

Time of Enrichment: How Older Adults are Learning on Their Own

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Research Article

Length: 6252 words

Microsoft Word

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## Time of Enrichment: How Older Adults are Learning on Their Own

The purpose of this study was to investigate how older adults are learning on their own. Education has the power to be an agent of change, both individually and socially. Similarly, this research isolated how learning can impact the older person's life. Of particular interest was a more detailed description of this personal learning by employing a general qualitative design. Between September and November 2001 four older adults were purposefully selected and interviewed. Each interview lasted several hours and took place in the homes of the participants. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. Each participant has been contacted since the interviews for clarification of data. During the interviews the participants were encouraged to show evidence of their personal learning. This research indicated that these older adults are involved in a variety of enriching learning activities. These findings are: Self-directed learning (SDL) is the focus of their time, leisure is the context of this learning, and there is a foundation of health and finances whereby these older adults continue to learn.

Key Words: Older Adults, Self-Directed Learning, Leisure, Qualitative Research

### Time of Enrichment: How Older Adults Are Learning on Their Own

“Well, I tell you, we enjoyed that trip so much, we learned so much during that experience, we did a lot of research, and reading, and we enjoyed the time with our children, I tell you, *it was a real time of enrichment* [emphasis added].” (Ms. S. comments on a trip with her family to Mesa Verde National Park.)

### Introduction

The older adult population is undergoing a variety of change. There are more older adults (65+) today than at any previous time in history, and this segment of the population is increasing. Also, the aging of the Post Second World War generation or “Baby Boom Generation” will double the older adult population to 70 million by the year 2030 in the United States. This older adult population will become more diverse because of increases in older ethnic populations and the number of women that continue to outlive men. Interestingly, some older adults are setting new standards and breaking traditions such as competitive athletes and by continuing to enroll in university classes (Lamdin, 1997).

Of special interest are the choices of today’s older adult during retirement. Retirement is a unique time in ones life where spare time and freedom of choice reign. It is interesting to see how many older adults are choosing to use this time to continue to learn. Some older adults are taking classes, not only the popular genre of arts and crafts, but also classes for college credit (Lamdin, 1997). Some areas of the USA are making it easier for older adults to continue to learn, for example the state of Georgia will allow anyone over age 65 to take a college level class for free if there is room. Other non-traditional ways of learning are very popular such as Learning in Retirement (LIR),

Elderhostel (Mills, 1993), and educational travel (Roberson, 2003b). Despite the increase of these avenues of learning, the complete story of older adult learning involves the large amount of time older adults are learning on their own (Lamdin, 1997). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to understand more about how older adults are learning on their own.

### Review of Literature

SDL can be described as learning that is self-initiated, personal, and intentional (Roberson, 2003a). This learning is evident in individual systematically planned learning projects as well as in on-going personal interests (Lamdin, 1997). Although SDL can begin unintentionally, from happenstance or even a required class, the defining characteristic of SDL is that the person eventually takes charge of his or her own learning. Lamdin, who researched learning of older adults or Elderlearning, states “The important thing is that these projects are ‘owned’ by the learner who is in control of what is learned, when the learning starts, where it goes, and when it is complete” (p. 118).

Personal learning and self-directed learning is the way most adults choose to learn (Knowles, 1984). Self-directed learning (SDL) allows the learner to study when, where, and how they want. This is the natural way for today’s busy adult to learn and to continue academic interests into retirement. Some of the more popular theories of successful aging are based on a philosophy of personal learning. For example, Baltes and Baltes’ (1990) ideas of selection, optimization, and compensation (SOC) contain a strong learning component. This cutting back (selecting), optimizing (choosing the best), and compensating (making up differences) is based on individual techniques of learning. Also, Rowe and Kahn’s (1998) popular concept of successful aging discuss a variety of

techniques that can enable the individual to age successfully. It should be noted that this assumes the adult is willing to learn the necessary skills for successful aging such as exercise, nutrition, and personal satisfaction. These concepts are similar to the ideas presented by McGuire, Boyd, and Tedrick (1996) which discusses how older adults can learn how to become like Ulysses rather than traditional stereotypes of aging.

Most of this personal learning occurs in ones leisure time. Mannell (1999) discusses the interlocking ideas of leisure and wellness with older adults. He makes the point that “leisure participation is one of a number of positive factors in the wellness of adults” (p. 9). He also stresses the positive impact of health and marital status, and emphasizes how involvement with positive leisure choices is an integral aspect for successful aging. Older adults are involved in many activities especially that of volunteering, travel, exercise, gardening, and activities with children and grandchildren. But more important for this study is the link between these activities and personal learning. Some people are enjoying these activities so much they begin to focus their life around these activities; Stebbins (1992, 2004) calls this serious leisure. Stebbins describes three types of serious leisure – amateurs, hobby, and volunteer. Volunteer leisure activities characterize those who spend a significant amount of time assisting others. Hobbies include unique aspects of leisure such as model kits, gardening, and cooking. And the amateur suggests following some professional, especially in an athletic endeavor.

### *Vital Involvement*

Erikson’s (1950) research resulted in his formulation of the eight stages of adult development. He later felt that there was insufficient information to describe what older

adults are experiencing. He began to consider there may be another age of development for older adults beyond the eighth stage of integrity versus despair, especially with older adults who live from 80 – 100 years. He suggested a ninth stage may be necessary which indicates a developmental issue of remaining *vitally involved* with life.

His discussion of vital involvement is part of their groundbreaking work (1950), which led to an analysis of development over ones life. Erikson's perspective of adult development outlines eight stages that begin at certain times, yet they continue to be a part of the individual's life. Of special interest is that the completion of a stage will lead to more confidence in the typical demands of ones life; however, when someone does not complete a stage there is an on going struggle in that particular stage. Older adults experience all of the eight stages and they will reconstruct earlier themes especially if there are some incomplete stages (Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1986).

For example, for older adults, industry versus inferiority may be evident in how the older person uses his/her time during retirement. Also, integrity versus despair may be seen in how the older adult views death, dying, as well as one's religion and spirituality. Generativity versus stagnation may be seen in how the older adult views their children, grandchildren, as well as other generative activities in the community (Erikson, Erikson, Kivnick, 1986).

In addition to the challenge of working through developmental tasks (all of them) it is important to anticipate and plan for *vital involvement* (emphasis added) during older adulthood by planning for retirement, involvement in generativity, and participation in lifelong learning (Erikson, Erikson, Kivnick, 1986). Two areas that promote learning are travel and time with ones grandchildren. Travel opens new arenas for discovery and the

older adult can achieve greater potential through lifelong learning and arts. Older adults have time or freedom to become vitally involved. The older adult who develops this vital involvement will contribute to society as well as enjoy the last segment of their life.

### *Elderlearning*

Lamdin (1997) describes a new frontier in our aging society, “Elderlearning” – how older adults are learning. This cross-sectional study provides an in-depth discussion how older adults carry out personal projects of learning. Despite the stereotypes, difficulty, and frailty of older adults, Lamdin emphasizes how learning is a way older adults can regain control of their life. Her book outlines such specifics as formal learning in higher education to informal self-directed learning projects in the backyard. She discusses how crystallized intelligence increases with age because of the accumulation of knowledge and experience, as well as the ability to put information into a broader context of one’s life. Older adults continue to learn, and with increased crystallized intelligence, they may have mental superiority over younger generations (Lamdin, 1997). She emphasizes the importance of keeping the brain stimulated through intimate social involvement, mentally challenging games or activities, physical exercise, and good nutrition.

Lamdin (1997) states that self-directed learning is the most prevalent mode of gaining new information for older adults. Similar findings from Roberson’s (2003a) dissertation emphasize how older adults can utilize SDL activities to offset negative aspects of learning. Lamdin (1997) discusses how leisure is a special issue for older adults because of retirement. Older adults are utilizing leisure time by participating in learning activities through travel, distance education, use of the computer, Elderhostel,

Learning in Retirement, University of the Third Age, and over the Internet. Lamdin (1997) challenges the older adult to consider socially constructive aging by making use of one's leisure time, volunteer activities, or continuing to work.

### *Learning in Late Life*

Jarvis (2001) describes learning as a normal human process that continues throughout one's life. He emphasizes that we learn more from informal or unintended situations rather than planned activities. These unintended opportunities to learn are not a regular part of our daily life; therefore, these surprises force the individual to "experience disjunction and have to learn" (p. 52). Further emphasizing this point, Jarvis states, "We become competent intellectually because we learn to solve actual problems...and creatively find solutions...." (p. 58).

Jarvis (2001) emphasizes how older adults must learn to "be unemployable and autonomous" (p. 70). The older adult has additional spare time; most people in western countries have lived lives governed by work. Retirement places the older adult in a new arena. Part of this new arena forces one to be socially active apart from his/her former career. Specifically, Jarvis (2001) states older adults can continue to work, become mentors, and volunteers; yet, they must learn new roles. The author takes the practical aspect of his book to a deeper level by discussing meaning, wisdom, and spirituality.

### Methodology

The purpose of this study was to understand more about how older adults are learning on their own in retirement. This general qualitative study (Merriam, 1998) sought to include participants who could inform the researcher with detailed and informative data concerning this subject. Merriam (1998) states: "...basic qualitative

design seek[s] to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and world views of the people involved” (p.11). Therefore I sought to find older adults who continue to learn on their own.

The four participants in this study were recommended by professionals. I called various educators - extension agents, local professors, teachers and asked if they could recommend any older adults who continue to learn; I was given several names. Two professors at a local university suggested two people when they heard of this research. Another person was recommended by a cooperative extension agent. The first four contacts that indicated they continued to learn and wanted to participate were in the study. I chose these four participants after meeting with them and talking with them on the telephone about self-directed learning. Each participant was involved with multiple projects of self-directed learning.

I contacted these four people and asked if they would be interested in the study. I explained the study during a telephone conversation and asked if I could spend time with them. I spent several hours with each participant as well as several phone calls. These phone calls were used to confirm various data during this process. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Table One describes the four participants as well as the three main findings. The value of these four participants is that they provided information-rich material and significant amount of information concerning personal learning as older adults. I felt I had reached data saturation after the fourth interview.

I analyzed the interviews based on the interview questions; Describe your life, What is a typical weekly schedule for you, and What is important to you now? After

reading through the data several times I discerned general themes while looking at how the participants answered each question. In particular I was looking for how they spent time during retirement, how they went about personal learning, and a description of their life. If they discussed a particular area of learning I asked them to show me what they were learning. Data saturation was reached and repetitive ideas emerged during the fourth interview. This subjective process of data analysis is a summary of the transcribed interviews based on the literature review as well as previous research. General ideas and themes were coded and further expanded; eventually the findings resulted in three main findings.

The findings are based on the following four participants:

*Mr. and Mrs. S.* He is 75, she is 72. They have been married 52 years. They have four children who live in various places across the USA. They are economical and look for ways to save money. For example, they enjoy learning how to take care of their house and yard work. They also like to learn about exercise; they are active walkers and take careful measures concerning their health. They like being outdoors and seek opportunities to learn more about nature; for example, they have been active campers throughout their life. They are avid readers and like to read about places they travel or topics in nature. For example, they have read every National Geographic Magazine since they have been married, and they will plan trips around various articles found in this educational magazine. They have volunteered with many activities such as church, library, and a local nature center.

*Mrs. P.* She refused to tell me her exact age; yet I am sure she is 75+. She also loves to read and to continue to learn. She takes formal classes at a local university. Mrs.

P has been widowed twice. She enjoys being around others, especially younger students (55 years younger). She rents three upstairs rooms to international students or faculty. She enjoys exercising at the YMCA as well as participating in church activities. Mrs. P had a stack of books that she is reading on her dining table. She also had prepared refreshments and home made cookies.

*Mr. F.* He was recommended by a local extension agent as an older adult who continues to learn. He is 79 and widowed. One of his daughters lives close to him and he is continually involved with them and his grandchildren. The dominant aspect of our conversation focused around ‘The Village.’ He has been constructing ‘The Village’ on his property for the last 10 years.

In summary, these four participants described multiple self-directed learning projects during this time as an older adult. These four people expressed evidence of multiple projects of self-directed learning, especially travel, reading, and home made projects.

[Insert Table One Here]

### Findings

The interviews with the participants resulted in three main findings. These findings are: Self-directed learning activities are the focus of their time, leisure is the context of this learning, and there is a foundation of health and finances whereby these older adults continue to learn and enjoy retirement.

#### *Self-Directed Learning is the Focus of Their Time*

Each of the participants described learning as something that was a significant and important part of their life. This intensity resulted in learning as a way of life as well as

focused efforts of self-directed learning. All four participants remain vitally involved in their community and family; they fill each day with activities of interest and learning. This learning is planned by the individual and is designed to meet personal needs. Each participant was involved in multiple projects of learning, and each one had one or two activities that were the focus of their time.

Mr. and Mrs. S enjoy travel. Learning plays a significant and serious part of this process:

Well, typically, if we go on a trip, we read a fair amount. Like going to Outer Banks, one time, we read several books. And then we usually write for information from the state or something. And then we try to utilize the interpreters there. *I may pull out 50 articles from National Geographic from the last 50 years* [emphasis added].

This seemingly leisure activity of travel, is in reality a learning situation. Mr. and Mrs. S will spend a year before the trip and after they return learning about their adventure.

They both excitedly spoke about a recent trip to Mesa Verde National Park. In the room where we were seated, there were several pictures on the wall of Mesa Verde:

We studied more about Mesa Verde, read in-depth, than most other places we have been....As an example, reading something about speculation when the people got there - why they got there, and why they left. I looked for something (an article) about that. I looked in the library, I got a book, brought it home, we both read it through. We talked about going. And we have been before. It is a fascinating place.

Similar to Mr. And Mrs. S, Mrs. P is also a self-directed learner and she spends much of her time reading. One of the most interesting things about Mrs. P was the number of books that she is reading; her love of reading was evident by the quantity of books in her house. Interestingly, there were several books on the dining room table with clothes pins sticking out of them: “Oh, they make wonderful bookmarks. Also it is hard for them to stay open [paperbacks], unless you hold them. So with clothespins you can use two clothes pens and it holds it open.” And in the same way that Mr. And Mrs. S devote their time to travel; Mrs. P focuses her time on reading various books. During the interviews she would continually get up from her seat and retrieve a book in order to show me some aspect of this book.

We were discussing her involvement in her church, she interrupted the conversation: “There is something I want to show you.” And on her way to get a book about a spiritual journey she said in a whisper: “I read voraciously, ravenously.” I asked her: “Mrs. P what are you reading now?” She said: “Faulkner...Flannery O’Connor...some horror stories, I read some mystery, read Mark Twain, I have been reading his *Letters from the Earth*. And everyday I read something from *The Unity*. This is a church related publication.”

We continued to talk about her books and her love of reading. She said with a sense of humor: “These books are about to push me out of the house (laughter). I try to choose...to give some to the library for the book sale. You know how many I could part with? One! Ridiculous!”

Similar to Mr. and Mrs. S and Mrs. P, Mr. F also was involved in self-directed learning. His preoccupation with building a village has become the focus of his time for

the last 10 years. Mr. F has managed to learn how to create a village in order to help preserve the past:

Since I retired I concentrated on building this village out here. Started in 1990.

First it was my wife and myself. Tearing down my Grandpa's old house, and then built this old house with the material...it took us about eight years and I am still working on what I call the country store.

I asked him: How did you know how to build this church, or how to go about this?

Okay, I took pictures of the churches I went to Walton County...I went to Cade's Cove in the Tennessee...took pictures of those church and came down and kind of sketched it out on a piece of cardboard. Figured out what material I had. And you went to work. But I had a couple of guys that were real good carpenters.

I asked Mr. F what it was like working on this village. I wanted to understand more about this experience:

I had the best time of my life. Had the best time...and I had so many people that realized what I was trying to do. And they say I got an old building that I'll give you if you'll come take it down....I want to show how people lived years ago – 1920's. It is something I started and probably got two hundred thousand dollars in it.

I thought to myself this is more than a hobby, this is a serious self-directed learning effort. Masked behind the building of a miniature village is a concerted effort of learning by reading, talking with others, and observation.

Traveling to learn, reading at home, and building a village are examples of self-directed learning situations of these older adults. Each one is uniquely different, yet similar in many ways. These highly personal and subjective aspects of self-directed learning were the focus of their retirement.

#### *Learning Takes Place in Context of Leisure*

The second finding in this study is the impact of leisure among the participants. This learning takes place in the context of the individual's leisure time. Each person carefully calibrated this extra time, this new free time from work. The participants enjoyed the freedom to choose the activities they wanted to be a part of. Mr. and Mrs. S described a variety of activities in which they participate during this time of their life. They enjoy learning about and taking part in house and yard work. Even though this couple has traveled around the world, Mr. S stressed: "Well, the older I get, the more I just want to stay around here and I got plenty to do. I am three years behind on things I want to do around here." Their house and yard was an exhibition of personal projects and activities. These included gardening, exercising, landscaping, rebuilding furniture, outdoor lighting, and squirrel resistant birdfeeders.

Mr. And Mrs. S also enjoy volunteering during this leisure time at a local nature center as trail guides. This is a weekly program where they assist school children in exploring and learning about the outdoors. "We try to work on the idea of, not a set of stuff to get over, but rather exploring and seeing what is there and being interested in what they discover...we learn a lot from them and from the way they learn."

Similar to Mr. and Mrs. S, Mrs. P has had a life that has been full of appealing leisure choices. In addition to the previous discussion of reading, she enjoys volunteering

in various ways, taking classes at the nearby University and Learning in Retirement (LIR) program, as well as involvement with church. She also has been on a variety of trips in the USA and internationally.

One of the most interesting aspects of this 80 something is that she attends classes in her leisure time at the nearby University:

Well, last spring I had Aristotle, Socrates, to Plato...and Philosophy of Religion Class – that, I loved. And I quite frankly love being around young people....They are interested in ideas. And after class the students would hardly leave, they hung around the teacher. Asking questions, and wanting to know.

Similarly, Mr. F enjoys creating opportunities for his family to come together during his spare time:

We have been a real close family. And after my wife got killed in 93, I told the kids, I said, 'We always wanted to travel, let's rent us a vehicle and go out west.' I said I'll pay for the whole thing. We were gone two weeks. My daughter and [her son] documented the whole thing - Oregon Trail, Yellowstone, Mesa Verde. I want to go back to Yellowstone. And since then we flew into Denver, rent a vehicle and went up to Glacier. I guess one of the highlights, he and I, my son-in-law, went fishing to the Flathead River. I hired a guide.

These activities such as travel as well as involvement in church activities have created an interesting opportunity for Mr. F to choose to be involved in personal activities of leisure. He also talks about learning in his spare time every day. "Yeah, I read the paper everyday." The room where we were talking was full of *Reader's Digest*, *National Geographic* as well as other types of books. "I just pick up and quick read a story. Every

so often I will go to the deer stand to video wildlife, and I will take a *Reader's Digest* with me.”

*Foundations of Learning in Late Life*

Often overlooked, yet eventually evident, are the philosophical underpinnings of ones life. It is interesting to consider the foundation of learning for this sample. What enables them to be involved in so many beneficial leisure pursuits and to be able to focus on several aspects of learning? There were two topics that were a part of our discussions. One is a lifelong commitment to financial responsibility, and second, there was a desire to preserve ones health and well-being. Both of these issues were discussed by all four participants, not in response to some question, but rather as a way of life.

For example, Mr. and Mrs. S made it clear that even though they have traveled all over the world, they initially camped in order to save money. Wanting to travel with four children at an early age in their marriage, they realized that they could go many places if they camped. They realized this was not only economical, but also being outdoors had a positive impact on the children. Later in life when they longer had to be so frugal, they continued to camp. Camping became the main choice in travel. Mrs. S: “Oh it is just great to be out in the great outdoors, hearing the birds, and seeing the children playing in the outdoors. We wouldn't want it any other way.”

After the interviews I was asking Mr. S some specific questions about camping. Mrs. S politely excused herself and started her self-designed exercise routine of fast walking with weights in both hands. Both Mr. and Mrs. S take their health seriously. Like the other participants in this study, they regularly visit doctors for check ups, have improved their eating habits, and exercise daily.

Similarly referring to financial responsibility, Mrs. P stated that being independent was an important value in her life and something she wants to maintain:

It means that I am not dependent on anyone else for my income, and that I can drive...and have freedom and wherewithal to do largely what I want to...go where I want to go, do what I want to do.

This simple comment reflects not only a commitment to save money but also a commitment to remain healthy. One simple way she has found to make extra money is in renting otherwise empty rooms to those who attend the nearby University.

She discussed how her feet sometimes hurt. "The chief [problem] is my feet don't work as well as they used to. And I can't wear spike heel shoes anymore. I hate that. I take good care of them and I see a podiatrist at least once a month." Seeing a podiatrist once a month is one example of taking care of her body, and another example of mental wellness is how she adjusted to the loss of two husbands:

The greatest change and difficulty was the loss of my husbands. It just wipes out much of the meaning of your life. You know it's really truly only what you do for someone else that matters. What you do for yourself just isn't much...One of the things I did, was I limited my vision. I would just take five minutes, and then I could handle the next five minutes.

Similarly to Mr. and Mrs. S, exercise and physical conditioning is important to this older student.

I exercise at the YMCA two or three times a week. My husband was involved with the YMCA for 30 years. So this has been a part of my life...I go to these machines on lower body with various weights. I exercise my arms. It takes about

one and a quarter hour. And there are people there that are trained and one or two, I can't do it alone, people have to help me. I have a chart and I have to use special gloves for my hands.

Similar to Mr. and Mrs. S, and Mrs. P, Mr. F has learned to handle setbacks and to make adjustments in his life. His wife was killed in a car wreck where he was driving, and later, he had a farming accident where a truck ran over him, eventually leading to a by-pass operation. He has had both knees replaced:

I learned when you go to rehab they send a lady here to help me. Seven trips here to help me. She showed me what to do; I did it for four months. Never have any pain. I went to rehab for three months. I saw all kinds of people struggling. Just could hardly go.

His resolve to continue to remain vitally involved in life despite these setbacks was a personal commitment to improving his health.

I asked Mr. F how he was able to adjust after the death of his wife. He calmly talked: "My friends, going back to work, working. Both of my daughters and her family. My daughter in Valdosta, I talk to her every day. *I learned* (emphasis added); I cook all the time."

He also discusses his commitment to being involved physically. He stresses how he keeps active by carrying out chores:

Well, see I cut all the grass. I got a big garden out there. I got about 25 acres that I keep planted for wildlife. Deer, turkey, dove, by the time you keep all that cleaned up. And I walk everyday. I get up at 5:30, I am wide awake, and I walk about

quarter of 7 till quarter after. See if I can see my daughter and grandkids when they go (drive by my house). I guess it is just a habit.

This “just a habit,” is a positive attitude that combines a commitment to physical health as well as opportunities to see grandchildren.

### Discussion and Conclusion

The participants in this study were utilizing the spare time of retirement for personal learning. This learning was evident in a variety of self-directed projects. According to the findings, these SDL projects were a significant part of their life and seemed to lessen some of the negative aspects of aging. In addition these older adults were able to learn because of a foundation of financial responsibility as well as a commitment to wellness.

Many of Erikson’s (1950, 1986, 1997) ideas were expressed by the personal learning projects of these older adults. His eight stages of human development summarize a series of conflicts during the life cycle. Of particular importance to this research are the last two stages delineated by the conflict of stagnation versus generativity and despair versus ego integrity. The task of the former is to resolve the dilemma of concern for the next generation, going beyond love for one’s own children or grandchildren to a humble and caring desire to generate the next generation, resulting in a goal of care. The latter task is to resolve the accompanying dilemmas surrounding a perspective on ones life. Similar to writing an epilogue or journal, the individual hopefully can resolve the difficult issues and topics of ones life and unify these into a theme of acceptance, purpose, and integrity, resulting in wisdom. Writers warn readers this has a lack of research and there is the inability to quantify; yet this sequential perspective of development continues to

hold the attention of writers, researchers, and psychologists (Lamdin, 1997). Erikson's model of generativity and ego integrity was evident in all four participants; each one was motivated to be involved with children and grandchildren, and they seemed to be searching through the experiences of their life in order to understand more about their decisions.

Continuing this idea is the latest book by Joan Erikson (1997) who adds a ninth stage to the conventional eight. Writing and speaking posthumously for her husband, she felt the eighth stage did not incorporate many of the frustrations of the adult that is 80 or 90 years old. Erikson stated this ninth stage incorporates issues of ageism, despair, and loss of physical ability. She encourages communities to embrace the older citizen, and for the aging person to confront death and to become more in touch with inner needs. Perhaps in a similar way, all four participants were involved in personal religious growth. Not only was their involvement in the local church meetings, but also a personal learning seen in meditation, prayer, and reading.

Many authors (Erikson, 1997; Jarvis, 2001, Lamdin, 1997, Mannell, 1999) discuss how older adults are committed to health and wellness. Mannell states: "Wellness is used in a variety of ways...and describes a holistic state of physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being (p. 9)." The participants carried out self-directed wellness activities in a variety of ways. Mr. and Mrs. S are active walkers, they volunteer regularly in the community, and they are active in their church. Mrs. P regularly exercises at the YMCA, she participates in Learning in Retirement programs, and she is an avid reader. Mr. F is involved with church activities, daily visits with family, and carries out physically demanding chores. These were more than activities filling an empty day; these were

personal projects of learning. Also, it was obvious during these interviews the participants displayed a lifelong commitment to financial responsibility. Mannell (1999) states: "Research evidence suggests that income also plays an important role in the life satisfaction of older adults (p. 2)." All four participants in the study lived in modest homes they owned; each one exhibited various examples of financial responsibility.

In addition Erikson (1997), Jarvis (2001), Lamdin (1997), and Mannell (1999) discuss the value of leisure participation. Mannell states: "Some research suggests that leisure activity levels may be better predictors of life satisfaction than health and income (p. 3)." Similar, the four participants were involved in a variety of leisure activities. All four older adults, despite physical setbacks and negative life events, were simply happy people and enjoyed these activities of learning in their spare time (Lamdin, 1997).

Congruent with research (Rowe & Kahn, 1998) these four participants were involved with exercise, travel, and outdoor activities which have been shown to be predictors of high life satisfaction.

Of particular interest are the number of activities these older are involved with. Building a village, reading novels, detailed planning of trips affirms Mannell's (1999) and Baltes and Baltes' (1990) discussion that older adults are not necessarily disengaging from life and becoming inactive, rather they are more selective and discriminating. Leisure has also provided opportunities for older adults for personal growth and self-actualization. The participants were learning about themselves through detailed studies of spiritual topics, personal health, and in volunteering.

Stebbins (1992, 2004) as well as Jarvis (2001) elaborates on the meaning of leisure. Stebbins' concept of serious leisure describes how people use spare time to

seriously express their abilities, fulfill their potential, and identify themselves as unique.

He describes three types – amateurism, hobbyist pursuits, and career volunteerism.

One of the main reasons for this extra time is because of retirement. This is similar of this sample well as many older adults because of extra time in retirement. Stebbins' (2004) main point is that: "...if leisure is to become an improvement over work as a way of finding personal fulfillment...then people must be careful to adopt these forms returning the greatest payoff. The theme is that we reach this goal through engaging in serious rather than casual...leisure (2004, p. 2)."

Similarly, the older adults in this study chose a form of leisure that seemed to be very beneficial. Mr. F's village was described as "one of the happiest times in my life." Mrs. P stated how her books "were about to push me out of the house." And Mr. and Mrs. S made it clear how much they love to travel. "We love to travel and to camp. When we go we learn so much. And we will continue to read about an area we visited for a year."

Interestingly, each person in this study was involved in travel as a way of life. Mr. and Mrs. S, Mrs. P have traveled extensively all over the world, and Mr. F has recently begun traveling with his family. Of special interest are the role of learning in travel and the impact of travel on older adults (2001, 2003a). Similar to ideas of Stebbins (1992, 2004), Kane and Zink (2004) discuss how travel for independent and adventure travel can provide serious leisure. Rather than insulated travel experiences through mass tourism each of these older adults were involved in multiple independent and adventuresome trips. Each of these travel experiences from New Zealand to Russia, from Yellowstone to Mesa Verde, from China to the Outer Banks were planned by the individual and continues to provide a source of pleasure and learning during retirement.

In summary, the purpose of this study was to understand more about how older adults are learning in retirement. This research is the result of interviews with four individuals whose life is enriched because of their personal projects of learning. This learning was evident by self-directed learning activities, took place within the context of leisure, and was based on a foundation of health and finance.

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Table One

Name	Biographical	SDL	Leisure	Foundation
Mr. S	75 years, married for 52 years; four children; white; retired 20 years; former pastor	Intense learning activity – travel and especially camping in travel	Other activities: Reading, working around the house and yard, gardening, volunteering, church activities	Foundation of health, daily exercise, lifetime of conservative financial practices
Mrs. S	72; white; retired 20 years; former teacher	Same	Same	Same
Mrs. P	75-85 (she refused to give me her actual age); widowed; retired 25 years; former teacher; two children and grandchildren	Intense learning activity – reading	Other activities: travel, taking classes, official classes at local university as well as various classes through church or senior activities, volunteering, and church activities	Life time of health activities, exercise, conservative financial practices
Mr. F	79 years; widowed; white; retired 20 years; retired businessman two children and grandchildren	Intense learning activity has been building a village on his property	Also involved with church activity, travel, active with family	Daily exercise, financial frugality