the likely event that enough participants are not recruited during the initial recruitment period. Participants self-identified their generation after considering the information found in Table 2.

Table 2
Generational Cohort Self Identification Chart

Year Born	Generational Cohort
1928-1945	Mature/Silent
1946-1964	Baby Boomer
1965-1980	Generation X

1981-1997	Generation Y/Millennial
After 1997	Generation Z/Boomerlet

No other characteristics of the chosen generation were revealed at the time of choosing in order to maintain the validity of the data.

Procedures

As the institutions listed in this study are sites of convenience and were not utilized beyond providing a base for potential participants, the study does not involve the institutions themselves, and all cited information is public, the beginning approval came from Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once approval was obtained the recruitment of participants began (see Appendix C). Recruitment was a multi-step process. In order to utilize email databases for research participants, permission was obtained from the institutions. The next steps included a pilot study followed by the actual recruitment of research participants.

A pilot procedure involved requesting two college students to review the Google form for clarity of the questions. These individuals were utilized to pilot the interview and focus group questions as well. This pilot procedure involved an email requesting participants for the study. The email was sent to individuals who were identified through the sites of convenience. These college students (former and current) were asked to complete the Google form. Informal questioning about the clarity of the form and ease of use was then conducted. This type of informal questioning allowed the participants of the pilot study to offer feedback and clarify any misunderstandings. The pilot participants were then asked to participate in an interview to pilot the questions (see Appendix D). The focus group interview questions were also piloted at this time (see Appendix E). The data obtained was used to ensure the questions on the form,

interview questions, and focus group questions provide enough information for reliable criterion sampling. No changes were deemed necessary. Once the peer-reviewed and piloted questions were approved, recruitment for research participants began.

The email which was utilized in the pilot procedure and was composed utilizing the Liberty University Recruitment Template was the recruitment tool. The email asked any current or former college student who may be willing to participate in a research study to complete a short survey. This email was sent to individuals who were part of the institutions which are included in this study. Over a course of a month, emails were sent out to potential participants.

A mass email was sent to BSC. This was followed up by a reminder email which was sent two weeks later. This group of emails numbered about 200. The researcher emailed all BRU faculty and requested they post the approved recruitment message in their Canvas classrooms. This group numbered about 125. The student emails for BRU and BTI were accessed via a student directory. BRU limited the number of emails that could be sent at one time. Over the course of one month, groups of emails were sent multiple times a day. The emails sent to BRU students numbered about 1,000. BTI did not limit the number of emails that could be sent at one time. During this time period of a month, the researcher emailed about 460 BTI students. Additional emails which were provided via snowballing amounted to about 60.

The survey (Google form) was embedded into the email. The survey was not intended for research data, merely to obtain demographic information and permit self-identifying of the generation to which they belong. This information allowed for selection to begin. The researcher reviewed the Google form daily for new respondents. A personalized email with the consent form attached was sent to each individual who expressed interest. Individuals who were personally known to the researcher were excluded. One male and one female from each of the

generational cohorts were chosen when possible. Gender preference was not given to the third participant of the generational cohort. A sufficient pool of volunteers was not obtained from the initial emails.

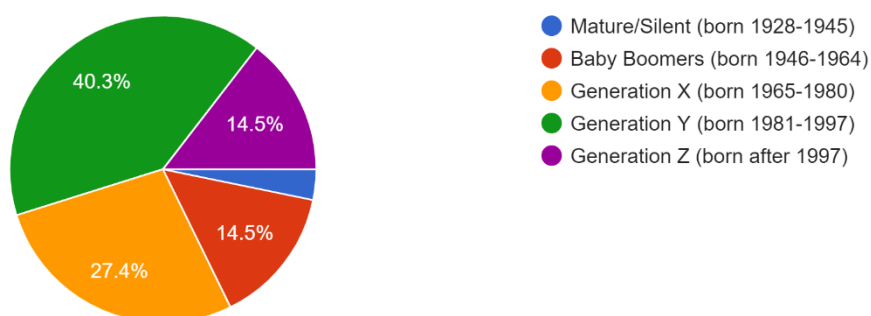
The researcher then asked those who had responded as interested to identify any others they may feel are interested in participating. The researcher obtained email addresses for these potential participants. The original recruitment email was sent to these identified individuals. The researcher supplied the link to the Google form in the email. The sorting of the data from this snowballing sample was analyzed in the same format as the original group of volunteers.

Once selected as a participant, consent forms were explained to the participants. The researcher discussed the form with the participant. The form was then signed by the participant and returned via email. After many weeks of recruitment, the eligible participant pool was comprised of 62 individuals of these, 69.4% were female. The majority of the respondents (40.3%) were from Generation Y.

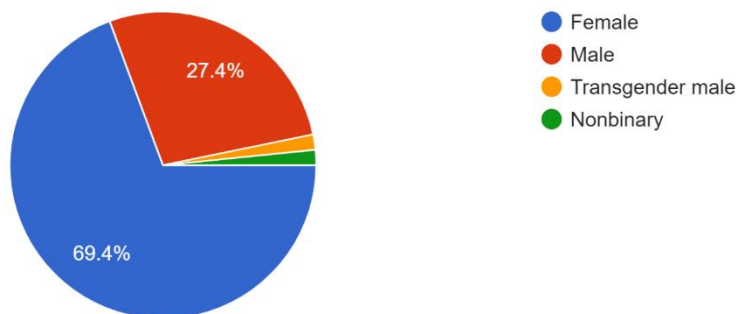
Volunteer Response Data (from Google Form)

Which generation do you identify with?

62 responses



Gender
62 responses



Multiple attempts were made to identify volunteers from all generations. Of the 62 individuals, 19 completed and returned the consent form. Of these 19 individuals, 11 were chosen as participants based on the generational cohort. The other eight individuals were of the same generational cohort, and including these would have resulted in more data from one generational cohort. The choice was made to keep the groups similar in composition size as was the original research plan.

Two individuals from the Mature/Silent generation volunteered but did not return the consent form. The first was unsure how to return the consent form. The researcher presented several options: scan/email, postal service, or meeting the participant at a spot convenient for the participant. There was no response. The researcher reached out one more time, but no response was received. The second individual was enthusiastic about participating. A lengthy email was sent to the researcher about why this participant wanted to participate. The researcher responded with matching enthusiasm. The individual did not respond to this email or the follow up which was sent a week later.

The participant pool for this research included two females and one male from the Baby Boomer generation, one male and two females from Generation X, one male and two females

from Generation Y, and two females from Generation Z. The researcher made every attempt to reach the fifteen-participants as the original research plan outlined; however, the researcher determined further recruitment attempts would not be fruitful. The recruitment phase of this research spanned one month and about 1,900 emails were sent. The response rate was 3%, and the researcher did not feel more time would increase the rate of response. The data provided by the chosen participants rendered a quality study. Participants were all former or current college students with at least 24 completed college credit hours. All participants were interviewed virtually via the virtual meeting platform Zoom.

Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher using the tool Happy Scribe. At the time of the interview, the researcher asked the participants to share their college transcripts (official or unofficial) and an example of graded work with the instructor's comments if possible. These documents were sent via email. Most of the participants were unable to locate assignments or transcripts due to the length of time that had passed since their course completion. One Baby Boomer, one Generation Y, and one Generation Z participant provided documentation of their grades. Most other participants gave a verbal report of their grade for the course they discussed in their interview. All participants were given multiple reminders and ample time to send documents.

Upon completion of the individual interviews, participants were then invited to participate in a generational-specific focus group. The researcher attempted to schedule the focus group at times convenient to the participants, but the participants did not respond to the invitations nor did they attend the scheduled focus group via Zoom. An additional attempt was made to schedule the focus groups. Two times were offered to all participants with no preference given to generational cohort. Seven of the eleven responded with a time they would

attend the focus group. In total, six participants participated.

In order to obtain the most information possible from the participants' experience from each generation, the generationally specific cohorts were also given the opportunity to share additional information together using the platform Google utilizing a shared document. Each generational group was added as an editor to a shared document with the focus group questions. Upon responding, the participants could also comment on each other's experiences. A dated deadline for completion was given to each generational group. The generation specific document was completed by two Baby Boomers, one Generation Y participant, and both of the Generation Z participants. Participant's demographic and experiential information was stored on an encrypted Excel file using code names. All artifacts analyzed were digitally recorded and securely stored in an encrypted file using code names.

The Researcher's Role

I am the human instrument in this study. As such, I recruited the participants, interviewed the individuals, conducted the focus groups, and analyzed the data while reflecting and drawing conclusions from the findings. Yin (2014) described this human instrument as the only investigator of the research. I am currently a middle school English teacher. While I have been an instructor and/or student at the institutions of higher learning presented in this study, I am not currently affiliated with any. My past affiliations only provide a source of familiarity with each. Additionally, the school corporation used for recruitment is my current place of employment, but individuals personally known to me were excluded from the study.

Participants were chosen from a pool of individuals who responded to the email request for volunteers and others who were provided via the snowball sampling method. The first eligibility requirement of the participants was current or previous enrollment in college having

completed at least 24 credit hours. Data analysis from the Google form allowed for further eligibility requirements to be confirmed. Once their college enrollment (previous or current) was established, the participants were chosen based solely on willingness to participate, gender, and self-identified generational cohort.

My personal interest in generational learning styles and the issues they may present began when I was a college instructor. Over time, I noticed patterns of learning and communication styles and preferences of instructional methods. Additionally, students of a certain age appeared to have difficulty learning from instructors from specific generations. This conflict began to occur more frequently as non-traditional students began enrolling in post-secondary education at higher rates than previously.

Data Collection

Data collection did not begin until approval was obtained from the IRB. After approval was obtained, the selection of participants began. An email was composed using the Liberty University Recruitment Template. The email requested any individual who has attended at least 24 credit hours of college to complete a short information form. A Google form link was embedded into the post. The questions asked were used for selection purposes only. The questions included demographic information and are as follows: email, first name, last name, best number to contact you, what generation do you identify with (using Table 2), gender, have you ever attended college, did you complete at least 24 college credit hours, have you ever taken a course in which the instructor was not of the same generational cohort as you, would you like to take part in a research project which would involve exploring your communication and learning experiences during your time in college? The results of this data were reviewed and potential participants were contacted via email (which was provided by the potential participant

in the Google form). The potential participants were given a consent form for their consideration. Once the signed consent form was obtained, participants were given a code name.

Data was collected from interviews, document analysis, and focus groups of college students representing four of the six living generations (as members of the Mature/Silent generation did not complete the recruitment process as desired). Yin (2014) stated that research “evidence may come from...documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observation, and physical artifacts” (p. 102). The majority of the data for this phenomenological study was collected through the use of interviews and artifacts (in the form of college transcripts, assignments, examples of specific feedback on assignments, and a generationally specific shared document). This type of data assisted the researcher in understanding the meaning of the participant’s experience (Moustakas, 1994). The analysis of individual information to provide specific meaning to the phenomenon followed the phenomenological study design (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

The interview process was the first step of data collection and began by scheduling a time for the participant to meet virtually using the platform Zoom. Each interview was scheduled to take approximately 60 minutes. Each of the eleven participants was given the opportunity to describe their higher education experience, guided by interview questions in a semi-structured interview. The participants were interviewed individually with the opportunity of sharing information in multiple sessions if desired (only if information obtained in the first interview was not sufficient). The information was recorded and stored digitally for analysis. Upon completion of the interview process, document analysis began.

Participants were asked to provide examples of completed coursework and transcripts. This data was used to compare participant’s responses to the interview questions with the final

course grade for a deeper understanding of their experience. In order to obtain additional information from the participants' experience from each generation, an additional form of the document collection was conducted virtually via a shared Google document which contained the focus group questions. The individuals of the same generational cohort were added to the secure document as editors. As these groups were generationally categorized, this allowed members of each generational cohort to share more information about their experiences in a group. Upon completion of the eleven interviews, the focus groups were scheduled.

The eleven interviews were transcribed by the researcher utilizing Happy Scribe. The transcripts were then sent to the participants for verification of validity. Individual interviews, once in the narrative form, were also sent to individuals to ensure the accuracy of the information in the narrative. The focus group transcript was not made available to the groups; however, all participants had editing access to the secure, shared document, and were asked to review their responses to verify the validity of the information. The interviews were studied and analyzed with a view to identifying patterns within the experiences of the generational cohorts. The patterns were then coded and themes were identified.

Interviews

Interviews are considered to be the main form of data analysis in qualitative research. These interviews are expected to be social interaction between interviewer and interviewee (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Yin (2014) recognized interviewing as one of the most important aspects of qualitative data collection. This phenomenological study's foundation was the interviews. This process was necessary in order to obtain the unique perspective of students from each considered generation and to ascertain the deeper meaning of the experiences.

The interviews for this research were conducted virtually using the virtual platform Zoom. The researcher sent an invitation to the participant prior to the interview. The date and time were agreed upon by the participant and researcher. While consideration was given to the participant's preference, the interviews were conducted during a window of four-six weeks. The participants were given the dates during which interviews needed to take place in order for the participant to schedule a time that is convenient. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes (with a 10-minute error margin plus/minus). All interviews were recorded digitally. Yin (2014) stated the qualitative interview would not be a rapid-fire interrogation, but rather a conversation guided by specific research questions. The interview questions were designed for a natural, conversational flow without being interrogative.

Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself to me.
2. Please explain your higher education status (example: degree conferred, how many courses completed, etc.).
3. Describe your learning process. Do you learn more effectively if you hear, see, or experience information? How do you study?
4. Please describe a time when you took a course when the instructor was not of the same generational cohort as you.
5. How was the course delivered? (Online, in person, hybrid)
6. Please describe the instructor of that course.
7. What teaching methods did they employ (lecture, guided notes, class discussion, PowerPoint, videos)?
8. Describe the quality of the communication between you and the instructor.

9. Describe your feelings concerning this professor.
10. Describe an assignment during that course that taught you the most about the topic of the course.
11. Describe an assignment in this course that was irrelevant to you.
12. What made this assignment meaningless for you?
13. If you could address this instructor and give him/her “tips” on how to teach you, what would you tell him/her?
14. We have discussed many details about your higher education experience. What else would you like to tell me concerning your higher education experience?

Questions one, two, and three are background questions. This allowed for the setting of the topic and for the participant to become engaged in the agreed-upon task of the interview (Aarsand & Aarsand, 2019). These questions also prepared the participant for the more detailed questions that follow. Questions four through nine were designed to obtain specific information about a specific college course and the professor, but in a holistic way that promoted self-reflexivity (Sandvik & McCormack, 2018). These questions focus on the student’s personal experience and were designed to allow response concerning the course (Bailey, 1994).

Questions ten and eleven refer to assignments completed within the course. The questions in this section were positive in nature. This allowed the participant to feel more relaxed about being interviewed (Bailey, 1994). Question eleven was also seeking specific information (Sandvik & McCormack, 2018) as prior questions concerning the course and assignments completed during the course. As it may be unpleasant to discuss, questions eleven and twelve referred to an irrelevant assignment. Question twelve empowered the participant, is positive in nature (Bailey, 1994), and considered the participant’s feelings (Sandvik & McCormack, 2018).

Question thirteen allowed the participant to express any feelings (Bailey, 1994) or details (Sandvik & McCormack, 2018) the previous questions did not address. The questions were open-ended which allowed the participant to share as much or as little of their experience as they desire.

Document Analysis

Participants were asked to share their college transcripts. Official and unofficial transcripts were accepted for the purpose of this study. The information found on the transcripts was utilized to examine overall GPA and course of study. Participants were also asked to provide graded work (with feedback from the instructor, if possible) from the courses discussed during the interview. Additional document analysis took the form of a shared Google document. The individuals of the same generational cohort were added to the secure document as editors. These focus groups were generationally categorized, and these allowed members of each generational cohort to share their experiences in a group. Artifacts provided were analyzed for patterns in preferred teaching methods, student rate of success, and instructor compatibility.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were utilized to identify previously undiscovered patterns. The group conversation promoted additional sharing of previously undisclosed information and similarities between participants as was anticipated. The initial, generationally specific focus groups did not produce the desired attendance. Two additional times were scheduled. Any participant could attend either of the two groups. Two focus groups were held. Two (one Generation X and one Generation Y) attended the first group and four (the three Baby Boomers and one Generation Y) attended the second group. A total of six participants attended the focus groups.

Focus Group Interview Questions

1. Reflecting on your individual interview, what have you learned about your higher education learning experience?
2. If you could tell instructors the best way to educate you, what would you say?
3. How would you describe the educational experiences of other students- from your perspective?
4. What do you believe are the learning characteristics and preferred teaching style of your generational cohort?
5. Please describe how teachers adapt their teaching style to your specific learning and communication needs.
6. Please describe how students learn to communicate with teachers from a different generational cohort.

Focus group question 1 was designed to allow the participants to reflect on their personal interview experience and relay what they learned (Aarsand & Aarsand, 2018; Sandvik & McCormack, 2018). As they reflected and shared in the group, others were able to identify with the experiences. This allowed for the development of patterns to be discovered. Question 2 allowed the participants to expound on their own personal needs (Allen & Jackson, 2017; Bailey, 1994; Sandvik & McCormack, 2018). By doing this in the group, the feelings and needs were validated by other group members. Question 3 encouraged the participant to think of others in the classroom. What did the participant see as significant in the experiences of others (Moustakas, 1994; Skinner, 1966; Taylor & Hamdy, 2013)? Question 5 was an expansion of question 2. This question encouraged reflection, application from other experiences, and validation of the needs based on the generational cohort (Boyle et al., 2018; Gerhardt, 2014; Sanchez, 2016). Question 6 allowed the participant to describe their lived experience concerning

communication between students and teachers who are not of the same generational cohort (Isaacson, 2017). In the group setting, this revealed similarities and patterns within the lived experiences of the group (Moustakas, 1994). The focus group data was then coded utilizing the same categories as listed above.

The data obtained for this research contained sensitive information about the participants. Immediately upon being selected for the study and signing the consent agreement, a code name was ascribed to each participant. These code names were also used in the findings section of this manuscript. Documents obtained had all identifiable information removed, and the code name was be assigned to each artifact. All documents received were digital (via email). Each participant had an individual file with the name of the file corresponding to the code name of the participant on my computer. The transcription of the interviews was also digitally stored in a password-protected file. This research study file was stored on my computer, which is also password protected.

Data Analysis

A phenomenology is a compilation of experiences and how these experiences are different for each participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). This collection of experiences is then combined into a description of the universal experience or essence of the experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data collection primarily consists of interviews (Sumskis & Moxham, 2017), but may also include document analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018) as this phenomenology did. Data analysis includes an explanation of exactly what the individual experiences have been and how these experiences have been perceived by the participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The essence of the research is the culmination of experiences to generate the commonalities of the human experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Giorgi, 1997).

A transcendental study requires that the researcher set aside any preconceived notions and examine the individual experiences with an original and authentic lens. This original and authentic lens could also be described as epoché (Greek for refrain from judgment) or bracketing (Moustakas, 1994). Epoché and bracketing require the researcher to look at the phenomenon in a new way (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) recognized this may be difficult, but is necessary for the authenticity of the essence of the research. The word transcendental means beyond ordinary or original and even the first time for something (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and this research revealed the essence of these experiences as a new thought or philosophical discovery.

Data collection involves many steps (Giorgi, 1997). After identifying the phenomenon to study, the researcher must “bracket” his/herself from the experiences. This will allow the researcher to interview the participants without bias and allow for the phenomenon to be revealed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data is collected in the form of interviews. This study also incorporated documents (transcripts, graded work, and a generationally specific shared document) as part of the experience. After the interviews and focus groups were transcribed, the researcher began an analysis of the data which included a reduction of data into moveable parts. The researcher, literally speaking, laid the data out for review (Moustakas, 1994). Interviews and focus group transcriptions along with all documents were annotated and highlighted with significant parts which described the experience of the participant. These parts were then categorized into themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These themes were further categorized into textural and structural descriptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Textural descriptions refer to what the participant experiences and structural descriptions refer to how the participants experienced it (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Horizontalization of the data took place by using the research questions as a basis to decide which participant statements were central to the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The memos and annotations from the first analysis were further categorized. These statements were memoed and highlighted for more specific organization. Additionally, the final step of horizontalization was putting these most important statements into themes. As stated above, this type of organization allowed the true essence of the phenomenon to be revealed. These informational categories and themes were then used to write the descriptions of how and what the participants experienced (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The essence, or a detailed account of the common experiences of the participants, is provided in this description (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The researcher utilized the modified van Kaam method of analysis (Moustakas, 1994). Once the interviews and focus groups were transcribed, the formal analysis began. Horizontalization (as described above) was the first formal step of analysis (Moustakas, 1994). This was followed by several sessions of further organization and categorizing. The modified van Kaam method describes these next steps as reduction and elimination, clustering and thematizing, and validation which will allow for the meanings and essence of the phenomenon to be fully explained (Moustakas, 1994; Sumskis & Moxham, 2017). These outlined steps are necessary to identify recurring themes in the verbal data along with the participant's documents (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The data for this analysis was provided via interviews, documents, and focus groups. The interviews were conducted with the individual participants. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, by myself, utilizing Happy Scribe as a tool. Once transcribed, they were given to the individual for review and accuracy, member checking. Validation of the data is best done by the

participants themselves (Moustakas, 1994). Once the interviews were been transcribed, the researcher asked each participant to review their own personal interview for accuracy. This ensured that the participant's experience is accurately recorded.

The documents requested included transcripts, a sample of graded work, and a generationally specific shared document. The documentation provided data that was analyzed for patterns such as the participants self-reported class preferences and GPA. This data was entered into an Excel sheet for ease of identifying these patterns. This, along with the transcription of the interview, was digitally stored and protected. The generationally specific document was a shared Google document. This allowed the participants to edit their own information in real time.

The focus groups were scheduled at the conclusion of the individual interviews. All participants were invited to attend the focus groups. The data was then analyzed for patterns and compared with the data obtained by the individual interviews and document analysis. As the data was collected, it was organized into data files.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness within qualitative research is manifested in many ways. Each participant volunteered and may have shared personal information which could be sensitive in nature. Transparency is vital. Participants must be informed of how their personal information will be kept safe. Additionally, accurate representation of their ideas and experiences is required.

Triangulation of the data and member checks were the primary methods for ensuring trustworthiness. The data was collected via multiple avenues (interviews, documents, and focus groups) and thus allowed for triangulation of all data. The interview questions align with the documentation which allowed for triangulation within the interview (Flick et al., 2018). Member

checks ensured the validity of information and allowed for clarification of miscommunication (Birt et al., 2016) and were conducted at multiple points in the process. Direct quotes were utilized in order to present clear meaning to the participant's experience. Expert review was also employed. A digital audit trail that can be "retrieved and examined" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.188) was also ensured.

Credibility

Member checks were the primary means of ensuring credibility. Participants reviewed their own information and transcripts of interviews. This ensured the information obtained was represented accurately. All documents were submitted by the participants, and the transcripts were reviewed for accuracy. In order to gain credibility, the researcher must maintain accurate records and confirm information is relayed as it was intended (Blumstein, 2017).

Dependability and Confirmability

Participants were informed of each stage of the process. They were asked to review information via member checks. This ensured consistency of information. This consistency adds to the dependability of the study by providing the steps and information for repeatability.

Confirmability was also ensured by member checks, but with the additional tool of peer review. As a human instrument, the potential exists for bias. The member checks allowed the participants to verify the representation of their information. Peer reviewers were utilized to remove this potential human error. The techniques ensured the researcher was not biased and provided an accurate representation of the information.

Transferability

Qualitative research allows the researcher's findings to be applied to new situations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The lived experiences of the participants, while unique to their

personalized situation, provide data that may be applied to others in the same generational cohort. This is an asset to understanding the phenomenon of multigenerational post-secondary classrooms. Due to the nature of this phenomenological study, transferability is quite possible in the fields of psychology, sociology, and human development.

Ethical Considerations

Researchers who are working with human participants must have a clear understanding of ethical standards. Each participant must have a clear consent form which is then explained to them before they sign in. The researcher must have ways of securing the information with particular emphasis on information that is sensitive in nature (Moustakas, 1994). Ethical considerations for this phenomenological study include confidentiality and transparency. All data obtained for the purpose of this research was digitally stored on my password-protected computer. No other person has access to this password. In addition to computer privacy, all research materials are stored in a password-protected file. Only individuals who are assisting with the development and preparation of the research were privy to this data. Code names were assigned to the sample in order to protect their identity. Those who are privy to this data only know the participants by their code names. These individuals reviewing the data include peer review and professional review. Participants were informed of the research process, given consent forms to review and sign, and given the option to leave the study at any time.

It is not anticipated that the nature of this study will cause any harm, emotionally or otherwise, to any of the participants. All participated willingly and the nature of the questions are not considered controversial or stress-inducing. However, as my participants were all human subjects, it was imperative to be sensitive to the needs of my participants and allow any to

discontinue their participation if desired. None made this choice. All ethical considerations and ethical professional practices (Vanclay et al., 2013) were followed.

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the current post-secondary educational issue of multiple generations in the classroom and how to adapt teaching styles to meet the needs of heterogeneous classes in post-secondary education. This qualitative design was conducted from an ontological perspective using the pragmatic paradigm. Participants were chosen from a population of known college students. These students were generationally categorized into five groups. This allowed for eleven participants. Individual interviews with carefully crafted and reviewed research questions guided the interview process. It was not anticipated these questions will cause any distress to participants. Candidates for consideration were identified based on current or former college student status, gender (including at least one male and one female from each studied generation), and self-identified generational cohort membership.

Once individual interviews were completed, generationally diverse cohorts participated in focus groups. These groups allowed participants to share their experiences within a generationally diverse group. The focus groups were semi-structured with approved interview questions. Document analysis was conducted on participant's transcripts and course work in order to identify the correlation between preferred courses, instructors, and grades received. Additional analysis was conducted on the generationally specific shared Google document. The procedures were approved by the IRB and monitored by peer and expert reviewers. Data was analyzed efficiently and accurately by utilizing a variety of approved methods. These methods include horizontalization, reduction and elimination, clustering and thematizing, and validation.

This phenomenological study is trustworthy and ethical. This was ensured by multiple safeguards such as member checking, code names for participants, and password-protected digital storing of data. The methods of this phenomenological study have been proven by peer-reviewed research. The past research, combined with the data from this phenomenological study, will provide far-reaching data.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to examine five of the six living generations in order to describe the experiences of college students who have been educated by a professor of a different generation. These experiences revealed how generationally heterogeneous classrooms communicate and learn. After a lengthy recruitment process and review of interested individuals, eleven participants were chosen for this study. Unfortunately, the volunteers from the Mature/Silent generation did not complete the consent process. No data was collected from this generation. In order to protect sensitive information and the identity of the participants, code names were assigned. The participants were identified by their pseudonym and self-identified generational cohort in Table 3. As previously discussed, these participants completed the selection and consent processes. They agreed to a scheduled interview, were given the opportunity to share documents such as transcripts and assignments, shared additional information via a generationally specific Google document, and participated in a generationally diverse focus group.

The participants section is followed by the results. This section describes the themes discovered through analysis of the participants' experiences, documents, and focus groups. Multiple themes were identified during the analysis of the data. These themes varied from themes found in the review of the literature. Ageism and feelings, communication, and learning and teaching are presented. These themes are followed by in-depth coverage of the research questions based on the shared experiences of the participants.

Participants

Participants of this study were chosen via sites of convenience. Eligibility was determined based on generational cohort, having been a college student (current or in the past) with at least 24 credit hours, having been taught by an instructor who was not of the participant's generation, and willingness to participate.

Table 3
Profile of Participants

Pseudonyms	Self-Identified Generational Cohort	Gender	Approximate Generation of Professor
Martha	Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964)	Female	Generation X
Doris	Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964)	Female	Generation Y
Maxwell	Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964)	Male	Mature/Silent
Rita	Generation X (born 1965-1980)	Female	Mature/Silent
Anna	Generation X (born 1965-1980)	Female	Mature/Silent
Billy	Generation X (born 1965-1980)	Male	Mature/Silent
Julia	Generation Y (born 1981-1997)	Female	Baby Boomer
Michelle	Generation Y (born 1981-1997)	Female	Baby Boomer
Rocky	Generation Y (born 1981-1997)	Male	Baby Boomer
Penny	Generation Z (born after 1997)	Female	Baby Boomer
Molly	Generation Z (born after 1997)	Female	Baby Boomer

Mature/Silent Generation (1928-1945)

This generation was born between 1928-1945(Boyle et al., 2018). This group is between the ages of 75-92. No data was received from this generation. Members of this generation were

desired for this study. Recruitment efforts included contact with this generation. However, even though they were contacted, they did not complete the recruitment process.

Baby Boomer Generation (1946-1964)

The Baby Boomer generation was born between 1946 to 1964 (Boyle et al., 2018). They are between the ages of 56-74. Three participants were from this generation. Two females and one male comprise this group.

Martha

Martha, a 59-year-old, is a younger member of the Baby Boomer Generation. Her highest level of education is a master's degree. She has been a student for many years of her adult life. Some of her most recent experiences were just last year. Martha is professional and well-versed in the education realm.

Martha felt that she learned best by reading material and experiencing it. This was in response to the question asking to describe her learning style. She mentioned reading course material multiple times, stressing the importance of this activity for her. Martha appreciates the practical application of material. She mentioned math and the value of practical application in addition to "reworking all the math" in order to gain understanding. Martha also described herself as not much of a "group learner" or "team player," but she "enjoys learning."

Martha's experience with an instructor of a generational cohort different than her own was with a professor who, she surmised, was "fifteen to twenty years younger" than herself. She described the course material as "very heavy." The course was delivered via live video with the opportunity to access a recording for review at a later time. The instruction was lecture with "a minor amount of time for questions." Martha felt that the instructor was skilled at answering questions when he chose to do so, but he was not "good at delivering" the material. He was an

expert in his field but did not have the ability to break the material down for comprehension. Martha was able to communicate with this instructor via email with limited office hours.

Martha could not describe any assignment she completed that taught her the most about the topic. She expressed frustration at this. When asked about an assignment that was irrelevant to her, she produced her notes for the course. The notes contained a lot of colors (highlighting and small sticky notes), and she explained that was the best way she could attempt to decipher the course information. Unfortunately, it was this experience that caused Martha to reconsider furthering her education.

If Martha could address this professor with advice on how to teach her, she would tell him to “slow down” and “make it meaningful.” She felt that if he slowed down and did not try to “cram all the things he crammed into that one semester,” she would have been able to retain more information and continue with the program. Martha also remarked that this individual “wasn’t a teacher,” but “a researcher at the college level,” and when he lectured, he addressed the students as fellow researchers who shared his level of understanding. Martha felt he needed to break the information down into meaningful chunks. At the end of the interview, she stressed that she had enjoyed all of her courses prior to this one.

Doris

Doris is a 69-year-old graduate studies student. She began her higher education journey in the 1960s and graduated in 1972, but did not formally turn her attention to graduate studies until later in life. Doris had experienced a life-changing event when she and the father of her children ended their marriage. Her children were adults, and she went through a difficult time. She stated that “going back to classes was amazing” for her. The classes allowed her to “focus on something outside of...personal problems.”

Doris described her learning process experientially. In addition to learning by experience, she felt that hearing information was good, but she also benefits from reading. She went on to describe a combination style of learning. When asked how she would study for an exam, Doris stated that she needed to schedule time for studying. Once this appointment time was made, she would also need to be in the correct studying environment. She prefers the library. Once she is in her study location, she rereads the material. She does not reread notes because “writing them down by itself is helpful,” but rereading the material is her primary way of preparing. Doris described an organized routine of setting time aside, studying in a specific location, knowing specifically what to study for, and rereading the material.

When asked about a time when she took a course with an instructor who was of a different generational cohort than herself, Doris spoke of a class she took last year. The professor was a “young, new professor” and the course was a hybrid (in person with online components). Doris described the professor as an individual who was very concerned about gender identity issues, but not so much age identity issues. Doris gave the example of the professor saying “so easy your grandmother could do it,” and even though the professor later apologized, this is a prime example of the lack of empathy toward ageism. Doris did say the professor was very “engaging” and “enthusiastic about...[her] field of study.”

Doris described a variety of teaching methods employed during this course. Presentations, discussions, small amounts of lecture with time for questions, as well as small groups, were all employed. Doris stated that she felt the professor was trying to “make it more egalitarian.” Doris felt the quality of communication between she and the professor was good though challenging for her because “she’s like, you know, younger than my daughters.” This

professor was open to email and text communication. Doris had positive feelings toward her professor with “a lot of respect for her energy,” and Doris “gained a lot of perspectives.”

Doris felt that the reading material in the course gave her the best perspective of the subject matter. She did express concern about the number of “printouts” and would prefer having the entire piece of work as opposed to just a small portion. She could not think of an assignment that was irrelevant for her. Doris did have a lot of tips on how this professor could teach her. She felt that education is too “judgy” and “punitive.” She would like for educators to create an atmosphere that “could be relaxed a little bit” in order to encourage student participation. She also felt that the “grades and judging and measuring...numbers for participation...everything is judged and graded” was too much. She was “opposed” to this type of assessment.

Doris would like to see a relaxed classroom with instructors who create an environment of acceptance. She feels that “academic speak...puts people off” and makes learning challenging. She also feels that the experiences of older students are of great value in the classroom. She would like to see a greater mix of ages in the classroom. She feels that “we’re doing a disservice to young people if they don’t have older adults in the class with them.” Doris reminded me that older adults “come into classes with a whole life experience” having “made serious decisions” and having “solved a lot of problems.” This practical wisdom adds richness to the post-secondary classroom.

Maxwell

Maxwell is a younger member of the Baby Boomer generation. He is a professional with two college degrees. He pursued his second degree later in life and is a recent graduate. Maxwell describes himself as an auditory learner who appreciates the hands-on aspect of

learning. This is applicable to his vocation choice, as he works in the healthcare field. As an auditory learner, Maxwell does well in a course that has a lecture component. During lectures, Maxwell takes notes that he then reviews prior to a quiz or exam. When reviewing the notes, he highlights pertinent information but does not utilize any form of color-coding.

When asked to describe a time when he took a class with an instructor of a different generation, Maxwell recalled an instructor who “is at least a generation older.” Maxwell describes the classroom environment as “hostile” and “straightforward,” but also felt that students were not treated equally. He felt that female students were “talked down to” and this instructor had “favorites.” The course material consisted of a textbook and large packets of information that had been prepared by the instructor. The course was delivered in person, and the instructor would display the packets on a screen and read them to the students. The students were to use the lecture and a pre-printed glossary of sorts to learn the definitions in the material. Maxwell found this to be challenging because the information was “disconnected.” The quiz and text material came from the packet. Even though the instructor had prepared this material in advance for the students, Maxwell said the most meaningful assignment was “assigned reading from the textbook.” And even though Maxwell appreciates hands-on learning, he described field trips taken during the course as “mandatory and forced,” and though he “didn’t learn much on the field trips...you got points for going.”

Maxwell felt that his communication with this instructor one on one was individualized. Maxwell could “remind him that...[he] was a certain age and...an adult.” In the classroom, the quality of communication changed. Maxwell felt that in this classroom, “students are not individuals.” The teacher spoke to the group with an air of superiority which left Maxwell with

“mixed feelings” about the experience. He went on to say, “He and I just don’t see eye to eye...I felt written off.”

If Maxwell could address this instructor with “tips” on how to teach him, he would tell him to teach. Maxwell wanted “to feel like I’m getting the information from him.” Maxwell wanted the opportunity to “ask questions” and “hear that directly from” the professor instead of being read to. Maxwell also expressed feeling that this professor was “inappropriate a lot of the time.” When asked in what way, Maxwell stated, “he was demeaning to a lot of the females in the class” and “it did feel like it was so hostile a lot of the time.”

Generation X (1965-1980)

Generation X was born between 1965 to 1980 (Boyle et al., 2018). The cohort is between the ages of 40-55, and many of these individuals were born to Baby Boomers. Three members of this generation were interviewed. This group consists of two females and one male.

Rita

Rita is a 49-year-old who graduated from college in 1994. She has had multiple continuing education courses in the past. Rita describes herself as a learner who learns best by seeing and experiencing information. She appreciates practical application, which is fitting as her field of study was mathematics. Rita appreciates practice and memorization. She stated if she was going to study for a difficult mathematics exam, she would quiz herself with the most difficult problems and check her answers. If the exam was language-based, she would rely on memorization. She tries to use “some sort of acronym” to aid her memory and does not use any form of color-coding.

Rita shared her experience of a course she took with a much older instructor. At the time of taking the course, Rita was in her 20s, and she believed the instructor to be “in his 60s, if not

70s.” She remembered this instructor had a “thick...country accent” which made understanding him a challenge. He was an “older man” who was “not friendly.” This instructor did not engage in “any kind of small talk.” He expected his students to be on time. Rita stated that he “started on time and he finished on time.” This course was delivered in person with the majority of the delivery of information being lecture. Rita recalls that he “didn’t even put a whole lot of math problems on the board for us to look at.” He also “was not the type to take questions” and he filled... [the class] from minute one to minute forty-five.” The experience was not positive for Rita and it “tainted” how she viewed the topic.

Rita said there was no communication between her and the instructor. He did not allow for questions “or any kind of feedback.” Rita learned the topic from “study groups” the students formed on their own. When asked about her feelings toward this instructor, she said, “lots of anxiety, lots of anxiety” and described him as “old school. Very old school.” She could not recall any assignment which taught her about the topic. She did not understand, and could only take “a lot of notes” because she felt as if she “had to write as much down” as she could. She could not make any application of the topic to her daily life.

If Rita could address this instructor and give him tips on how to teach her, she would advise him to “ask for questions along the way” and put “more examples on the board.” She also felt that guided notes could be helpful. She really expressed the fact that this instructor did not give enough examples nor did he show the class how he worked the problems out. He merely lectured. The students relied on each other for deeper application.

Anna

Anna is an older member of Generation X. While she did not supply her actual age during the interview, she has been a professional for 33 years. She has a master’s degree

obtained while she was working and raising her family. She also has many hours of continuing education in her field.

Anna describes her learning style as auditory but also needs to write information down. She described her study process in multiple steps. She records herself reading her notes aloud and then rewrites them as she is listening to them. She does use color as a means for coding information. Anna wanted to talk about her experiences in a class with a professor who was older than she.

The course she described was a history course. This course was in person with an “older” instructor. She described the instructor as “terrifying, brilliant, and very serious.” Anna said he “never smiled” and “was a very terrifying man.” When I asked to her expound on this, she said he was “intimidating.” By way of example, she said there was a textbook for the course with corrections in it. The corrections were made by the professor. I asked her about his classroom management style to which she responded, “nobody made a peep.” She could not describe how the class knew they were to be silent, but she said the class “completely understood” their role in the learning environment by “his presence alone.”

Anna said the majority of teaching came in the form of notes, “lots and lots of notes.” There was never any classroom discussion or other materials (videos, audio recordings, etc.) to aid in understanding. Anna recalled that many students recorded the lectures and listened to them over and over again due to the “low percentage of people that passed his class.” When asked to describe the communication between her and the instructor, she said there was none. He did not allow for questions or discussion. He did have office hours, but Anna stated that only “brave” individuals would have tried to meet with him, and to her knowledge, “nobody ever went to that door.” She described no feelings toward this professor and said that she “just

wanted to pass the class” so she did not have to repeat it. She spent hours and hours studying her copious notes.

When asked to describe a meaningful assignment that taught her the most about the topic, she said it was a paper. She wrote about the destruction of the Berlin Wall and how she “thought that could happen.” She shared that this professor “totally destroyed the paper” by saying “he did not think either one of our lifetimes” would see the destruction of the Berlin Wall. She said he did not comment on the mechanics of the paper, merely the opinion stated in it. She felt berated by his feedback as if she did not even have the right to think such a thought. She wished she could have talked to him about this after the Berlin Wall was taken down.

Even though the experience was hard, Anna expressed appreciation for the course. She “became a better student” and “learned to study better.” If she could give this instructor tips on how to teach her, she would tell him to be a “bit more open-minded” and allow for “people’s thoughts” to be respected and considered. She felt that the age difference was the major factor in the lack of communication and understanding of the instructor.

Billy

Billy is a member of Generation X who began his post-secondary education as an “older adult.” He has a master’s degree but is getting ready to enroll in another post-secondary master’s program. Billy learns best by reading and applying information. He appreciates the hands-on aspect of learning. He explains it this way: “If I just watch someone do it or have someone explain how to do it, it doesn’t really stick.” Billy mentioned the value of his instructors being “personable.” He appreciates instructors who can relate to the students and “try...to create a relationship.” He also felt that the more “effective teachers...employed all” types of visual learning support such as videos and slide shows.

Billy reflected on an instructor he described as “definitely from my parent’s generation.” His experience, for the most part, was positive. The course was a “capstone” course with time spent “articulating what we wanted to do with our degree.” Billy appreciated this instructor’s way of focusing on the individual. She was skilled in this area, but “some of her lecturing maybe wasn’t so effective.” He described her as a “good interviewer” with the ability to be “empathetic” and to allow for student expression. She was an English teacher but was not as concerned with the mechanics of writing as much as the personal expression. Billy felt she was “really effective at getting us to articulate what we were trying to say...particularly around writing, that can be really vulnerable.” Billy felt this professor was a “great teacher” and even described her as a “friend.”

It was important to Billy to share the importance of learning and “identifying our strengths.” He did not feel as if education focused on the important skill of “working together” as in the workplace. He expressed the importance of learning “how to work in a group and to manage all those expectations and manage the frustrations” that can come from group work. This type of real-world or practical application of education is missing in our post-secondary classrooms. Today’s students want more than learning for the sake of learning. They want to know how to apply the learning to the workplace.

Generation Y (1981-1997)

Generation Y includes individuals born between 1981 to 1997. They are between the ages of 23-39. Generation Y is the largest generational cohort alive at this time (LaBan, 2013). This group provided the most respondents to the call for participants. Two females and one male from this generation were interviewed.

Michelle

Michelle is a thirty-something member of Generation Y, or a Millennial. She currently holds a master's degree and is considering going back to school for her doctorate. Michelle is a visual learner who also appreciates learning with hands-on practice. She is currently working in the healthcare field, so her learning style would fit this vocation.

Michelle described her process of study as something that has a lot of “repetitiveness...writing...and seeing it.” She needs to see the flow of information and utilizes memorization by repeatedly writing it. This aids her in learning more than a simple lecture. She also uses color to help code information and reported “seeing” the color of information and linking it to information on an exam.

Michelle's post-secondary experiences occurred in the past ten years. She relayed details about a statistics course with an instructor who was “late 60s, early 70s.” This course was delivered in person. Michelle gave a detailed physical description of the instructor and ended with the comment “she was very straight to the point.” Michelle's experience with this instructor was not “warm, motherly” but “no nonsense.” The teaching style of this professor included lectures, notes, working examples out via overhead projector, and assigned readings to reinforce topics.

Communication style was then discussed. Michelle could not recall any direct communication with her instructor beyond a few emails, but stated she was “approachable.” Her email responses were sent on the “next business day.” On the other hand, Michelle recalled she was also intimidating because the matter-of-factness of her demeanor led students to feel their questions were “stupid.” Michelle stated that she “really respected” this instructor. She was “super smart” and “knew what she was talking about.” Michelle admitted that the instructor was a bit intimidating, but like a stern parent figure that you “don't cross.”

Due to the subject matter of the course, most of the work was practice through homework. The students would listen to lectures, take notes, and have an independent assignment to complete out of class due the next time the class met. In the beginning, Michelle found some of the assignments pointless due to their elementary nature. Even though these assignments were “building the basics,” they “seemed kind of meaningless at first.” The class followed a similar format throughout as the assignments built upon one another. Michelle’s grade for this course was a B+, which was lower than the grades she was accustomed to.

Michelle reiterated her visual learning preference when asked if she could offer tips to this instructor about teaching her. She felt that more oversight of the professor while Michelle was working problems out would have been helpful. Michelle suggested getting help with the work and doing corrections “in real time.” This would have made the learning more meaningful. Michelle admitted the class was hard, but she learned from it even though this instructor “was one of the more stern teachers.” Michelle felt that this instructor really knew her topic and was able to share her knowledge with her students.

Rocky

Rocky was born in 1987, putting him in the middle of the Millennial generation. He has an associate’s degree. His higher education experiences took place prior to the year 2015. Rocky learns best from hands-on experiences but also appreciates the visual aspect of learning. He did not utilize handwritten notes or note cards during his education but used other visual forms of study such as online quiz applications.

Rocky’s experience with an instructor of a different generational cohort was with an instructor at least 30 years older than he. This was a male professor who taught an in-person class. There was no online option. This instructor was stern, did not get involved in the

students' lives, but felt he had a job to do and that job was to teach the information required. Rocky stated that this professor only utilized lectures. A packet was handed out at the beginning of class and was read to the class by the instructor. Part of the packet was filled in by the students, but the majority of it was provided. There was no visual instruction such as video or slide show presentation.

When asked to describe his experiences with communicating and this instructor, he described it as "a little tense at times." Rocky felt this was due to a different "wavelength of respect" and the fact that this instructor could be "abrasive" and even "grumpy" at times. Rocky went on to explain that this instructor was "a little hyper rigid with things," and "he would also go off on tangents" about unrelated topics. On the other hand, the class felt comfortable asking questions, and the questions would be addressed in class. Face to face was the preferred method of communication, but email was also accepted.

Rocky did not remember many assignments from this course. The packets had a point value if students completed them. This course also had many hands-on or clinical experiences which were graded. If students did not attend the clinical portion, they did not receive the points. Rocky did not feel as if any of the work was irrelevant as it all had a purpose and pertained to the topic. His grade for this course was a B, slightly lower than his other academic performance.

Rocky felt that his experiences with older people helped him understand this instructor, but he felt that many students could not learn from him. He thought it was "challenging" for students to "understand where he was coming from." However, if he could address this instructor with tips on how to effectively teach him, he would say "stay on topic" and "work on the gruffness." Rocky also felt that more hands-on experiences would have enhanced his

learning. While most of his experiences were positive, this course was a challenge due mostly to the strict environment and demeanor of the instructor.

Julia

Julia is a thirty-something member of Generation Y. She is also in the middle of this generation. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in 2010. She described herself as a learner who needs to read information and write it down. Hearing information is helpful, but not as the primary learning tool. Rewriting notes and using highlighters aid her learning, but she does not utilize color as a coding tool.

Being a member of Generation Y, Julia stated that all of her courses were taught by "Gen Xers and Boomers." She focused on a particular course taught by a woman who was at least 40 years older than she. This course was delivered in person with not a lot of technological support. Julia found this course enjoyable because the class "would actually just discuss more the differences and what we were seeing, what we were understanding, and we acknowledge that we were looking from very different viewpoints."

Julia described the instructor of the course as a "fun" and "happy" person. She also said this professor was "not what I would call a Harvard professor, but she was very, very effective." Her teaching style led her students to "learn the material." The course, due to the nature of the topic, was very visual. Slide shows and videos were utilized to aid with comprehension.

Julia found this instructor to be "very easy to get a hold of" and "you could always pop your head in and talk to her in her office or stay before or after class." Julia admitted this instructor was "a little bit slower with emails," and that finding her around the campus was a more effective way of communication. Initially, Julia thought this instructor would be intimidating as she was the chair of her department, but Julia found her to be very "easygoing."

She felt “comfortable” with her though Julia understood the “high level of work” which was expected. “There was always a level of professionalism with her level of respect” that Julia understood without being told. Her feelings about this professor were very warm.

When asked about an assignment that taught her the most about the topic, Julia referred to a project which took an entire four weeks to complete. The assignment involved design elements, theory, drawing, and discussion. Julia would work on one portion of the assignment and then discuss it with the instructor. This process went on over the entire four-week period. This combination of application and discussion helped Julia apply the concepts to her learning. She was then able to take these learned processes and apply them to the rest of her related coursework. Beyond that, Julia could not recollect any other assignments. Her experience did not include irrelevant work or busy work. The grade for this this course was an A, comparable to other courses Julia had taken.

Julia could only think of one tip for this particular instructor: “I would tell her to make sure I was writing it down and writing it down often.” Julia needed a stronger sense of accountability. In general, Julia’s experience was favorable. She did, however, wish to stress that instructors and advisors help students find an education that is meaningful and enjoyable. Giving education a real-life application and transferability are imperative. Julia wanted educators to provide all sides of a vocation in order to help students identify whether or not the choice was a good fit.

Generation Z (after 1997)

Generation Z began in 1997 (Boyle et al., 2018). The oldest members of this generation are currently 23. Two females from this generation were interviewed. No males completed the recruitment process.

Penny

Penny is a recent graduate having received a bachelor's degree in May 2021. Her self-identification of membership in Generation Z means that she is no older than 24-years-old. Her preferred learning style involves projects and if she "had to come up with a project," that is the best way for her to focus on a topic. Studying for Penny involves index cards and highlighting. Penny does utilize color coding with her highlighting. Penny also stated that writing things out, such as vocabulary words, helps her learn the material more effectively.

Penny's experience with a post-secondary course taught by someone of another generational cohort involves an older instructor. This instructor was "nearing retirement...probably late 60s, early 70s." The course was in person. Penny recalled this experience as one with "a real big generation gap." The course was described by Penny as "traditional old school."

The first example Penny gave of the traditional aspect of the course was how assignments were submitted. "We didn't do anything online, everything was submitted paper copy to her," and this was unlike other courses Penny had experienced. Penny described her other courses in this way: "All professors are using online email to them, whatever. But every submission to her was a paper copy." Penny went on to describe the experience by saying, "I don't think she had a teacher's assistant." These aspects of the course made an impression on Penny as it was mentioned a few times. Penny shared the course gradebook, which revealed grades but no feedback and no digital files.

When asked about the instructor's teaching methods, Penny said it was just lecture. There was an occasional slide show, but "a lot of it was just kind of her talking" and there were a few times she would "write notes on the board as she spoke." Penny commented that this

instructor's sight and hearing were poor. Sometimes she would accuse the wrong students of talking due to her poor hearing. The instructor also utilized small group instruction, but it was not teacher-led nor did she participate in the discussions. Penny described this course as "vastly different from the rest of my classes." Penny did not feel there was "a lot of communication from students to professor." The professor preferred face-to-face communication over email. Texting was never an option.

Penny described her feelings toward this professor as not "really a big fan." She felt as if she did well in the course due to peer support. She did not feel supported by the instructor, especially if she had to miss a class, and her stern demeanor was not inviting. A missed class was a "lost chance" to gain the information taught that day. Penny did not feel as if any form of relationship had been built with this instructor.

A meaningful assignment that taught Penny the most about the topic of the course was a reflective writing piece. The students watched a documentary and wrote about a "specific feature" of the film. The writing assignment helped Penny understand a specific part of the topic "rather than just the big picture." Penny felt the group discussions were irrelevant. The students would break into groups but not discuss on-topic subjects. The teacher was not involved in these group discussions, and, due to her poor hearing, was unable to monitor discussions. Penny felt as if these discussions were a waste of time.

Penny had many tips for this instructor on the best way to instruct Penny. Her first tip was "encourage more technology." She felt as if she needed lectures available online or other resources available outside of class to aid with comprehension. Penny would also suggest visual aids such as slide shows, and then have the slide shows available online. There was a sense of

loss from Penny. Her experience seemed to echo the sentiment that she could have learned so much more from the course with the instruction she was accustomed to.

Molly

Molly is a junior at a four-year college. Like Penny, Molly is under the age of 24. She is concentrating on the completion of her degree but does not feel that additional higher education is practical. She feels that a bachelor's degree in her field will provide her with plenty of opportunities. Molly reflected on her learning style by providing examples from her high school experience. She described learning more from hands-on projects, but felt that seeing and hearing "is also really vital." Slide shows providing a visual reference along with "verbally saying things, that helps me." She also described "writing down notes...kind of connects things a little bit better." She benefits from "a lot of note cards" for studying. This helped her with review by going "over and over, look[ing] at note cards, read[ing] it." She attempted color coding with highlighting, but "it was too tedious" and "didn't seem to help."

Due to recent circumstances, all of Molly's classes have been moved to an online platform. She reflected on a class that began in person but was moved to online due to COVID-19. This unplanned switch was a challenge for students and teachers, but Molly was able to reflect on the generational differences between herself and the instructor. Molly felt the instructor of this class was "50 or maybe even 60...retiring this summer because she has been teaching for so long...definitely is in a different generation." Molly felt the transition to distance learning was a challenge for her professor because "she had to go with Zoom and she had to do all these new things online." Molly said this professor was not accustomed to that platform for teaching. Prior to the change, all of their work had been done on paper.

Molly expressed warm feelings about this instructor. She mentioned several times that she was “really, really nice” and “very, very engaging.” Molly said this instructor showed she really cared about her students. She encouraged conversation in a way that made Molly feel as if she wanted to have a “deep conversation” with her. She also described her as “sweet,” “organized,” and “fun.” Molly described her teaching methods as employing lectures, displaying notes on a screen with a document viewer, and encouraging notes. She would put the students in pairs for meaningful, directed discussion.

Molly had good communication with this instructor. She described the communication as “positive,” “very good,” and “academic.” She felt that any email communication was answered in a timely manner and her instructor was open to spending time answering students’ questions. She felt as if her instructor wanted her to succeed and Molly wanted to learn from her because “she had so much to teach us.” She could not identify an assignment that taught her the most about the topic because all of the assignments were relevant, well planned, and interesting to Molly. Molly received an A in the course and felt this was appropriate.

Molly was hesitant to provide any tips for this instructor on how to educate her more effectively. She had so many kind and complimentary things to say about the professor, it took time for her to think of any meaningful feedback. It appeared to distress her, as if she was being disloyal to the professor. Finally, she conceded to suggesting that maybe this instructor should not talk so much. She “talked and talked and talked.” Molly suggested “maybe implement more time saying, ‘Are there any questions? Is there anything you’re confused about?’” Molly shared so many positive thoughts concerning this experience. She was very enthusiastic about this professor and her instruction.

Results

This section describes the themes discovered through analysis of the participants' experiences, documents, and focus groups. The data was organized and analyzed for the most significant parts to describe the participants' experiences. Transcripts and documents were reviewed, annotated, and organized. College students (former or current) who had been taught by an instructor of a different generation than their own provided copious data, which then revealed thematic patterns. Frequently occurring words were grouped together with frequency of appearance in the interviews noted. These groups were further refined into themes. The themes were then paired with the research questions of similar content.

Theme Development

As the transcripts and documents were reviewed, there were words and phrases that repeated themselves. In order to find the themes of the researcher, these recurring words and phrases were noted. They were then put into the following table.

Table 4

Coding Data and Thematic Development

R1	R1	R2	R3	R3
Ageism	Feelings	Communication	How We Learn	Trends in Teaching
older (3)	engaging (3)	email (6)	experience (4)	Notes (8)
different	good (3)	talking (3)	learn (3)	writing (7)
different generation	difficult (2)	discussion (2)	learner (2)	read (5)
issue	hard (2)	talk (2)	seeing (2)	reading (5)
issues	organized (2)	discussions	experiencing	studying (4)
old	tense (2)			color (3)
old school	challenging (2)		How to Teach Me	paper (3)
age identity	comfortable (2)		lecture (7)	powerpoint (3)

	respect (2)		projects (3)	academic (2)
	respected (2)		hearing (2)	assignment (2)
	teach		in person (2)	rewrite (2)
	teacher		structure (2)	textbook (2)
	teaching		questions	book
			small group	books
			team elements	memorization
			team player	memorize
			group discussions	write
			group learner	

Frequently occurring words from the interviews were grouped together with frequency of appearance noted. These groups were further refined into themes. The themes were then paired with the research questions of similar content.

Research question 1 (R1): What are the experiences of students who are learning and communicating in a heterogeneous post-secondary classroom?

Research question 2 (R2): How do students learn to communicate with teachers from a different generation?

Research question 3 (R3): What are the students' experiences based on educators' ability to address the specific learning needs of each unique generation?

Once the words and phrases were put into the table, the researcher looked at the frequency of occurrence and grouped similar ideas together. The researcher then analyzed commonalities within the groups. Specific trends were apparent. These trends were then linked to the research question which corresponded. The themes revealed were ageism and feelings; communication; and learning and teaching.

Ageism and Feelings

Participants expressed very strong feelings concerning their experiences. The perceived number of years between student and professor appeared to strengthen these emotions. Younger students whose experience involved a much older professor like Anna, whose experience

involved a professor who was “older, older,” used words such as “terrifying” and “intimidating” to describe her experience. Penny, whose instructor perceived as at least 45 years older than she, stated there was a “big generation gap” and her instructor was “stern.” When asked to describe the instructor, Penny said she “wasn’t a big fan.” Rocky said his instructor was “stern,” “grumpy,” and “rigid.” Maxwell described the classroom environment as “hostile” and “demeaning” for the women in his class, which was led by an older man. These negative feelings were also linked to poor performance in the class. Anna, who had been a “straight A student,” received a C- in the course. Rita’s experience was almost identical. Her professor was at least 40 years older than she. Her experience involved an instructor who “would not greet us or say hello” and was “very regimented.” Accustomed to “getting As and Bs,” her final grade for this course was a C-. Neither Anna or Rita were able to produce transcripts or assignments from their courses, as their experiences has taken place many years ago. They did, however, remember with clarity their grades for the courses described. This information was shared with no hesitation.

Older students whose experience involved a younger professor also expressed strong emotions. While Doris described her experience in mostly positive terms, she expressed concern about the attitude her professor seemed to have concerning older people. Doris shared her professor was “really very conscious of...not stepping on gender identity issues, but...[not] much exposure to age identity issues.” While her grade did not suffer for this lack of generational understanding (a review of her transcript revealed an A), she felt that she was not “taken seriously in...[her] academic work” because of her age. She felt as if the professors gave her “space” and “respect” due to her age, but she felt as if it was in a condescending way. Martha did not experience age discrimination, but her experience changed her academic goals in

a negative way. Martha felt that her instructor needed to “make it meaningful” and slow down so she “would have remembered it.” Martha shared verbally that passed the class, but her experience led her to discontinue the program she was enrolled in. She felt “it was going to be...difficult...at my age.”

Younger students who had older professors with a positive experience were also very emphatic about their experiences, expressing strong emotion. Julia and Molly, who both had professors at least 40 years older, had positive experiences. They both verbally reported that they received an A in the class they described, and a review of Julia’s transcript confirmed this. Julia described her professor as “fun” and “always happy.” Prior to taking her class, the professor’s age and perceived demeanor led Julia to the belief she was “very formal” and “intimidating” (similar to Anna’s experience), but found her perception was incorrect. She found this older professor to be “great” and “a friend.” Molly said “you could just tell she cared” and that was important to Molly. Molly also described her professor as “really, really nice.”

The focus groups allowed for a deeper understanding of ageism and the feelings it can generate. Baby Boomers are not looking for “mentors,” but see professors as “peers,” and because “school functions in a certain way,” professors need to be aware of their biases- “ageism, racism, and gender bias.” Baby Boomers also need instructors to understand they are “individuals.” Generation X and Y noted that they felt their professors commanded respect with their older presence, this was at times “intimidating.” Generation Z expressed feelings of annoyance or “frustration” with their experiences as it concerned the “generation gap” in high education. This group felt age was a barrier as technology use is concerned.

Communication

The quality of communication between students and instructors is paramount to success. Respect and talking were common words used by the participants. Each had a positive and negative application. Younger professors, such as Doris's, were willing to text and email their students. Older professors preferred face-to-face or did not allow much communication at all. When asked about the quality of communication between her and the instructor, Anna said, "there wasn't any." There was no discussion in the class, no opportunity for questions, and while this professor had office hours, Anna believed that "nobody ever went to that door." Maxwell found that he could communicate with his older professor "one on one," but found the experience in the classroom much different.

Many older professors, such as Anna's and Rita's, commanded respect and control by their mere presence. Both instructors were not open to questions, did not allow class discussion, and were not approachable. Anna and Rita *never* spoke with their instructors outside of class, and their verbally reported grades reflected average performance from above-average students. Michelle shared that she "did communicate" with her professor a "few times, mostly through email," but described the communication as "short responses" and "to the point." Michelle's instructor was not "warm" and students were hesitant to ask questions in class for fear of feeling "stupid." While Michelle's grades did not suffer from this communication style, as she remembered she received an A for the course, this course was not one of her "favorites."

Rocky, Maxwell, and Penny had similar experiences. While their verbally recollected grades did not appear to suffer from the lack of communication, their experiences could not be described as positive. Rocky described the classroom environment as "tense" and "rigid" while Penny did not feel as if she "could rely on the professor" after class hours. Maxwell felt that the instructor viewed all students as a collective "group" and addressed them as such. There

appeared to be a disconnect in these student/teacher relationships. On the other hand, Billy's experience included an instructor who was "empathetic" and "a friend." His instructor cared about getting to know the students to help them achieve their goals.

Instructors who talked but did not lead or allow discussion were problematic for the participants. "Lecture" and "talking" were used interchangeably but with a negative connotation. Penny described lecturing without any visual aids, and while her instructor used group discussion, Penny "didn't feel like the little discussions really tied to the material that we were learning about." Molly described "all of the talking" as "exhausting." Rocky and Maxwell's instructors utilized lectures but also read to the class from handouts. Rocky felt that this created a "tense" environment and this teacher often went "off on tangents" that were unrelated to the material. Maxwell wanted to be taught from the professor, not readings. Michelle's professor also lectured with no supervised practice. This made the course challenging, as it was a math-based course. Anna's professor talked with no student interaction. The students did not feel any connection to these professors nor did they recall the course with any fondness.

The information gathered in the focus groups brought greater depth to the data. Baby Boomers felt that more communication between student and teacher would bring about a "more egalitarian" learning environment. Generation X and Y felt that many professors did not empower students and classes "were not confident" to ask questions. Communication was further hindered by making the students "feel silly for asking" questions. Generation Y also expressed the value of email communication in order to "physically read their explanation and have it to read as many times as I needed." Generation Z requires "clear and concise" direction as to expectations in the classroom and for assignments. This generation also mentioned having professors who are "open to questions and answer[s]." Additionally, Generation Z felt that face-

to-face communication may be more comfortable for the teachers than the students. All groups felt that teachers were not open to changing their style of communication in order to meet the needs of the students.

Learning and Teaching

Overwhelmingly, participants felt that experiencing information helped them learn it. This does not support how teachers are currently instructing their post-secondary students. All participants mentioned some form of a lecture in their courses. Michelle and Rita, who both had math-based courses they reflected upon, stated their older professors utilized lecture only. There was no opportunity for real-life application or supervised practice. Rocky felt as if he learned from the lecture, but felt the time was wasted when the instructor veered off-topic. Maxwell felt that the information in his course was “disconnected,” and the hands-on experiences were not applicable. The group discussions in Penny’s class were not meaningful and did not aid in the understanding of the course. Penny felt the instructor’s age interfered with her ability to monitor group discussions.

Doris appreciated her younger professor’s approach to class discussion and said it gave her “perspective on a lot of issues.” Julia, whose older professor utilized “a lot of class discussion” in her course had fond memories of the course, and this helped her understand the material. While Martha described herself as “not a team player,” she did feel that “particular team elements” helped her learn the material. Rita and Anna developed their own group discussion by joining study groups. Their professors did not allow this form of teaching/learning in their classroom which forced the students to improvise. Rita shared that “a lot” of her “learning came from our study groups” that “we created.” Anna mentioned studying with her

classmates, reviewing recorded lectures together, and sharing notes. This type of group learning helped her pass a course she feared she would fail.

Teaching by utilizing real-life examples and projects immersed as a need for students to be successful. Students who had professors who did not provide a real-world application, no matter the generation of the professor or student, did not feel as if they performed in the course as well. The grades reflected this. Projects, which almost always translate into real-world applications, were described as something that would provide a more positive learning experience. Penny shared that she “really thrive[s] with projects,” and Julia described a hands-on project which was developed over the course of four weeks as “the assignment that stands out” as one that taught her the most about the topic. On the other hand, Rocky appreciated the field trips in his course and described them as “very helpful,” but felt applicable projects would have helped him retain course material. Michelle lamented that help during the course working on “real-time” examples would have helped her with her course. Billy also stressed the importance of real-life application by saying he did not feel that students were prepared for the workplace. He expressed students need to be able to “identify... strengths relative to either the content or the task of the people that we’re working with.”

The focus groups all mentioned online learning. The recent developments with COVID-19 have made online learning a necessity; however, all generations expressed a desire to have some face-to-face learning. Generation Y expressed appreciation for the ability to “learn from the comfort of our home,” which was contrasted by the Baby Boomers who did not want education “to go completely online.” Baby Boomers like choices and options, but “there should also be a physical space to meet and interact.”

Research Question Responses

Research question 1: What are the experiences of students who are learning and communicating in a heterogeneous post-secondary classroom?

The experiences of students who are learning and communicating in a heterogeneous post-secondary classroom are mixed. Many students appear to have specific learning and communication needs that are not being met, which appears to be related to generation gaps. Penny and Molly, both members of Generation Z, are the youngest of the participants. They do not know what it is like to have a professor who is younger than them. Both of their instructors were at least 40-50 years older, and each participant mentioned “retirement” and “retirement age” in their interviews. The instructors did not match the level of technological usage these students require. Penny and Molly both felt that lecture was overused. Molly’s teacher “didn’t do a PowerPoint,” and Penny’s was “just lecture” with “an occasional PowerPoint.” Generation Y participants, Julia and Michelle, also felt as if the level of communication was not up to their technological standards. While they both expressed positive feelings toward their learning environment, communication was not as prompt as they would have preferred. Julia confessed her professor was “a bit slower with emails” while Michelle remembered waiting for a response to email “almost always the next day...next business day” no matter when the communication was sent. Rocky, also a Generation Y cohort member, felt his instructor was “grumpy” and went off on “tangents” unrelated to the course topic. Generation X participants, Rita, Anna, and Billy, felt that real-world application is missing in the classroom. Instructors teach what they know but not necessarily what will help you in the workforce. The oldest generation of participants, Baby Boomers, experienced instructors who were much younger. Doris and Martha did not experience technological disparities, but ageism was an issue. Martha’s experience led to her feeling her program was “difficult” to do at her age, and she “dropped out.” She confessed that

“he was the one that after taking the course, I decided not to take any more courses.” Doris described an instructor who, in class, stated that something was so easy “your grandmother could do it.” Doris also described feeling as if professors thought this was a “hobby” of hers and did not take her as seriously as younger students. Maxwell felt the need to remind his instructor of his age and that he was an “adult.”

Research question 2: How do students learn to communicate with teachers from a different generation?

Again, the experiences are mixed. Some students do not learn to communicate with their teachers at all and avoid communication, while others adapt to the teacher’s preferred method. None of the participants mentioned an instructor who was willing to change their communication style to meet the needs of the students. It was mere serendipity when the communication styles of student and instructor were compatible.

Many of the participants who had older instructors in their experience expressed an inability to communicate effectively with their instructors. Penny (Generation Z), Michelle, Rocky (Generation Y), Rita, and Anna (Generation X) all expressed a disconnect with their older professors. Penny’s experience included a professor who “preferred that we come talk to her directly,” but the class was only held two days a week. So, if a student had a question, “you needed to ask her one of the two days that we had class.” Michelle could communicate with her instructor via email, but was hesitant to ask questions in class because the instructor was “just a little intimidating” and “super smart.” Students did not want to feel “stupid” by asking questions. Maxwell, Rocky, Rita, and Anna experienced older, male professors who did not engage with their students. Rita and Anna both felt “uncomfortable” approaching these teachers. Email was not an option for them.

Molly (Generation Z), Julia (Generation Y), Billy (Generation X), and Doris (Baby Boomer Generation) experienced open instructors who were approachable and available to their students. Doris “felt comfortable” texting and emailing her professor. Billy and Julia expressed warm feelings and even friendship toward their professors. Molly described her professor as “very academic in a professional way,” and she helped Molly feel as if she could have meaningful conversations with her.

Research question 3: What are the students’ experiences based on educators’ ability to address the specific learning needs of each unique generation?

The shared experiences do not reveal that instructors are addressing the specific learning needs of each unique generation with the exception of a documented disability, such as hearing impairment as reported by Maxwell. Educators are placing the responsibility for learning the material on the student no matter the generation. Knowledge of the specific learning needs was not revealed by the students’ experiences. All of the participants revealed a need for real-world application in the form of projects or relatable examples. More formative assessment in the form of allowing time for questions and discussion is also needed.

Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964) need professors to understand “you come into classes with a whole life of experience,” as Doris explained it. She also wanted professors to take Baby Boomer’s work seriously and not “for a lark or a hobby.” Martha may have continued in her course of study if she was not led to feel as if she was “too old” for the coursework. She needed a teacher not a “researcher at the college level” who did not “understand how to teach.” Maxwell wanted “individualized” communication and did not want to be treated like everyone else.

Generation X (born 1965-1980) need a combination of practical application and real-world examples. This generation needs time for discussion and questions for deeper understanding and application. Rita expressed frustration with the teaching style of her older professor which was “just him talking” and “not the type of person to take questions.” Anna, who was “so scared of failing,” needed her older professor to have an “open mind...to people’s thoughts.” This, too, would have allowed for deeper understanding and further application of the material in the real-world. Billy expressed this well when he said, “we were not taught how to work together.” Information combined with the thoughts of others would have allowed deeper learning and understanding, not just memorizing facts.

Generation Y (born 1981-1997) needs hands-on (when possible) and practical real-world application of the material. Generation Y, as explained by Rocky, find it “challenging to understand” when an instructor does not “stay on topic” and cannot bridge educational material and the real world. Generation Y needs accountability as stated by Julia: “...make sure I...[am] writing it down and writing it down often.” Michelle’s needs echo this sentiment: “...watch...me, help me as I’m doing it.” This action-oriented type of instruction leads to a deeper understanding of the material.

Generation Z (born after 1997) needs instructors to get to the point, utilize technology effectively with content accessibility, but allow time for questions and discussion. As Molly put it, “We’re just exhausted and done at the end of the year because she did just talk a lot.” Molly wanted more from her older professor such as “implement more time” for questions and ask, “Is there anything you’re confused about in this content?” Penny would encourage her older professor to use “more technology and I mean, not that it has to be so heavy, but her lectures could be available online.”

Summary

Upon analysis of the data, clear patterns and themes were revealed. The experiences of eleven current or former college students were examined. Interviews, documents, and focus groups provided the data for this phenomenology. The eleven participants were asked a series of questions that allowed them to share their experience of a time when they were a student in a class in which the professor was not of the same generational cohort. Participants were asked about their own personal learning style, a description of the course and its instructor, teaching methods, communication styles, feelings about the instructor, and what tips they might provide the instructor on how to teach them, personally. Documents that provided information about assignments and grades were also considered. The focus groups allowed the participants to share more details about the learning experience with all participants and others of their own generational cohort. This data was compiled and analyzed. Themes were discovered based on the frequency topics that appeared in the conversations as they pertained to the research questions. Ageism and feelings, communication, and learning and teaching emerged as clear and strong thematic subjects. These themes, together with the responses to the research questions, thoroughly described the participants' experiences.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

This study examined five of the six living generations in order to describe the experience of college students who have been educated by a professor of a different generation. These experiences reveal how generationally heterogeneous classrooms communicate and learn. The theories which guided this study are Mannheim's (1936) generational theory and Skinner's (1966) learning theory of behaviorism as it pertains to adult learners in the post-secondary, multi-generational classroom. These theories are a combination of learning and generational theory as they relate to adult learners in the generationally heterogeneous classroom.

Chapter Five contains the conclusion of the research and will describe the summary of the findings. Firstly, the summary of findings is described. A thorough discussion of the findings and the implications which takes into consideration the relevant literature and theory follow the summary of the findings. The implications section reveals the methodological and practical application of the data. This is followed by an outline of the study with delimitations and limitations identified. The final portion and the conclusion of this section discuss the recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

Three research questions formed the path of this study. The summary of findings provides a concise summary of the study findings, while briefly answering each research question based on the participants' experiences. Each research question is presented with data from the participants. Direct quotes from the participants are included for an accurate representation of the data. The research question answers are categorized by generational cohort when possible.

Research question 1: What are the experiences of students who are learning and communicating in a heterogeneous post-secondary classroom?

The experiences of students who are learning and communicating in a heterogeneous, post-secondary classroom are eclectic but reveal clear patterns. Many students appear to have specific learning and communication needs that are not being met, which appears to be related to generation gaps. Generation Z, the youngest of the generational participants, do not know what it is like to have a professor who is younger than them. The instructors did not match the level of technological usage these students require. They also felt that lecture was overused. The participants used “old school” and “retirement age” to describe their instructors, but described their learning needs as “modern.” While admitting their technological immersion did not occur until their “middle school” years, they felt the post-secondary classroom, for the most part, was not as “engaging” as it could be.

Generation Y participants also felt as if the level of communication was not up to their technological standards and would have appreciated a “prompt” response to their communication, especially email. Generation Y also felt “intimidated” by their instructors. This generation also experienced low-quality communication. The professors demanded a high level of respect with little reciprocity from the students. Generation Y respected the level of intelligence their instructors possessed but wanted to feel more connected to these individuals. This would have allowed them to feel more comfortable asking questions in class.

Generation X felt that real-world application is missing in the classroom. Instructors teach what they know but not necessarily what will help you in the workforce. Their time is valuable wasting it on irrelevant information or information with no real-world application is frustrating. As the younger two generations also experienced, Generation X did not feel as if

they had quality communication. They experienced feelings of terror and intimidation when they thought of asking questions for clarification of material.

The oldest generation of participants experienced instructors who were much younger. While they did not express experiencing technological disparities, ageism was an issue. Baby Boomers struggled with professors not taking them seriously or viewing their continuing education as a “hobby.” They experienced young instructors who assigned large amounts of material with little time for learning and no real-world application. Baby Boomers wanted a co-learning environment, did not want special treatment due to their age, but also wanted recognition for the life of experiences they brought to the classroom as these experiences could enrich the erudition of their fellow classmates.

Research question 2: How do students learn to communicate with teachers from a different generation?

The communication experiences were consistent in one way: not one of the participants mentioned an instructor who was willing to change their communication style to meet the needs of the students. Instructors placed this duty firmly on the students. Some students do not learn to communicate with their teachers at all. Examples of this were found in all studied generations. Other students adapted to the teacher’s preferred method in order to get their educational needs met, and many formed peer groups to help them interpret the information delivered during class.

Generation Z, Y, and X, who had older instructors in their experience, expressed an inability to communicate effectively. Their older instructors preferred a face-to-face approach, and while email may have been used, it was not the preferred format. Students found themselves unable to get timely clarification of material at any time other than the scheduled class. All

generations expressed respect for the amount of knowledge their teachers had but stressed they did not want to feel as if their questions were unwelcome. Feeling uncomfortable and intimidated were common to the experiences though a few participants experienced open instructors who were approachable and available to their students. There was a strong link between a professor showing engagement and interest in the students with understanding the material and expressing satisfactory communication.

Research question 3: What are the students' experiences based on educators' ability to address the specific learning needs of each unique generation?

The shared experiences do not reveal that instructors are aware of addressing the specific learning needs of each unique generation. Educators are placing the responsibility for learning the material on the student no matter the generation. Teachers, who bring a wealth of knowledge to the classroom, teach in a way they are comfortable with. Students do not perceive instructors trying to find a new way to reach other generations. All of the participants revealed a need for real-world application in the form of projects or relatable examples. Students want more formative assessment in the form of questions, answers, and discussions. Teachers need to be comfortable with this type of teaching/learning.

Baby Boomers want and need professors to understand the life experience they bring to the class. They want to be taken seriously and to be taught with real-world examples. They want instructors to be aware of ageism as much as they are racism and gender bias individualized instruction. Generation X needs a combination of practical application and real-world examples as well. They want and need time for deeper understanding and application. Generation X is frustrated with professors who talk the entire class time and do not have an open mind. They want to know how to work together in the workforce. All of this information combined with the

thoughts of others would have allowed deeper learning and understanding, not just memorizing facts. Generation Y needs hands-on (when possible) and also practical real-world application of the material. This generation needs a teacher who can stay on topic and provide a practical bridge into the real world. This action-oriented type of instruction leads to deeper understanding of the material. Generation Z needs instructors to get to the point, utilize technology effectively with content accessibility, but allow time for questions and discussion. They want technology integrated into the educational delivery system and do not see this happening as fully as it could in the post-secondary classroom.

Discussion

The purpose of this section is to discuss the study findings in relation to the empirical and theoretical literature reviewed in Chapter Two. This discussion details how the research corroborates previous research, but also extends the previous research and adds to the field. This phenomenology revealed a new understanding of the post-secondary students' experience in the multigenerational classroom.

Empirical Discussion

The study of the literature revealed patterns concerning learning styles, teaching styles, and technology usage. Interestingly, the only generational cohorts that mentioned technology were the Baby Boomer cohort and the Generation Z cohort. As expected, Generation Z expressed a desire for their instructor to use technology more effectively. The literature study suggested that Baby Boomers may struggle with the increase of technological advances, but this phenomenology revealed something different.

We know that students from all generational cohorts are attending college and comprising a multigenerational classroom. In 2017, it was reported that up to 40% of part-time enrollment

in higher education were individuals over the age of 35 (Lowell & Morris, 2018). Preferred learning styles and technology use are just one aspect of this challenging mixture. Older students are all but forgotten as the typical college targets marketing to younger, high school graduates (Simi & Matusitz, 2016). It is only logical to conclude that teaching styles in the post-secondary classroom would be designed to meet the needs of the targeted market, high school students, or Generation Z, but the research does not show this. Younger students are frustrated due to the lack of consideration for their learning styles.

Older, adult learners bring qualities to the classroom their younger classmates do not yet possess and are an asset to the classroom. Not only do they bring life experience to the classroom, but they also have their own generation-specific values which add richness to the classroom environment (Boyle et al., 2018; Dabija et al., 2018; Houk, 2011; Karthikeyan, 2017; LaBan, 2013; Novak, 2018; Polakova & Klimova, 2019; Sherman, 2006). In addition to the unique values and experiences, older adult students have a vast variety of reasons for attending college (Simi & Matusitz, 2016). The Baby Boomer participants expressed these truths but did not feel they were valued in their classrooms. They felt as if their age was a deterrence, or even a distraction in the classroom.

Sherman (2006) identified issues as they pertain to coaching and mentoring a multi-generational cohort. According to the research, Baby Boomers prefer to be coached in a peer setting and appreciate public recognition (Sherman, 2006). Generation X prefers merit-based recognition (Sherman, 2006). Millennials appreciate personal feedback, but also tend to exit an experience that is not meeting their needs (Sherman, 2006). Burton et al (2019) noted that Generation Z needs copious praise and want to know their teachers care about them (Miller &

Mills, 2019). This phenomenology revealed experiences that were slightly different than the research.

Baby Boomers in this phenomenology wanted to blend in and feel included. They wanted to feel as if the entire group was a group of their peers. Students learning together. While Generation X mentioned their grade point average as something of importance to them, the participants felt as if understanding the material and communication were of greater value and would lead to better classroom performance. The Generation Y participants did express appreciation for real-time evaluation of their performance. This is in agreement with what was found in the literature. The Generation Z participants did not mention feedback or praise but did desire a personal connection to their teachers.

The communication styles described in the literature and what was discovered in the personal experiences of the participants did not reveal many variances. Baby Boomers are less formal and appear to be comfortable with many forms of communication, including text messages. The fact that the social aspect of the classroom for a Baby Boomer could be described as democratic (Polakova & Klimova, 2019) agrees with these participants who desired an “egalitarian” form of the classroom. Generation X does well with technological-based communication and information that “gets to the point.” This cohort is impatient and appreciates content that is relevant (Polakova & Klimova, 2019). This is reflected in their desire for applicable, real-world examples. This research did reveal that Generation Y enjoys instant feedback (Boyle et al., 2018; Novak, 2019; Rickes, 2009; Rickes, 2016), teamwork, email, and texting (Polakova & Klimova, 2019; Sherman, 2006). Generation Y described an interactive classroom with lots of conversation and collaboration (Houck, 2011), but this style of classroom was not limited to this generation. All cohorts wanted this form of teaching.

The literature discussed Generation Z as conflicted as they utilize technology in a way the other generations do not, but they also desire face-to-face communication similar to that of the Mature/Silent generation (Rickes, 2016). The participants in this phenomenology did not mention preferring or desiring face-to-face communication. Their interviews revealed a desire for meaningful group work and real-world examples. They wanted consistent communication, but electronic communication was viewed just as positive as face-to-face.

The literature was saturated with examples of the disparity of electronic technology usage in the classroom, but the research revealed a resolution to this issue. One study suggested that almost half of the Mature/Silent and Baby Boomer generations are afraid of technology (Hu et al., 2004) and may struggle with the ever-changing technological world (Shatto & Erwin, 2017). However, the participants in this phenomenology were tech-savvy individuals who were comfortable with Zoom meetings, online learning, and utilized high tech equipment at a level not matched by the younger participants. However, the interviews did reveal that students may be more versed in advanced electronic technology than their instructors (Clark, 2017).

The traditional college experience could be described as teacher-centered, and “in the teacher-centered classroom, students place all of their focus on the teacher, students generally work alone, and collaboration is discouraged” (Allen & Jackson, 2017, p. 17). As discussed previously, this appears to be the experience of the participants as well. However, the literature study revealed that this style of teaching may appeal to the Mature/Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, and Generation X, but “students often find teacher-centered classroom boring” (Allen & Jackson, 2017, p. 18). In fact, most students found this style of teaching boring. Even the Baby Boomers mentioned having their information in shorter chunks, which was attributed only to Generation Z in the literature. Additionally, meaningful life application (Zimmer, 2018) was

only attributed to Generation Z in the literature, but the research revealed that all ages desire to have more meaningful, real-world application with hands-on experiences as much as possible. This is the complete opposite of how the traditional college lecture is delivered.

Two forms of student-centered learning were mentioned in the literature, but also in the student experiences. The flipped classroom and project-based learning, or PBL, were both identified by participants as a way for them to value their education and retain information. The flipped classroom changes the role of the teacher (Betihavas et al., 2016; Cukurbasi & Kiyici, 2017). The teacher is not providing the information as the content expert. PBL is similar to the flipped classroom as it encourages student-led exploration. The students are led to discover a problem to solve. The participants in this phenomenology, no matter their age, occupation, or field of study, described a form of PBL as their preferred learning method. The reviewed literature was found to contain the theory that PBL may not be viewed as a valuable type of education (Novak, 2019; Rickes, 2016; Sherman, 2006) for older generations, but the research showed a different view.

The literature studied revealed suggested patterns of learning for Millennials and Generation Z, as they enjoy relying on each other for support, learning, and information (Adamson et al., 2018; Schlee et al., 2020). Collaborative learning is something they are familiar with (Alfonseca et al., 2006). The research showed that all generational cohorts appreciate factors of this style of learning. Baby Boomers *do* tend to be more individualistic but appreciate more group discussions (Burton et al., 2019; Clark, 2017). It is suggested that Generation X is not team-oriented and even more individualistic than Baby Boomers (Burton et al., 2019; Clark, 2017); however, it was this generational cohort that shared experiences that involved developing study groups and working together. According to Picciano (2019), group work has become more

common in post-secondary classrooms, but the research revealed it may not be as common as once believed.

Karthikeyan (2017) stated, “Millennials are looking for leaders who care about people. Millennials tend to want to know why” (p. 606), but this phenomenology revealed that all age groups are looking for such leadership and information. Generation Z needs real-life application and meaningful lessons (Zimmer, 2018), but also appreciates an instructor who demonstrates a caring attitude (Miller & Mills, 2019). The experiences in this research support this, but all generational cohorts mentioned the importance of real-life application and the value of a caring instructor.

The research in this phenomenology revealed new information regarding today’s post-secondary students. No matter the age of the student, real-life application, meaningful examples, a sense of belonging in the classroom, respect for the teacher and student, collaboration, and caring communication are vital. It is not an accurate assumption to state that certain generations would not benefit or could not learn in this type of learning environment. Students want engaging, relevant material delivered by an instructor who demonstrates understanding and caring for the students. This can be shown by demonstrating understanding of ageism, racism, sexism, and gender identity concerns which are not apparent in all generations and exist in all post-secondary classrooms at varying degrees.

Theoretical Discussion

The theories guiding this study are a combination of learning theories as they relate to each generations’ unique learning style. Skinner’s (1966) theory of behaviorism, as it applies to adult learners, along with Mannheim’s (1936) generational theory provided the scaffolding for this study. Skinner (1966) and Mannheim’s (1936) work illustrate why the multigenerational

classroom is a challenge. The results of this study illustrated the needs for older adults to have tailored teaching based on their learning styles as described in Mannheim's (1936) theory. However, the study revealed a more cohesive learning style for all adult students. Skinner's (1966) behaviorism theory supports this finding. Participants' response to the types of teaching offered morphed into a combination of taking what was given and developing additional supports to aid understanding. Older professors will teach what they know, and this tends to be lecture or what may be referred to as "sage on the stage." Many of the participants referred to this type of lecture-based teaching. No matter the generational cohort, they felt as if this type of instruction was not enough.

Allen and Jackson (2017) described one teaching method as the student-centered classroom. This method is centered on the students' learning goals. Conversely, the teacher-centered classroom is focused on the teacher and lecture. The participants in this study described their experience mostly in terms of the teacher-centered classroom. They also expressed the value in learning more efficiently from hands-on and visual lessons as opposed to teacher-centered lectures and text-based lessons (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). All generations studied expressed the desire to discuss, analyze, and work through information utilizing real-world examples and applications.

The research also suggests that the "sage on the stage" will be gradually replaced by the "guide on the side" approach (Ricketts, 2009) which may be hard for older generations to adapt to. However, the participants in this study expressed a desire for collaboration in the classroom. All generational cohorts valued discussion and practical application of the material. This type of classroom was described by Blue and Henson (2015) as the ideal learning environment for younger generations, but not older. The experiences of these participants revealed that all

wanted less lecture and more collaboration. Incorporating this technique may include all ages and all may learn by shared experiences, but especially the copious life experiences of the older students.

The current literature does not address the complexities of communication and learning styles combined in the post-secondary classroom. The current literature provided background, history, and characteristics of the generations but certainly lacked the in-depth connection between these generational characteristics, how to address them in the post-secondary classroom as one cohesive unit, and how students will learn best under these complex circumstances. This study revealed students' preferences on how to address these issues. Their experiences revealed a group of individuals, no matter their age, who wanted practical information, discussion and collaboration in the classroom, and respect for their station in life without condescension. Age is an issue. These students wanted their age and experience to be incorporated. They wanted a generationally diverse learning environment with collaboration between educators and students.

Implications

The significance of this study as it pertains to the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications are discussed in this section. Recommendations for educators and adult learners are also included in this section. This phenomenology revealed the experiences of eleven unique individuals from varying generational cohorts. However, analogous patterns for learning and teaching were found in all groups.

Theoretical

Mannheim's (1936) generational theory considered the geographical and historical locations of individuals (Connolly, 2019). Skinner's (1966) theory of behaviorism was built on the foundation of consequences or reinforcers. It is reasonable to conclude that learned

behaviors would be generationally similar considering the historical context and experiences unique to a generation. The exploration of the participants' experiences revealed this truth. The generational cohort to which a participant belonged contained a shared worldview and learning style to the others in their cohort.

Experiential learning, or learning from one's experiences (Yardley et al., 2012), and generational theory (Costa et al., 2019; Cox et al., 2019; Mannheim, 1936; Wilson & Gerber, 2008) are linked in a way that cannot be denied. The older an individual is, the more experiences and opportunities for learning have been presented. There is value in considering what experiences a student brings to the classroom, but also giving the student a learning experience with real-world application is grounded in these theories. Skinner (1966) and Mannheim's (1936) theories would suggest that the behavior of an individual has been shaped by their experiences and the influence of the world around them, but there is also value in providing shared experiences in the classroom. Acknowledging what older students bring into the classroom, and embracing that as part of the curriculum, adds to the real-world application of the students.

Experiential learning, supported by the learning theories of Skinner (1966) and combined with the generational theory of Mannheim (1936), explained the differences in how individuals of varying ages perceive information. Lived experiences provide learning opportunities for growth in a cognitive way (Polakova & Klimova, 2019). These truths appeared in the experiences of all participants. As the individuals shared their story and their life experiences, a richly colored background began to develop. The desire to learn through real-world examples and relatable projects, while preserving the generational differences, also presented a cohesive learning goal. Combining the real-world examples of all students embellishes the learning

fabric. A variety of generations in the classroom can provide valuable educational experiences simply by their presence. Their responses to information, the opinions they supply, and their mere decorum can provide yet another layer to experiential learning.

Empirical

While the themes in the literature appeared in the research, there were unanticipated commonalities within the generations. The literature review contained strict, generational characteristics which became blurred in the research. The research revealed a more compatible learning style and desired pedagogy. Students expressed similar themes which were not revealed in the study of the literature. These participants wanted clear communication, real-world application, meaningful interactions, and teachers who cared about their individual needs and success. Educational progress in the form of grades revealed a higher level of individual success when the instructor was engaged with the students. This was true in all cohorts. Technology, though revealed in the literature as a complicating factor for older generations, did not appear as an issue for the individuals in this study. Most had professors who have adapted to technology use, even if in a minimal way. Older students have also adapted to the use of technology in education. Technological disparities did not appear as a recurrent theme in any generational cohort.

Practical

While many have studied the living generations and tabulated a list of characteristics, this phenomenology revealed that generational cohorts are more alike than they are different. This could be due to the nature of higher education as a whole, the nature of students who are seeking additional education, or could be limited to the nature of these participants. No matter the reasons, the fact remains that this phenomenology examined eleven students, their post-

secondary educational experiences with a teacher from a different generational cohort, and uncovered answers to the problem of how to teach in the multigenerational classroom. These answers are not complicated.

Educators need to know what students need in order to be successful. Students' time is valuable, and education is expensive. Students want their experience to reflect respect for their time and money. They want educators who care about their success and who are in tune with the issue of ageism, but also other social injustices. Students want their education to be relatable to their world. They want to know how to apply this information in their everyday lives or in their chosen vocation. People want to be valued and not questioned concerning their motives for this education. This involves a high level of respect across all generations.

Delimitations and Limitations

This phenomenology was conducted to learn the experiences of individuals who have taken post-secondary courses with an instructor of another generational cohort. The delimitations of this study include participants over the age of 18 and using a site of convenience for recruitment. Setting the boundary of age had two rationales. One is that college students, for the most part, are over the age of 18, but also this would eliminate the need for parental consent for the small chance a participant would be under the age of 18. The slight odds of having this age of a participant justified setting the age of participants to 18 and older. The other delimitation was choosing sites of convenience. As colleges and school corporations are logical sites to find former or current college students, the choice was made to recruit within these sites. This research was also limited to the experiences of eleven individuals. Part of this decision was due to individuals who were willing to participate, but also to allow for the full description of the experiences.

Limitations do exist with this study. Covid-19 required that all recruitment and data collection be done virtually. Email was the chosen platform for recruitment. While no preference was given to who received the recruitment email, participants would need regular access to this form of communication in order to determine their willingness to participate. It is possible that older generations, such as Mature/Silent and Baby Boomers, were not exposed to the same opportunities for recruitment. Additionally, the individual participant's level of participation complicated the research. Once interviewed, many of the participants were not as communicative and some did not complete their described role as the researcher desired. The data obtained provided new insights; however, new research completed during a time when a pandemic is not present will allow even more comprehensive data to be collected.

Recommendations for Future Research

For this researcher, the biggest populations which should be studied are the older two living generations, the Mature/Silent and Baby Boomer. As only two Mature/Silent individuals were interested in participating (though neither completed consent forms and could not be interviewed) this reveals a need to recruit this population in a different way and explore their experiences. Many of this generation were the educators in the participants' stories, but learning their experiences as a student is also vital. Additionally, the Baby Boomers are a growing group of adult education students. More research should be done on this population, as we can learn how they are experiencing learning at this age. This type of research would contribute to the knowledge base of how to decrease student attrition rates in the United States. This study only provided research on a small scale, but perhaps a detailed, quantitative study would reveal what these older students are experiencing and more ways to help them be successful.

This research did not include the educator's experience. A phenomenology with educators who have taught those of another generation would be beneficial to see the alternative viewpoint. Understanding why educators teach the way they do and uncovering their feelings toward students, teaching, and education, in general, would add a wonderful perspective to the topic. Combining that research with the findings of this research would aid in developing a comprehensive, educational view of our complicated, modern educational arena.

Summary

This phenomenology examined the unique post-secondary experiences of eleven individuals who represented four of the six living generations. The GI Generation was not included in this study due to the low probability of being a higher education student. The Mature/Silent generation was invited to participate but was unable to complete research requirements for varying reasons. The remaining generations who were part of this phenomenological research were Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964), Generation X (born 1965-1980), Generation Y (born 1981-1997), and Generation Z (born after 1997).

The review of the literature revealed specific patterns of generation-specific learning and communication styles. This phenomenology revealed commonalities with the literature, such as the generational cohort to which a participant belonged contained a shared worldview and learning style to the others in their cohort. On the other hand, the experiences shared also uncovered new patterns that revealed a more cohesive view of generational learning. All students desire a post-secondary classroom which includes respect for the life a student brings, projects, experiences, and examples which contain real-world applications, and meaningful communication revealing an instructor's concern for student success. This will require educators to analyze their teaching methods and acknowledge any personal biases. Educators need a

balance of genuine examples, varied delivery methods, social awareness, and meaningful communication in order to reach the complicated arena that is today's post-secondary, multigenerational classroom.

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Appendix A

Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2020, Fall Enrollment

Table 303.50. Total fall enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by level of enrollment, control and level of institution, attendance status, and age of student: 2019	
Attendance status and age of student	Undergraduate
	Total
1	2
All students	16,565,066
Under 18	1,450,384
18 and 19	4,509,302
20 and 21	4,022,673
22 to 24	2,361,365
25 to 29	1,616,666
30 to 34	917,999
35 to 39	607,080
40 to 49	676,016
50 to 64	334,213
65 and over	53,426
Age unknown	15,942
Full-time	10,219,934
Under 18	254,881
18 and 19	3,752,904
20 and 21	3,215,272
22 to 24	1,424,669
25 to 29	703,292
30 to 34	349,420
35 to 39	214,215
40 to 49	213,164
50 to 64	81,515
65 and over	5,148
Age unknown	5,454
Part-time	6,345,132
Under 18	1,195,503
18 and 19	756,398
20 and 21	807,401
22 to 24	936,696
25 to 29	913,374
30 to 34	568,579
35 to 39	392,865
40 to 49	462,852

50 to 64	252,698
65 and over	48,278
Age unknown	10,488
Percentage distribution of students with known age\1\	
All students	100.0
Under 18	8.8
18 and 19	27.2
20 and 21	24.3
22 to 24	14.3
25 to 29	9.8
30 to 34	5.5
35 to 39	3.7
40 to 49	4.1
50 to 64	2.0
65 and over	0.3
Full-time	100.0
Under 18	2.5
18 and 19	36.7
20 and 21	31.5
22 to 24	13.9
25 to 29	6.9
30 to 34	3.4
35 to 39	2.1
40 to 49	2.1
50 to 64	0.8
65 and over	0.1
Part-time	100.0
Under 18	18.9
18 and 19	11.9
20 and 21	12.7
22 to 24	14.8
25 to 29	14.4
30 to 34	9.0
35 to 39	6.2
40 to 49	7.3
50 to 64	4.0
65 and over	0.8
\1\Percentage distributions exclude students whose age is unknown.	

Note. Adapted from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d20/tables/dt20_303.50.asp
U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2020, Fall Enrollment component. (This table was prepared January 2021.)

Appendix B Screening Survey

Title of the Project: Generational Learning Styles: A Phenomenology

Principal Investigator: Amy Baxley, M.Ed., Liberty University

*** Required**

Email address *

Your email

First Name *

Your answer

Last Name *

Your answer

Best Number to Contact You (Voice or Text) *

Your answer

Which generation do you identify with? *

Mature/Silent (born 1928-1945)

Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964)

Generation X (born 1965-1980)

Generation Y (born 1981-1997)

Generation Z (born after 1997)

Gender *

Female

Male

Other:

Have you ever attended college? *

Yes

No

Was this college in Indiana? *

Yes

No

What was/is the name of your college? (Please list all.) *

Your answer

Did you complete at least 24 college credit hours? *

Yes

No

Have you ever taken a course in which your instructor was not of the same generational cohort as you? *

Yes

No

Maybe

Would you like to take part in a research project which would involve exploring your communication and learning experiences during your time in college? *

Yes

No

Link to Google form: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSebpXJBz4-9-ycXUUUoTARSS9yc_DD2_mNOV9KJruAz_qq98Q/viewform?usp=sf_link

Appendix C Recruitment Email

Dear [Recipient]:

As a doctoral student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research to better understand the learning and communication style variations for college students from five of the six living generations in the United States and discover teaching methods which will engage learners in a multi-generational higher education classroom. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be at least 18 years of age and a previous or current college student at one or more of these three post-secondary institutions: Brown Regional University (BRU), Brown Technological Institute (BTI), and/or Brown Specialty College (BSC). Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in an interview which will last approximately an hour. This interview will be recorded. It will take over utilizing a virtual platform such as Skype, Zoom, Webex, or Google Meet. This will be determined when the interview is scheduled. The format will be based upon participant preference. It is estimated this interview will take an hour. The second part of the process will involve participating in a focus group. This group will be conducted using a virtual platform such as Skype, Zoom, Webex or Google Meet. The focus group will be shaped by interview questions. It is estimated this group will last an hour.

Participation will be completely anonymous. The participant records of this study (transcripts, course names, professors identified) will be kept private. Ethical considerations for this phenomenological study include confidentiality and transparency. Transparency includes participant's knowledge of how their personal data is protected. All data obtained for the purpose of this research will be digitally stored on my password protected computer. No other person will have access to this password. In addition to the computer privacy, all research materials will be stored in a password protected file. Only individuals who are assisting with the development and preparation of the research will be privy to this data. This may include peer review and professional review and/or transcription and editing professionals.

In order to participate, please click **here** to access a survey. Submit the survey within 7 days of receipt of this email. If selected (based upon needs of the researcher), a consent document will be sent to you, and if not selected, you will be given notice of the decision. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign and return the consent document and your first interview will be scheduled.

Sincerely,

Amy M. Baxley, M.Ed.
Liberty University Doctoral Student
(812) 267-0743
ambaxley@liberty.edu

Appendix D
Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself to me.
2. Please explain your higher education status (example: degree conferred, how many courses completed, etc.).
3. Describe your learning process. Do you learn more effectively if you hear, see, or experience information? How do you study?
4. Please describe a time when you took a course when the instructor was not of the same generational cohort as you.
5. How was the course delivered? (Online, in person, hybrid)
6. Please describe the instructor of that course.
7. What teaching methods did they employ (lecture, guided notes, class discussion, PowerPoint, videos)?
8. Describe the quality of the communication between you and the instructor.
9. Describe an assignment during that course that taught you the most about the topic of the course.
10. Describe an assignment in this course that was irrelevant to you.
11. What made this assignment meaningless for you?
12. If you could address this instructor and give him/her “tips” on how to teach you, what would you tell him/her?
13. We have discussed many details about your higher education experience. What else would you like to tell me concerning your higher education experience?

Appendix E
Focus Group Interview Questions

1. Reflecting on your individual interview, what have you learned about your higher education learning experience?
2. If you could tell instructors the best way to educate you, what would you say?
3. How would you describe the educational experiences of other students- from your perspective?
4. What do you believe are the learning characteristics and preferred teaching style of your generational cohort?
5. Please describe how teachers adapt their teaching style to your specific learning and communication needs?
6. Please describe how students learn to communicate with teachers from a different generational cohort.