

**THE EXPERIENTIAL PROCESS OF ACQUIRING WISDOM:
HOW WISE INDIVIDUALS REPORT LEARNING
LIFE LESSONS**

by

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Abstract

Philosophers have considered and debated the topic of wisdom for centuries. Now, as we face an ageing world population, a need for the scientific exploration of the topic has arisen. Over the past 30 years, the challenge to understand and define wisdom has been taken up and studied mainly by the fields of psychology and sociology. A body of wisdom literature has emerged and this thesis addresses an identified gap in that literature concerning the development of wisdom.

This thesis examines the process of acquiring wisdom across the human lifespan. Specifically, this qualitative exploratory case study examines the process employed by wise nominees when transforming a personal life experience into a life lesson. The opinions, experiences, and relationship descriptions of their nominators are uniquely included in the study's findings. Each of the four cases in the study is comprised of a dyad, a nominator and their wise nominee. Data were collected from the study participants through questionnaires and in-depth interviews.

A framework, comprised of three components, that begins to describe the wisdom acquisition process emerged from the study's findings. The first element of the emerging wisdom acquisition framework is a new succinct definition of wisdom. The second element is a model that describes the iterative process of learning from life experiences. This model was hypothesized at the outset of the study and obtained some corroboration from the study's data. The third element of the emerging framework is the life management practices that wise individuals employ to deal with life experiences. These practices emerged as four central themes from the data. Three of those four life practices

revolve around self-reliance whereas the fourth theme addresses the spiritual balance in the participants' lives.

This study is a first attempt to unravel the complex phenomenon of the acquisition of wisdom.

Acknowledgements

Getting Here

We sometimes find ourselves on an unexpected path in life. This journey of mine has led me unexpectedly to this place and to the writing of this document. I don't see this thesis as an end point but rather a gateway to an exciting exploration and the beginning of a new journey for me.

My interest lies in the topic of wisdom. I consider wisdom to be a goal of human development. It therefore seems logical to me that we should know all that we can about that end goal and explore the many ways, means, and strategies to reach that goal. This interest of mine has only begun to blossom over the past few years. It has, however, taken a life time to germinate. There are many people along my life path that have influenced me, shaped me, supported me, and loved me, and to whom I am forever grateful.

To my family and friends, I am grateful for all that we've experienced together: every interaction, every event, every mishap, every piece of joy we've shared that has helped shape me and therefore the very words I write at this moment. To my two daughters, Alanna and Celyn, and my step-son, Brian, no words could ever begin to explain the love that I feel for you and how you have helped me grow and become a better person through the years. As I witness you beginning to create your own families and have children, I am more than ever aware and grateful for my experience of the circle of life and the privilege of your presence.

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My Queen's Experience

Instrumental in my application to the department of Education at Queen's University were my discussions with Dr. Nancy Hutchinson, who was the Director of Graduate Studies at the time. She told me if I could give myself the gift of time, and dedicate myself as a full time student, all of my thinking would change. That has proved to be true. But I am grateful to Dr. Hutchinson for more than just that early introduction to Queen's. She has been with me on every step of this journey: first as my program supervisor, and then as my thesis supervisor. Nancy has guided me through the Master's program and she is with me on every page of this thesis.

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The Research Participants

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes.

John Dewey, 1938

Wisdom intrigues me. We can all likely name a few famous, historical people we believe to be wise or that we hold as wisdom exemplars: Aristotle, Albert Schweitzer, Gandhi, Solomon, and Mother Theresa. It is also very likely that we have encountered a few wise persons along our own life journey. Yet for many of us, wisdom is considered a revered state reserved for the few and unachievable by most. My objective is to investigate how wisdom can be actively acquired. Ultimately, I would like to see educators focus on the topic of wisdom and consider wisdom a teachable competence.

My aim as an educator is to design curriculum for adult learners on the practice and acquisition of wisdom. To accomplish this goal and before determining what about wisdom is educable, it is first imperative to understand why some individuals are perceived to be wise, how these individuals accumulate their knowledge, and how they are able to apply their knowledge to make wise decisions. Are these individuals born with a special set of personality traits? Do they hold a different worldview from the majority? Do they process their experiences and learning uniquely? To answer these and other questions about wisdom, a qualitative research study has been conducted that explores the construct of wisdom with individuals nominated by others to be wise.

Interest in the topic of wisdom is increasing globally. As Baltes and Smith (2008) suggest, “a special need for wisdom has emerged” (p. 63). This need is due in part to ageing world populations (United Nations, 2007) and the fact that societies are dealing with the new phenomenon of extended lifespans for their citizens. Evidence of this increased interest in wisdom is demonstrated by the fact that published research on the topic of wisdom doubled approximately every five years in the period 1980 to 2004 (Ardelt, 2005a).

As Illeris (2007) stated, “it is not everyone who can achieve what others acknowledge as wisdom. But it may nevertheless be a good expression for the type of learning many strive for in mature adulthood” (p. 211). A recent cross-cultural comparative study of wisdom found that although differences exist in the meaning of the concept of wisdom in Eastern and Western cultural groups, both groups identified the word “wise” to be the most desired descriptor for an ideal self (Takahashi & Bordia, 2000). This thesis explores the process of acquiring wisdom and describes the multi-case qualitative study undertaken to understand how wise individuals report learning life lessons and integrating life lessons with their pre-existing and accumulated knowledge.

Definition of Wisdom

The one thing that wisdom researchers appear to agree upon is that there is no one universally accepted definition of wisdom (e.g., Ardel, 2005b; Baltes & Smith, 2008; Birren & Fisher, 1990; Bluck & Glück, 2005). Birren and Fisher (1990) created a table of 13 differing definitions of wisdom offered by the 13 researchers and authors who contributed to Sternberg’s (1990c) first edited book on the topic of wisdom. Then Birren

and Fisher summarized these multiple definitions as follows, “Wisdom is seen as an integrative aspect of human life. Wisdom brings together experience, cognitive abilities, and affect in order to make good decisions at an individual and societal level” (p. 324).

Later, Sternberg (2001b) developed his Balance Theory of Wisdom and defined wisdom this way:

Wisdom is defined as the application of tacit as well as explicit knowledge as mediated by values toward the achievement of a common good through a balance among (a) intrapersonal, (b) interpersonal, and (c) extrapersonal interests, over the (a) short and (b) long terms, to achieve a balance among (a) adaptation to existing environments, (b) shaping of existing environments, and (c) selection of new environments. (p. 231)

This comprehensive yet cumbersome definition of wisdom has at its core the concept of the application of knowledge to achieve a common good.

Birren and Svensson (2005) created a list of four new definitions of wisdom that were introduced in the period 1990 to 2005. They titled these new definitions, the Recent Definitions of Wisdom, and stated, “the definitions range from the inclusion of wisdom as a state of enlightenment to ordinary and extraordinary concepts of wisdom” (p, 17). It is clear that wisdom can and has been defined in many ways.

The Canadian Oxford Dictionary (2001) first defines the noun wisdom as “the state of being wise.” Secondly, it defines wisdom as “experience and knowledge together with the power of applying them critically or practically” (p. 1670). It is this second definition that utilizes the verb applying, like Sternberg’s definition of wisdom that

informs my own definition of wisdom. Drawing on Birren's and Fisher's (1990) summary that describes wisdom as an integrative aspect of human life, and incorporating the concept of application, I created for the purpose of this study an operational definition of wisdom.

In this thesis, I define wisdom as the application of knowledge, beliefs, common sense, intuition and values to deal effectively with life experiences. Behind this succinct definition of wisdom, the following assumptions, inter-connections, and definitions apply: (a) knowledge is information that is uniquely and individually crafted by transforming one's experiences through the process of learning and validation; (b) experience is one's direct or indirect interaction with one's environment; (c) learning is a process one chooses to engage in; (d) intelligence is one's mental capability to learn; (e) beliefs are non-validated knowledge; (f) common sense is the sound, practical understanding of everyday matters; (g) intuition is one's immediate and powerful understanding of a situation; and (h) values are the principles and moral standards to which one holds oneself accountable.

Purpose

Although many facets of wisdom have been researched over the past 30 years, a gap in the literature exists concerning the development of wisdom. It is this aspect of wisdom that this thesis begins to explore. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the experiential process of acquiring wisdom by understanding the lived experiences of a few individuals thought by others to be wise. A qualitative case study has been conducted that explores what processes and actions a small group of wise nominees employ when

transforming a personal life experience into a life lesson and integrating that life lesson into their cumulative body of personal knowledge. As well, the opinions, experiences, and relationship descriptions of their nominators are uniquely included in the study's findings. The nominators were first recruited and selected as study participants as they were considered by the researcher to be wise themselves.

Three research questions were formulated to address the aims of this thesis. The first question was posed to the study's nominators and the second and third questions were posed to the study's wise nominees. The three research questions are: (a) How do individuals describe their experience of and interactions with wise persons? (b) How do wise individuals report living their lives? and (c) How do wise individuals report learning from life experiences.

This thesis will contribute to filling the existing gap in the literature on the development of wisdom. It is intended that the outcomes, the shared experiences of the study's participants, will shed light on the process of acquiring wisdom across the human lifespan.

Thesis Overview

This thesis is organized into five chapters. This first chapter introduces the study and its purpose, defines wisdom and provides an overview of the thesis. The second chapter reviews the literature on wisdom, summarizes what aspects of wisdom have already been explored, categorizes wisdom theories as implicit or explicit, and highlights research studies that informed and contributed to the present study. This chapter then looks at what about wisdom still needs to be explored and introduces a hypothetical

process of how wisdom is acquired across the human lifespan. This hypothesized process is described in detail and a model of the process is introduced. The study's three research questions were created based on this hypothesized process.

The third chapter describes the methodology and qualitative approach used to answer the three research questions and explores the phenomenon of wisdom acquisition. The multi-case research design is described and the methods for data collection and analysis are detailed.

The fourth chapter lays out the study's findings. The chapter begins with the study's four case descriptions which include the experiences chosen and the ensuing life lessons reported by the four wise nominees. The central themes that emerged from the data analysis are reported in the second part of the chapter.

The fifth and final chapter addresses the study's three research questions. It includes a discussion of the central themes that were presented in chapter four, connects the study's findings to the wisdom acquisition process, and links this study's findings to the existing literature on wisdom. The chapter concludes with reflections on the study's limitations and implications for education, society, and future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This thesis draws on multiple theories and bodies of literature. This chapter opens with a review of the wisdom literature and briefly summarizes some of the facets of wisdom that have been explored to date. As wisdom theories are generally categorized into two main groups, implicit and explicit theories, this chapter does the same and presents descriptions of key studies that have informed this thesis. A gap in the literature concerning the development of wisdom is noted which leads to this study's hypothesized Experiential Wisdom Acquisition Process and Model. Where appropriate the experiential and transformative learning theories that underlie the process and the model's foundation are presented. This review of the literature and creation of the model led to the formulation of the study's research questions which are included in the chapter summary.

Wisdom Research: What Has Been Explored

The topic of wisdom has been considered and debated by philosophers for centuries while the scientific study of wisdom has only begun recently. Lifespan psychologists were among the first to study wisdom, although researchers in other fields of psychology have also begun to explore wisdom including the fields of personality research, research on intelligence, language pragmatics, and motivational psychology (Kunzmann & Baltes, 2005). For years wisdom was not even considered in the psychological sciences, as evidenced by its omission as either a topic or even an index entry in seminal works such as William James' (1890/2010) *The Principles of*

Psychology, Wolman's (1973) *Handbook of General Psychology*, and even recently Robinson's (1995) *An Intellectual History of Psychology* (Birren & Svensson, 2005).

The scientific approach to the topic of wisdom is relatively new and the majority of research on the subject has taken place in the past 30 years. The first comprehensive book on the study of wisdom was edited by Sternberg and published in 1990. Sternberg viewed the study of wisdom at that time as in its early developmental stage where theories were just beginning to be developed and research was just getting underway. He described this stage as the ideal time to edit a book on the subject. He opened the book's preface with, "Wisdom is about as elusive as psychological constructs get. It is perhaps for this reason that it is one of the least studied such constructs" (Sternberg, 1990a, p. ix). Fifteen years later, Sternberg, along with Jordan, edited a second handbook on the subject titled, *A Handbook of Wisdom: Psychological Perspectives* (2005). A large amount of research on wisdom was conducted during that 15 year period between books, yet this field of inquiry can still be considered in its infancy.

Much of what has been explored about wisdom to date has concentrated on defining what wisdom is. As discussed in Chapter One there have been many approaches to this subject and many definitions of wisdom have been documented. Looking at wisdom from a cultural-historical analysis, Kunzmann and Baltes (2005) listed seven facets of wisdom that were philosophically discussed and repeatedly addressed through the literature. According to these authors, wisdom: (a) addresses difficult problems regarding the meaning and conduct of life; (b) represents truly outstanding knowledge, judgment and advice; (c) is a perfect integration of knowledge and character, mind and

virtue; (d) coordinates and promotes individual and societal growth; (e) involves balance and moderation; (f) includes an awareness of the limits of knowledge and uncertainties of the world; (g) is difficult to achieve but easily recognized (p. 112).

Birren and Fisher (1990) documented, summarized, and categorized the facets of wisdom (as defined by 12 researchers) according to process, development, traits, products, and research methodology. Bluck and Glück (2005) summarized and categorized the sub-components of wisdom, from a group of descriptor-rating studies, by cognitive ability, insight, reflective attitude, concern for others, and real-world skills.

Wisdom has also been studied in relation to intelligence and intellectual knowledge (Ardelt, 2000; Sternberg, 2000). Wisdom has been linked to moral reasoning (Kupperman, 2005; Pasupathi & Staudinger, 2001), and it has been studied in relation to and correlated with age (Baltes & Smith, 1990; Glück, Bluck, Baron & McAdams, 2005; Jordan, 2005; Montgomery, Barber, & McKee, 2002; Richardson & Pasupathi, 2005). The construct of wisdom is gradually being examined and the picture of what wisdom looks like is taking shape over time.

Another of those important examinations and ongoing debates is whether wisdom exists due to specific personality traits or whether certain personality traits arise as a result of wisdom. Staudinger, Dörner, and Mickler (2005) write that the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm “considers personality characteristics as antecedents, correlates, or consequences of wisdom” whereas others like Erikson “viewed wisdom as the pinnacle of personality development and as such considered wisdom a personality characteristic” (p. 191). Orwoll and Perlmutter (1990) suggested that wisdom depended on the ability to

go beyond one's personal perspective to embrace collective and universal concerns and they concluded from their study, "wisdom, we found, requires remarkable negotiation of the personality domain, evident in unusual self-development and self-transcendence" (p. 174). Whether wisdom is due to or contributes to specific personality traits, competencies, or a combination of these, is still being explored.

Research on wisdom is generally seen as falling into one of two categories, (a) implicit theories that rely on lay people's understanding of wisdom, or (b) explicit theories that aim to assess and measure the dimensions and performance of wisdom (Bluck & Glück, 2005; Kunzmann & Baltes, 2005; Kunzmann & Stange, 2007; Sternberg, 1990b).

Implicit Wisdom Theories

"The goal of research on implicit theories is to map out the common features of wisdom as held in the minds of groups of individuals" (Bluck & Glück, 2005, p. 86). Implicit wisdom theories or lay people's theories about wisdom have traditionally had individuals rate attributes that apply to wisdom, creativity or intelligence. This line of research has led to the following common findings: lay people can clearly distinguish wisdom from other human capacities; wisdom represents human excellence; and wisdom is seen as multidimensional, comprised of cognitive, social, emotional, and motivational capacities (Kunzmann & Stange, 2007).

Two implicit wisdom research studies that have directly impacted the design and structure of this study are detailed. First, Holliday and Chandler's (1986) study that developed a prototype of a wise person is described. Second, Bluck and Glück's (2004)

study that employed a memory narrative procedure to study wisdom-related events in the lives of ordinary people is discussed.

Prototype of a Wise Person

Holliday and Chandler (1986) undertook to present “a systematic means of studying wisdom” (p. 33) that aimed at describing the characteristics and actions of wise people. In a three-phase study that involved over 450 participants these researchers developed a prototype of a wise person that they labeled the Factor Structure of Wisdom.

The first phase of this study by Holliday and Chandler (1986) collected and analyzed descriptions of wise people. The researchers asked 50 young adults, 50 middle-aged adults, and 50 seniors to generate lists of descriptive characteristics of wise, shrewd, perceptive, intelligent, spiritual, and foolish people. A pool of judges was used to reduce the 878 descriptors generated for the “wise” category to 79 words or phrases categorizing people’s conceptions of wisdom. Through a rigorous exercise the judges eliminated redundant words, words that did not receive multiple endorsements, and words synonymous with others. The list of 79 words was supplemented with 24 descriptors taken from the literature on wisdom and an additional 20 words not associated with the category wise but associated with the other target categories were added to the prototype list.

The second phase of the study used new participants and generated the prototype that typified a wise person. Fifty young adults, 50 middle-aged adults and 50 seniors were asked to rate the wise descriptors generated in the first phase of the study on a seven point scale. Another 100 subjects followed the same instructions but rated the descriptors

for the categories of intelligent, shrewd, perceptive, and spiritual. A five-step analysis was conducted that determined the reliability of the prototype ratings, assessed cross-cohort agreement, described the prototype characteristics, identified the prototype ratings, and finally analyzed the relationship between wisdom and the other categories. From this, the Factor Structure of Wisdom was generated that grouped wise descriptors into five ordered factors where the variables defining Factor 1 had higher prototypical ratings than did the variables in Factor 2 and so on. At this point the researchers claimed “that wisdom is a distinct non-redundant competency term” (p. 68). The five factors are: (a) exceptional understanding, (b) judgment and communication skills, (c) general competencies, (d) interpersonal skills, and (e) social unobtrusiveness.

The third phase of the study empirically validated the process used to develop the prototype of a wise person. Thirty-eight subjects were used for this phase of the work and the researchers found that the results were consistent with other reports on prototype literature and the effects of prototypes on cognitive processes. The researchers justified their use of prototype analyses, “Prototype analyses have been used successfully to study intelligence, personality traits, clinical judgements, and stereotype formation” (p. 39).

The Holliday and Chandler study is highly regarded. In their literature review of implicit wisdom theories, Bluck and Glück (2005) summarized the leading descriptor-rating studies and concluded that Holliday and Chandler’s descriptor list had been compiled in the most careful manner and was the most reliable. Holliday and Chandler’s Factor Structure of Wisdom was offered as a tool to help nominators identify wise nominees for this current study.

Learning a Life Lesson

Bluck and Glück (2004) employed a memory narrative procedure to study wisdom-related events in the lives of ordinary people. Their study involved 86 Caucasian, German participants who were sub-divided into age groups as follows: 28 adolescents aged 15–20 years old; 27 young adults aged 30–40 years old; and 31 older adults aged 60–70 years old. The gender and professional status of participants were balanced across age groups. Study participants were recruited through newspaper advertisements and posted flyers and were paid a minimal sum for their participation.

Six trained interviewers conducted semi-structured autobiographical interviews with participants. Each participant was asked to list within two minutes up to 15 situations they could remember when they did or thought something wise. The authors justified allowing participants to subjectively define wisdom since they had found that “the differences between lay persons’ and experts’ definitions of wisdom ... vary little” (p. 546). Each participant was asked to select the one situation in which they had been wisest. A taped, open-ended interview was then conducted where the participant was permitted to speak for as long or as little as they chose about their wisest memory. All 86 interviews were transcribed and subsequently coded twice by two independent trained coders. Coding disagreements were resolved through discussions and only variables with 80% agreement were reported. Aside from the 86 participant interviews that were used in the study, 50 pilot interviews were conducted for testing and training purposes.

The interviewees’ wise memories were coded into variables that determined if the situation was fundamental or not, and if the situation reported on a life decision, life

management strategy or reaction to a negative event. The outcome of the event was coded as positive, negative, both or neither. The time frame of the narrative was coded as a single event, generic event or extended event. The causal coherence in the narrative was coded as none, specific events or life in general. They questioned if a lesson was learned and that was coded as yes, no or maybe. The extent of the lesson learned was coded as no generalization, factual or procedural knowledge, life philosophy or as a lesson that had been learned previously.

One of the study's significant findings was that most remembered wisdom events, described by the participants, involved thoughts, feelings or actions that changed negative circumstances into more positive ones. They found 77.9% of the participants learned a lesson from the event and some of the participants reported applying the learned lesson over time.

Bluck and Glück's (2004) study has informed the present study. The authors' starting assumption that people behave wisely at some time(s) in their lives is significant. It suggests that wisdom is not an all or nothing construct—with people either wise or unwise and it aligns with my understanding that we all have the capability of being wise at some time(s) or for some situations in our lives. The finding that the group of ordinary people who participated in the Bluck and Glück study mostly perceived wisdom as transforming a negative situation to a more positive situation informed this study's definition of wisdom that sees wisdom as the application of knowledge to deal effectively with life situations. Bluck and Glück's study participants were asked about, and the majority reported learning, a life lesson. The current study expanded on this concept and

asked its participants not “if” they learned a life lesson but “how” they learned a life lesson. Bluck and Glück explained the use of an implicit understanding of wisdom and the use of a memory narrative procedure in their study. They said, “Our goal is to analyze descriptively individuals’ narrative accounts of remembered wisdom in their own lives, which we have termed experienced wisdom” (p. 544). This same approach was employed in the present study.

Explicit Wisdom Theories

Jordan (2005) argues that implicit theories often influence expert-defined or explicit theories of wisdom. In their literature review of wisdom, Kunzmann and Stange (2007) categorized explicit wisdom theories into three approaches—cognitive development, intelligence, and personality development. Synopses of the authors’ understandings of the general approach and common findings of each of these lines of research are presented here.

Research on wisdom as a late stage of cognitive development has focused on the integration and balancing of different modes of knowing, opposing points of view or dualistic thinking. Traditionally, participants in these studies are posed decision-making questions or open-ended questions regarding self-concepts and their answers are scored on pre-determined categories. A common finding from the research on cognitive development as summarized by Kunzmann and Stange (2007) is that an important facet of wisdom is the ability to process information about one’s self and the world in an integrative manner. The concept of integrative thinking is an important element in the current study’s hypothesized Experiential Wisdom Acquisition Process. It is

hypothesized that the wisdom acquisition process requires integration of one's experience or interaction in the world, with current learning and prior knowledge comprised of previous experiences and information. It is clear that prior research on wisdom recognizes the importance of this facet of wisdom.

Research on wisdom as a form of intelligence has looked at psychometric models of intelligence such as Robert Sternberg's Wisdom Model and Paul Baltes' Berlin Wisdom Model. Typical testing in this area involves asking participants to think aloud while trained evaluators rate responses against pre-determined criteria. Kunzmann and Stange (2007) reported that a typical finding of this line of research is that wisdom is recognized as a competence rather than as a personality trait. Finding wisdom to be a competence is a hopeful concept as it implies wisdom can be developed. Again, this finding underpins the Experiential Wisdom Acquisition Process presented later in this thesis.

Research on wisdom as an aspect of mature personality development has looked at concepts like: integrity and generativity; interpersonal, intrapersonal, and transpersonal development; and integration of reflective, cognitive, and affective elements. Methods used to study personality aspects have included the development of self-administered questionnaires such as Ardel (2003) employed in her study. Scales of traits or descriptive adjectives, and open-ended test questions have also been used. Some of the findings that have emerged from the studies on personality development are that: practical wisdom increased from early to middle adulthood; wisdom is multidimensional; wisdom is positively correlated to indicators of adjustment and negatively correlated to

maladjustment; and that wisdom is positively correlated to higher education and unrelated to marital status, gender or ethnicity (Kunzmann & Stange, 2007). The findings of this line of research are thought-provoking. Some of these findings support the concept of wisdom as an iterative process increasing over the lifespan. Also, the idea that wisdom is multidimensional is encouraging in that it implies wisdom is not static or singular and that it may be different for each individual.

Nominated As Wise

The concept of nominating wise people for wisdom research studies has been employed in the past. For example Baltes, Staudinger, Maercker and Smith's (1995) comparative study that aimed to measure wisdom-related knowledge used nominated subjects. The focus of their study that involved 69 participants was to apply the researchers' wisdom paradigm and compare a group of 14 wise nominees with three control groups: 20 young adults 25–35 years of age; 20 older adults 60–80 years of age; and 15 clinical psychologists aged 60–76 years of age. The 14 wise nominees aged 41–79 years of age were highly regarded wise citizens active in West Berlin at the time. These wise nominees were nominated and selected by a group of 21 paid journalists.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant and think-aloud protocols were collected about two fictitious situations. One represented a life planning situation, the other an existential life management situation. The interviews were taped, transcribed, and later evaluated by trained raters. The scored data were organized into two groupings and tested via analyses of variance to draw conclusions on four hypotheses. The first hypothesis compared the data for the three control groups and

showed that on the scored data, there were small or no age differences among adults 25 to 80 years old with respect to wisdom-related performance. Perhaps qualitative theme analyses would have yielded meaningful differences for various age groups.

The researchers found that clinical psychologists and wise nominees demonstrated higher levels of performance than the control group of older adults. Second, they found wise nominees performed better than the clinical psychologists. The wise nominees did demonstrate the best performances on the existential life management task. Mixed results were obtained for the researchers' final hypothesis that wise nominees and clinical psychologists would demonstrate an advantage in the three metacriteria of the authors' wisdom concept. Overall, Baltes et al.'s (1995) study supported the use of nominators to obtain wise participants.

The present study on wisdom acquisition employs the concept of having individuals nominate people they deem to be wise as participants for the study. The current study extends the tradition of nominating participants by including the opinions of the nominators in the analysis.

Still To Be Explored: How Wisdom Develops

Although much has been written and researched about what wisdom is, that is, the philosophy and psychology of wisdom, little research exists to tell us how wisdom develops or how we can work to acquire wisdom across our lifespan. In their recommendations for future research on wisdom, Birren and Svensson (2005) ask: "What are the cognitive, affective, motivational, and other behavior components that contribute

to the development and expression of wise behavior” (p. 25). Glück and Bluck (2010) address this gap in the literature as follows:

While several studies have investigated implicit theories of what wisdom is, no evidence exists about people’s conceptions of how wisdom develops. This is a somewhat surprising gap in the literature . . . and there is also a lack of evidence from explicit psychological wisdom research concerning factors that lead to the development of wisdom. (pp. 6-7)

Likewise, Jordan (2005) poses questions that remain unanswered about wisdom and aging when she asks: “What can be done to help wisdom’s development?” She states: “there has yet to be an intervention program designed to increase wisdom-related knowledge during adulthood . . . a program that could potentially increase this knowledge would be advantageous to both physical and emotional well-being in old age” (p. 184).

This research study attempts to begin the exploration of this aspect of the wisdom construct, the development and acquisition of wisdom. An assumption is made that some individuals are recognized by others to be wise. This study examines the lived experiences of a few of those nominated as wise individuals. The objective of this examination is to gain a profound understanding of the active processes these individuals have employed in transforming their life experiences into life lessons and of the contribution and impact these life lessons have had on their personal development. This study is an exploratory and initial examination of the process of wisdom acquisition.

The Experiential Process of Wisdom Acquisition

The acquisition of wisdom is an iterative, evolutionary, never ending process. As Jarvis (2006) wrote, “the persons who continue to seek knowledge gradually grow in wisdom” (p. 92). It would be beneficial from an educational perspective to demonstrate that the evolution, development or acquisition of wisdom was something that could be proactively pursued and acquired through directed intention.

The term “wisdom acquisition” implies wisdom is something that one can strive for. It does not imply that wisdom is a finite commodity that can be picked up and transferred or transplanted. It does, however, imply that wisdom is a construct that one can work towards developing.

In the current study, an individual’s ability to apply wisdom is seen as existing on a continuum and depending on the context, the individual’s ability to apply wisdom is likely positioned somewhere along that continuum. In this view, we are neither totally unwise nor completely wise. Furthermore, we may demonstrate wisdom in one domain and not in another. For example, we may make wise judgments in the workplace but poor judgments in our relationships. Brown (2005) argues, “that wisdom is contextually defined – what is wise in one context may not be wise in another” (p. 355). Also, we may be judged by others to be wise at some points in our lives and not at other times in our lives. Wisdom is not an all or nothing construct.

Life Experience Defined

Dewey (1938) writes that we “live in a series of situations” and “an experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment” (p. 43). Our lives are a composite of experiences or situations that provide us with learning opportunities to transform those experiences into personal knowledge and to shape the evolving person we are. No two human beings evolve to be exactly the same. Each of us is born with a varying set of physical and mental capacities. These capacities coupled with our given perspectives, attitudes, and motivations uniquely define how we interpret our life experiences or interactions with our environment.

Human experiences are interactions with one’s environment, where the environment refers to the human, physical, social, cultural, and natural world in which we live. An experience can be a very complicated interaction with family members, news of a health concern, a request to sign a political document, an inspiring presentation by a teacher, a business transaction, a simple encounter with a meaningful line in a book or the experience of solitude in a quiet natural setting. For the purpose of this study, a life experience refers to any meaningful experience we humans deal with in our day-to-day lives.

Experiential Wisdom Acquisition Model

The process of knowledge acquisition and wisdom application as depicted in Figure 1 demonstrates an on-going and repetitive cycle where knowledge is created

through the learning from a new or recurring life experience. So that as Jarvis (2006) puts it, “we are both being and becoming simultaneously and this continues throughout our lifetime” (p. 87). Jarvis further looks at learning from a holistic perspective. He regards human learning as:

The combination of processes whereby the whole person – body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values emotions, beliefs and senses): experiences a social situation, the perceived content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotively or practically (or through any combination) and integrated into the person’s individual biography resulting in a changed (or more experienced) person. (p. 13)

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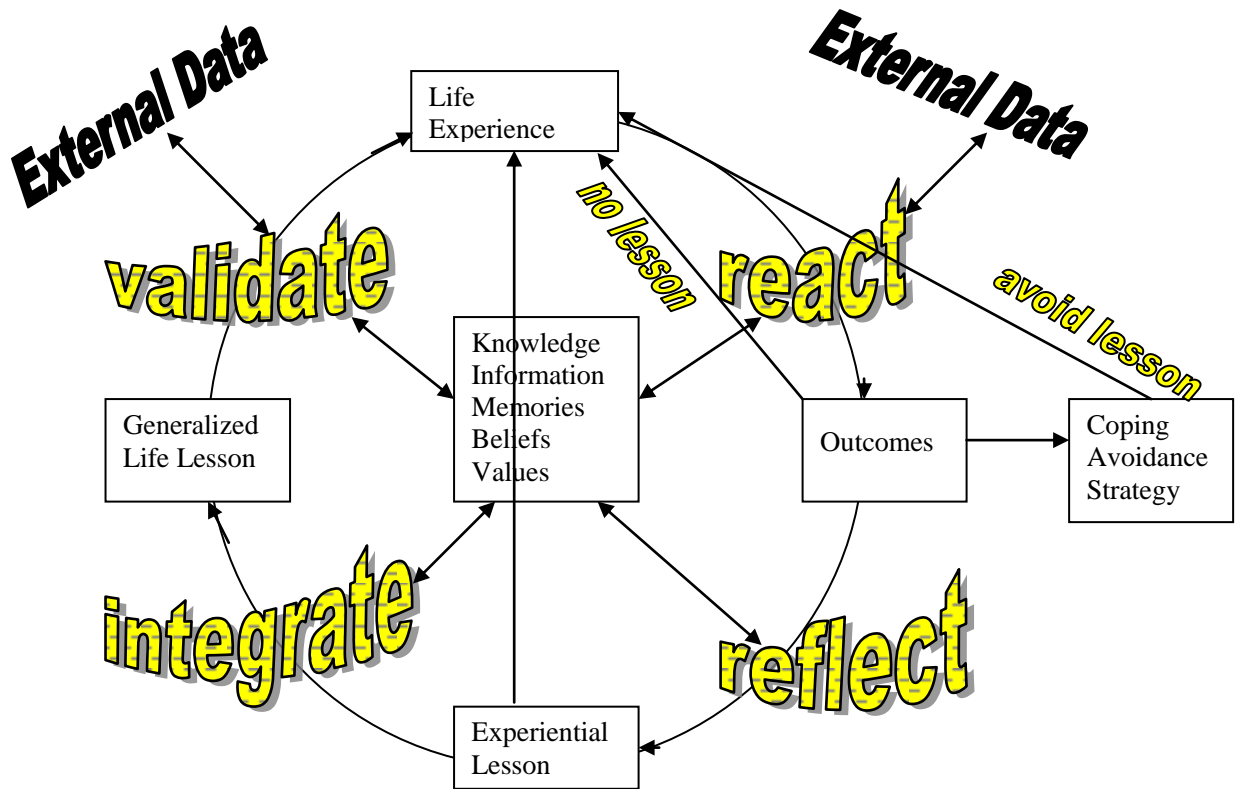


Figure 1: Experiential Wisdom Acquisition Model

Four-Step Process to Learning and Integrating a Life Lesson

This section describes each step of the proposed model and shows how these steps in the model are based on existing theory and, to some extent, research data on experiential learning.

The four steps depicted in the Experiential Wisdom Acquisition Model demonstrate the creation of a lesson resulting from a life experience, the integration and validation of that lesson with existing knowledge, and the application of one's evolving knowledge base to deal with new life experiences. An individual chooses: (a) to engage

in learning and the knowledge building process beginning with reflection on the outcomes of their reaction to a life experience, or (b) alternatively chooses to postpone or avoid the opportunity to learn.

Learning and knowledge building do not happen passively. According to the model, four active steps are involved in the knowledge building process: (a) Step One - an individual reacts in some manner to a life experience and the outcomes of that reaction are realized; (b) Step Two – an experiential lesson ensues from the reflection on the reaction and outcomes of Step One; (c) Step Three - integration of the experiential lesson learned in Step Two of the process with existing knowledge and past experiences results in a more generalized life lesson; (d) Step Four - validation of the life lesson with external data sources combined with critical reflection allows for adjustments to the knowledge base as the life lesson is corroborated or reframed. In this model, one's existing knowledge base is represented by the box situated in the middle of the diagram that is comprised of one's existing knowledge, beliefs, values, and memories.

Step One and Step Two complete the process of acquiring an experiential lesson. Step Three and Step Four complete one cycle of the knowledge acquisition process that results in a generalized life lesson. Each time the cycle is repeated, the individual is changed. Their body of knowledge expands or is adjusted preparing the changed individual for their next interaction with their environment and an opportunity to apply their knowledge, beliefs, common sense, intuition, and values in a wise manner to deal effectively with a situation.

The first and fourth steps of the Experiential Wisdom Acquisition Process as seen in Figure 1 depict external interactions with one's environment as well as the inward reflections and mental processes one engages in. The second and third steps of the process are solely introspective.

Kolb (1984) suggested that experiential learning theory offers a “holistic integrative perspective on learning that combines experience, perception, cognition, and behaviour” (p. 21). He developed an experiential learning model based on the learning models of the three founding theorists of experiential learning theory: (a) Dewey's Model of experiential learning, (b) Lewin's experiential learning model, and (c) Piaget's model of learning and cognitive development. The four stages depicted in Kolb's learning model are: (a) concrete experience, (b) observations and reflections, (c) formation of abstract concepts and generalizations, and (d) testing implications of concepts in new situations. The Experiential Wisdom Acquisition Process depicted in the diagram above builds upon work in the field of experiential learning.

Step One - React

Step One of the Experiential Wisdom Acquisition Process, an individual's reaction to a life experience, involves an active response which results in either positive or negative outcomes. Engaging in no action is considered an active response to a situation and similarly results in positive or negative outcomes.

When a new experience is encountered, an individual often reacts automatically or intuitively without fully understanding why they have chosen their behaviour. Schön (1983) refers to knowing-in-action: “Although we sometimes think before acting, it is

also true that in much of the spontaneous behaviour of skillful practice we reveal a kind of knowing which does not stem from a prior intellectual operation” (p. 51). In this case, the intuitive reaction to a situation is based upon previous knowledge and experience. When a situation calls for a more considered response, an individual can look inward and search their personal data banks for how best to deal with the experience. They may also look outward for external information before responding. This looking outward and inward is depicted in Step-One of the wisdom acquisition process.

According to Kolb (1984), “typically, an immediate reaction to a limited situation or problem is not thought of as learning but as performance” (p. 34). The results of our reactions are outcomes not learning. We can learn from these outcomes but it takes some thoughtful reflection before a lesson is realized. At this juncture an individual can choose to continue with the learning process and move on to the second step of the knowledge building process and reflect on their outcomes and the situation or they may choose to engage in one of two avoidance strategies (see Avoidance Strategies below).

Step One of the process is where the opportunity to practice wisdom lies. Some individuals are able to integrate and apply their personal knowledge with their beliefs, common sense, intuition and values to deal effectively with life situations. When this occurs, other individuals can perceive the wisdom of their actions. As this whole process is iterative and cyclical, the opportunity to practice wisdom occurs many times over our lifespan.

Step Two - Reflect

Ardelt (2003) tells us:

A deeper understanding of life is only possible if one can perceive reality as it is without any major distortions. To do this, one needs to engage in reflective thinking by looking at phenomena and events from many different perspectives to develop self-awareness and self-insight. (p. 278)

If an individual chooses the learning path, they take time to reflect on the consequences of Step One so that an experiential lesson results. Dewey (1933) defines reflection as, “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends constitutes reflective thought” (p. 9).

Kolb (1984) discusses the important role internal reflection plays in learning and in the creation of knowledge. Jarvis (2006) takes the concept of reflection one step further and includes the element of time: “we think (reflect) about an experience after it has happened; in other words, reflection is always post the event - a looking backwards, even though that period of time might be only microseconds, but it might be days or hours” (p. 98) or, I would add, months or even years.

Mezirow (1991) distinguishes among three forms of reflection: “Reflection is the process of critically assessing the content, process, or premise(s) of our efforts to interpret and give meaning to an experience” (p. 104). Reflection in Step Two of the Experiential Wisdom Acquisition Process refers to Mezirow’s reflection on the content and process of our experiences. The third type of reflection that Mezirow refers to, reflection on premise(s), takes place in Step Four of the wisdom acquisition process.

An individual may be satisfied with the acquisition of an experiential lesson and stop the learning process at this point. The experience may not warrant further time or energy. Not all experiences warrant equal consideration.

Step Three - Integrate

Step Three of the process involves integration of the situational lesson learned, as a result of Step Two, with the individual's existing internal knowledge base that has been accumulated over the lifespan and resulted from previous experiences. As a result, a broader life lesson may be conceptualized. Yang (2008) sees wisdom as a real-life process, and considers integration one of the three core components. He states, "many wisdom theorists assert that integration is the essence of wisdom" (p. 64).

The Canadian Oxford Dictionary (2001) defines "integrate" as: (a) combine (parts) into a whole, and (b) complete (an imperfect thing) by the addition of parts. This important introspective part of the Experiential Wisdom Acquisition Process moves an experience from a singular event to part of a whole more complex concept.

Kolb (1984) writes that, "integrative consciousness is primarily synthetic, placing isolated experiences in a context that serves to redefine them" and "integrative consciousness creates integrity by centering and carrying forward the flow of experience" (p. 150).

Step Four - Validate

Step Four is the validation of the life lesson with corroborative data from external sources. This final step may involve further introspection and critical reflection on the

original experience as external information may present a new perspective on the situation that might challenge one's original premises. As stated earlier, Mezirow (1991) sees reflection as comprised of three components: content, process, and premise(s). The type of critical reflection that is undertaken in this final step of the process where validation takes place and possibly a reframing of the experience is reflection on the underlying premises of the experience and life lesson.

Mezirow is most often credited with constructing the concepts and theory of transformative learning (Cranton, 1998, 2006; Illeris, 2007, 2009; Jarvis, 2006, 2009; Scott, 1998). Transformative learning occurs when an individual questions previously held assumptions, meaning schemes or life perspectives through the central process of critical reflection. Mezirow (1991) states: "Overcoming limited, distorted, and arbitrarily selective modes of perception and cognition through reflection on assumptions that formerly have been accepted uncritically is central to development in adulthood" (p. 5). Transformative learning occurs when an individual changes their views or perspectives by questioning what was previously taken for granted and uncritically acquired through childhood. Using the adult capacity of critical reflection and bringing previously unexamined assumptions into consciousness allows for perspective transformation to take place. Further, Mezirow (1989) claims, "most significant learning in adulthood takes place during transitions which often involve dilemmas not amenable to problem solving in the usual way" (p. 197), and argues that these life transitions provide opportunity for perspective transformation. Although transition periods and life dilemmas do provide learning opportunities, the learning or acquisition process for small or everyday

experiences can also result in transforming an individual or their knowledge base, albeit perhaps at a slower pace. Cranton (2006) suggests that Mezirow, after his original work, acknowledged that transformative learning could result incrementally as a gradual cumulative process as well as from a single disorienting dramatic event.

Avoidance Strategies

Sometimes we choose not to take the opportunity to learn. “It is at the intersection of us and our world that we are presented with the opportunities to learn” (Jarvis, 2006, p. 170). Two avoidance strategies are depicted in the Experiential Wisdom Acquisition Model that circumvent the learning process and stifle knowledge building. The first of these two avoidance strategies is shown as the shortest cycle where an individual reacts to a life situation, lives with the consequences of their actions, and does nothing further. No reflective time is allocated and no lesson is learned. In this scenario, the individual is likely to continue reacting in the same way to the same situations.

The second avoidance strategy appears little better. It too stifles wisdom acquisition. In this scenario, an individual deals with the situation by developing a passive coping strategy to avoid similar situations in the future. This alternative provides immediate or short-term solutions but aborts the opportunity for a broader learning experience and results in limited means to deal with similar life situations when they occur.

Ardelt (2003, 2005b) conducted a two-part study that explored how older people coped with crises and obstacles in their lives. Her research found that elders who rated relatively low on a three-dimensional wisdom scale did not reflect on the meaning of

their life crises and hardships. Rather they chose passive coping strategies and did not gain wisdom or insight over the situation. Ardelt's study used semi-structured qualitative interviews with 40 interviewees, 10 rated low on the wisdom scale, 18 with median wisdom scores, and 12 with high scores. Analyses were performed on the extreme cases: the three highest wisdom scorers and the three lowest wisdom scorers. Not only did this study find that the lowest wisdom scorers chose passive coping strategies and did not engage in reflection but it found the wiser participants used active mental and physical coping strategies to deal with life crises.

Even though an individual may initially choose one of the two avoidance strategies, life provides repeated opportunities to learn. The recurrence of a situation or of an experience with a similar situation or pattern may cause an individual to begin the reflection process and to internalize their outcomes and situation and to learn from the experience.

Chapter Summary

The Experiential Wisdom Acquisition Process hypothesized and shown in Figure 1 informed the study's research and interview questions. Three research questions were formulated. One question was based on the data from the study's nominators: "*How do individuals describe their experience of and interactions with wise persons?*" The objective of this line of questioning was to clearly understand what behaviours and experiences the nominators witnessed that differentiated their nominee from other individuals they knew and had dealt with in their lives.

Two research questions were explored in data from the wise nominees: “*How do wise individuals report living their lives?*” and “*How do wise individuals report learning from life experiences?*” The objective of this line of questioning was to compare the hypothesized wisdom acquisition process as depicted in Figure 1 with the accounts provided by these individuals.

This chapter has reviewed research from both implicit and explicit wisdom theories. It has provided a description and overview of some of the types of research that have been undertaken to understand the construct of wisdom. At this point, we are still a long way from complete understanding of the wisdom construct but it is becoming clear that a gap in the existing literature exists. Several researchers have noted that while work is ongoing to understand what wisdom is, little research has explored how wisdom is developed. This chapter presents a model that begins to explore the learning of life lessons, integrating those lessons with one’s personal and existing knowledge, and describing the process of wisdom acquisition. That model has led to the development of this study’s research questions. The following chapter, Chapter Three, lays out the study design and methodology used to answer the three research questions posed in this chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology and qualitative approach chosen to research the phenomenon of wisdom acquisition. The rationale for the method, and the study design, participant selection, data collection, and data analysis are described throughout the chapter, and the approaches used to enhance the trustworthiness of the study are reported.

Rationale and Research Design

The purpose of this research was to understand the wisdom acquisition process by better understanding the lived experiences of a few individuals thought by others to be wise. To answer the research questions, a qualitative, exploratory case study was conducted. The study explored the processes a small number of nominated wise individuals reported they used to learn a personal life lesson and to integrate that life lesson into their cumulative body of knowledge.

This research clearly lent itself to a qualitative study. According to Patton (2002), “qualitative methods facilitate study of issues in depth and detail” (p. 14). As this approach to the study of wisdom is relatively unique and the hypothesized Experiential Wisdom Acquisition Process is new, this research should be considered exploratory in nature. McMillan and Schumacher (2006) state, “exploratory studies add to the literature by building rich descriptions of complex situations and by giving directions for future research” (p. 316). Because this research was designed to explore “how” individuals

acquire wisdom and Yin (2009) points out that “how and why questions are more explanatory and likely to lead to the use of case studies” (p. 9), a qualitative, exploratory, multi-case study approach was employed to achieve the study’s research goals.

The research design was approached from a constructivist paradigm, looking to understand the unique perspectives of each individual involved in the study and their experience of wisdom. My research aim was to partner with the study participants to construct the meaning of wisdom and the meaning of the acquisition of wisdom as they understand it. According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), “interpretive constructionists look for the specific and detailed and try to build an understanding based on those specifics” (p. 28).

This multi-case study examined four cases. Each case focused on a dyad composed of a nominator and a wise nominee who know each other well. In all four cases, the pairs of individuals had known each other for at least eight years. The practice of nominating wise persons, either personal acquaintances or public figures, is relatively standard practice in wisdom research (Ardelt, 2003; Baltes, et al., 1995; Bluck & Glück, 2005). However, this study differed from other wisdom research studies that have used nominators. Every effort was made to solicit nominators who were deemed to be wise themselves, so that perspectives on the topic of wisdom could be gathered from the nominators as well as from the wise nominees. The nominators’ close and personal experience with the nominees was drawn upon to describe in detail not only why they chose these individuals as wise designates but also to give specific examples of their

nominees' wise behaviours. The descriptions and opinions of the nominators were part of this study's data.

Participant Selection

The strength and validity of this study depended in large part on the credibility of the wise individuals nominated and selected as case study participants. It was, therefore, extremely important that a strong representative group of wise individuals was found for this research. Charmaz (2002) states, "obtaining rich data provides a solid foundation for developing robust theories" (p. 677). To ensure that information-rich informants, who were wise persons, were found for the study, purposeful sampling was first used to locate the nominators for the study. Patton (2002) states, "the purpose of purposeful sampling is to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (p. 46). A small group of professors, professionals, and community leaders located in the Kingston area and Greater Toronto area of Ontario were selected and solicited in person or over the phone to become study participants as nominators. These nominators were selected because they were considered to be wise by the researcher or by individuals known to the researcher; they met many of the characteristics listed on Holliday and Chandler's (1986) prototype of a wise individual (see Appendix A). As well, they have been employed in professions that deal with the public and several of them have professions that are considered wisdom facilitative, such as teaching, civic leadership, or counseling (Baltes & Staudinger, 1993; Montgomery, Barber, & McKee, 2002).

After an individual had agreed to participate as a nominator, he or she was asked to nominate a wise individual they knew personally. Snowball sampling was relied on as

the nominators were trusted to nominate wise individuals. Snowball or network sampling is useful when the participants to be studied are scattered throughout a population (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

Brown (2005) suggested it is difficult to provide nominators with criteria that adequately ensure the nomination of wise participants for a study. To address this issue, all nominators were provided at the outset of the study with Holliday and Chandler's (1986) respected Factor Structure of Wisdom that lists the attributes of a wise person as a guide and they were encouraged to use it if they chose (see Factor Structure of Wisdom, Appendix A). The nominators were told they could rely on their own implicit understanding of wisdom when nominating a wise individual if they wanted or could use the Holliday and Chandler list; whichever they were more comfortable with. All of the nominators reported relying on their own implicit understanding of wisdom when making their nominations.

At the outset of the study an information package that included a short questionnaire was delivered to each nominator. These questionnaires were designed to gather background histories about the nominator, contact information for the individual they chose to nominate as wise, a short description of the nominator's relationship with their wise nominee, and a description of the nominee. After I had received a completed questionnaire from a nominator, I contacted the wise designate to explain the study and invite this individual to participate in the study. If the nominee agreed to share his or her experiences, I arranged to conduct a focused interview with the nominator to explore in more detail why they had chosen this particular individual as their wise nominee.

The process to select, secure the study participants, and conduct the participant interviews was spread over an eight month period from August 2009 to mid-March 2010. In the end, I felt privileged to have conducted interviews with a group of interesting and articulate wise individuals who were willing to share not only their ideas on wisdom in general but some of their personal life experiences as well.

When the study began at the end of July 2009, four potential nominators were approached to participate in the study. An attempt was made with this original group to not only find wise individuals but to include different genders and age groups. With such a small sample this was very difficult to achieve and in the end, it was the wisdom factor that took precedent when approaching and selecting participants. The original four purposefully selected nominators were: (a) a female professor in her late fifties, (b) a female civic leader in her early sixties, (c) a male medical doctor in his late forties, and (d) a female corporate trainer in her late thirties.

The first and second of the four potential nominators were able to participate in the study even though the first nominator's original nominee had to withdraw for personal reasons. That nominator identified a second wise nominee who participated. Replacements had to be found for the third and fourth potential nominators for the following reasons. The third nominator's choice of a wise designate was out of the country and unavailable. This nominator had difficulty thinking of a second choice so he was unable to participate. The fourth nominator had nominated an individual who initially agreed to participate in the study but later had to withdraw because of personal time constraints. The nominator did not have a second nominee choice so she too

withdrew from the study after her nominee had withdrawn. After several careful and lengthy attempts had been made to identify and enlist other nominators, successful replacements were found. A male veterinarian and columnist in his mid-sixties replaced the male medical doctor and a female life coach and professor in her late fifties replaced the female corporate trainer. All eight final study participants, the four nominators and their nominees, are identified by their pseudonyms in Table 1.

Table 1: Study Participants

	Nominator	Wise Nominee
Case One	<i>Sheila</i> Female, Professor, Late fifties	<i>Heather</i> Female, Writer, Mid sixties
Case Two	<i>Maureen</i> Female, Civic Leader, Community Activist and Volunteer, Early sixties	<i>Ruth</i> Female, Retired Health Care Manager and Administrator, Early sixties
Case Three	<i>Bill</i> Male, Veterinarian, Entrepreneur, Columnist, Mid sixties	<i>Edward</i> Male, Retired Meteorologist and Government Employed Environmentalism, Mid-Eighties
Case Four	<i>Phyllis</i> Female, Professor and Life Coach, Mid Fifties	<i>Barbara</i> Female, Retired Professor and Theological Coach, Mid-Eighties

Ethics Clearance

In advance of participant selection and the commencement of data collection, ethics clearance was obtained from the General Research Ethics Board of Queen's University in July 2009. Letters of Information and Consent Forms were distributed, signed and collected in advance of conducting the interviews with both the nominators and wise nominees (see Appendices B to E).

Data Collection

Data were collected from five sources: (a) nominator questionnaires; (b) focused interviews with nominators; (c) in-depth, semi-structured interviews with wise nominees; (d) well-being questionnaires completed by the wise nominees with the assistance of the researcher at the end of their in-depth interviews; and (e) a field log maintained by the researcher throughout the process in which detailed notes, observations, and reflections were recorded.

Although data were collected from multiple sources, which addressed the issue of data triangulation and enhanced the study's trustworthiness, the main body of data was collected during the in-depth, semi-structured interviews with each of the wise nominees. In their study, Glück, Bluck, Baron & McAdams (2005) stated, "the examination of wisdom through autobiographical narratives has proven to be a useful, ecologically valid method for studying experienced wisdom across the lifespan" (p. 207).

Pilot Interview

At the outset of this study, a pilot interview was conducted with a former teacher, an individual I considered to be wise and whom I trusted to provide valid and helpful feedback. The pilot interview was designed to test, refine, and modify the interviewing techniques and questions. This interviewee provided informed feedback which helped increase my confidence in my interviewing skills and, therefore, helped ensure the trustworthy collection of data.

Nominator Information Form

As described earlier, the nominators were required to complete a short information questionnaire at the outset of the study. Information gathered on these forms was used to help formulate the interview questions for both the focused interviews with the nominators and the in-depth interviews with the wise nominees (see Nominator Information Form, Appendix F).

Interviews

Interview data were collected over the six-month period October 2009 to March 2010. The setting and timing of the interviews were arranged at the convenience of the study participants and took place in their homes with one exception; that interview took place at the participant's office. A total of nine interviews were conducted; a pilot interview, four focused nominator interviews, and four in-depth interviews with the wise nominees. Yin (2009) has stated, "one of the most important sources of case study information is the interview" (p. 106).

An interview protocol including a standard introduction was created and used with all study participants. According to Johnson and Weller (2002) an important way to start an interview is to explain the reason and purpose of the project. This not only helps establish the interviewer-interviewee relationship but also distinguishes the interview from an ordinary conversation. The interviews followed a carefully conceived guide approach that, according to Patton (2002), constitutes “a descriptive analytical framework for analysis” (p. 440). As much as possible, I tried to ensure that the majority of questions laid out in the guide were answered. However, each interview was unique and the pace, direction, and interests of each participant were honoured. For example, the questions were posed in a different sequence from interview to interview and at times topics were initiated by the participant that eliminated the need to ask some of the questions.

The interviews with nominators lasted between an hour to an hour and a half. These interviews were introductory in nature to create rapport, and were designed to learn who they had nominated, the nature of the relationship between them and the nominee, and to understand why they viewed this particular individual as wise (see Interview Guide for Nominator, Appendix G). The interviews with the nominators were used to help shape the probing questions used during the semi-structured interviews with the nominees.

Interviews with the wise nominees lasted on average about two hours. One of those interviews was conducted over two sittings, as the audio equipment failed during the first interview with that nominee and the individual agreed to a second interview. All of the wise nominees were asked in advance of their interview to think about a situation

that had occurred in their lives when they believed they had acted wisely at the time and a life lesson had resulted, either a positive or negative lesson. The interviews with the nominees were designed to explore and document their description of the one experience they chose to discuss about learning a life lesson. Questions were posed to find out how their life lesson impacted their lives and contributed to shaping the person they had become (see Interview Guide Wise Nominee, Appendix H).

In-depth interviews were chosen as the most appropriate tool for these research needs. According to Van Manen (1997), the interview “may be used as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon” (p. 66).

All of the interviews were audio-recorded and two professional transcribers who had signed confidentiality agreements were employed to create verbatim transcripts of the interviews (see Confidentiality Agreement, Appendix I). To maintain confidentiality, to the extent possible, all study participants were assigned pseudonyms and identifying data were removed from the transcripts.

Wise Nominee Well-Being Questionnaire

The Government of Canada is beginning to collect information that reports on the well-being of its citizens (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, n.d.). A short questionnaire was designed to record information about the study’s wise individuals that was consistent with information gathered and recorded by Human Resources as well-being indicators (see Well-Being Questionnaire for Wise Nominee, Appendix J). The questions were short and direct and related to issues such as physical and mental activity,

volunteering, and community engagement. Rather than ask the wise nominees to complete the questionnaire themselves, I posed the questions to them at the end of their interview and completed the form while they spoke.

Field Log

A detailed and chronological field log was maintained throughout the study. I used the field log to record decisions, reactions, and interpretations during the pilot interview, the participant selection process, the interviews, and the analysis period. With reflexivity and objectivity, I have attempted to record my feelings and reflections to provide ongoing interpretations and additional information that informed the final analysis. Peshkin (1988) points out that researchers should be conscious of their subjectivity when collecting data to manage and account for their subjectivity. By remaining as neutral and impartial as possible and clearly documenting personal biases, I believe I have enhanced the trustworthiness of the study's findings and ensured that the views of the participants were reported without bias.

Data Analysis

Data Management

LeCompte (2000) emphasizes how important it is to tidy up and organize the raw data collected before launching into analysis. As she recommends, the following administrative steps were taken to ensure the data were well managed, maintained, and secured. Multiple backup copies of all data were made and stored on various media; audio recorder, electronic computer files, and one hard copy of all documents were safely

stored in a secure metal file cabinet. The field notes have been chronologically organized and form part of the raw data and, as Miles and Huberman (1994) recommended, and where appropriate, these raw field notes were corrected, edited, and typed up.

The data were organized into four case files and indexed for easy access both in hard copy and electronic format. Each dyad, one nominator and one nominee, was considered a unit of analysis so that each case file was made up of: the personal data and relationship history gathered on the questionnaire filled in by the nominator; the transcribed opinions, recollections, experiences, and applications of experiences collected from the audio-taped interviews of the nominator and nominee; the researcher's notes made during the interviews that serve as an accompaniment to the transcriptions; both consent forms signed by the nominator and nominee; the well-being questionnaire completed on behalf of the nominee; and any additional materials pertinent to that case.

The next step was to immerse myself in the data to get a sense of the whole and ensure before beginning analysis that data were complete. I listened and re-listened to each audio-recorded interview several times. Once I had the verbatim transcripts, I likewise read and re-read each transcript looking at the data for different reasons: for example, to write up the case descriptions or to summarize the life lessons learned. I therefore got a good sense of the data from different perspectives. I felt I had an abundance of data and that there was no need to go back to the participants to obtain any supplementary data before my analysis began.

Case Descriptions

Once the files and data were organized and before rigorous analysis was begun, I spent many hours developing as rich and thick a description as viable that positioned the participants in the case study. Descriptive case details were created about the relationship of the nominator and wise nominee as well as their shared and personal life histories and experiences. According to Stake (1995) “a constructivist view encourages providing readers with good raw material for their own generalizing. The emphasis is on description ... not only commonplace description but ‘thick description’, the interpretations of the people most knowledgeable about the case” (p. 102). The interviewees were interesting and articulate individuals. A thorough understanding of the dyad’s shared relationship was documented and numerous descriptive quotes about the personality traits and characteristics of the wise nominees were accumulated and stored in the case files.

Coding and Interpreting Data

Open coding was employed in the early stages of the qualitative analysis to code and label the data while searching for what was significant in the raw data. The data were searched for consistencies and core meanings. An iterative process of examining and reexamining the data and revising codes was employed until as Yin (2009) puts it, “a full explanation or even a good description of your case” (p. 128) emerged. A list of 187 emic and etic codes was compiled and used to code the data (see List of Codes, Appendix K).

As Patton (2002) advises, a set of systematic categories was derived that were consistent, complete, made sense of the data, and represented the whole picture. I began

the case by case analysis by analyzing Case Two first as it was the most robust case. I then proceeded to analyze Case One, Case Three, and Case Four in that order. A cross-case analysis to deepen the understanding of the wisdom acquisition process was conducted once all the individual cases had been analyzed. Inductive analysis was then employed which Patton tells us “involves discovering patterns, themes, and categories in one’s data” (p. 453).

For the purpose of analytical triangulation and to increase the trustworthiness of the study, I consulted with my thesis supervisor who provided direction with the development of a comprehensive classification system developed for the data. Together we decided my original groupings of functional categories should be reexamined. I then regrouped the categories by nature and four central themes began to emerge. At that point, I went back to the raw data and reexamined each case against the new groupings of categories and themes. I eliminated any categories that were not consistent across all four cases.

As a final analysis, I reexamined the revised categories and themes together, making sense of the groupings and readjusting the names of the themes. Table 2 lists the four central themes with their associated categories that emerged from this analysis.

Table 2: Central Themes and Categories

Themes	Categories
Know Yourself	Self-awareness and Self-acceptance Confidence
Be Fully Engaged In Life	Active Disciplined Hard Working Interested Respectful Communications <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Respectful listening- Willing to share experiences and provide advice- Respond respectfully and in an appropriate manner- Role model
Make Sense of Your Experiences	Broad, Objective, Perspective Calm Reactions Reflective Conscious Decisions
Believe In Universal Support	Feel Part Of The Whole Trust Positive Attitude

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the case study approach and methodology used to conduct the qualitative research have been described while the approaches used to enhance the study's trustworthiness and validity were discussed. The next chapter, Chapter 4, contains rich case descriptions and the central themes for the four cases.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

This chapter begins with the four case descriptions. These descriptions explain the relationship between the nominators and nominees, include descriptions of the nominees, and relate the situations and resulting life lessons the nominees chose to share. The strength of this study lies in the power of the stories told by its participants and the powerful corroboration between the nominators' descriptions of their wise nominees and the actual accounts of the nominees.

The central themes that emerged from the data about wisdom in general and for these participants in particular are examined in the second part of this chapter.

The Stories

Case One Description

Sheila is a professor between 50–60 years of age and Heather is a former stay at home Mom who is now a writer with one published novel and a non-fiction book in the works. Heather, 68 years of age, was born in South Africa and moved to Canada in the early 90's. She has been married for 47 years and has four children and four grandchildren.

Heather and Sheila met eight years ago while Sheila was conducting research at a school in Toronto. Sheila was billeted at Heather's home and they have remained friends ever since. Sheila, through an informal collaboration, has done some editing on Heather's current book. Heather describes their relationship as easy and open, "one of those

serendipitous things that doesn't happen so often in life, so I'm very grateful for that friendship" (C1H, p. 2). The data source is indicated as case number, interviewee, and transcript page, so (C1H, p. 2) refers to a quotation taken from page 2 of the interview transcript with Heather (H) in Case 1 (C1).

During Sheila's interview and the telling of why she perceives Heather as wise, Sheila described Heather as follows: "She's an intensely centered being, you can just feel the strong core that is unshakeable no matter what happens" (C1S, p. 5). She also used words like serene, thoughtful, quiet confidence, capable, reflective, and respectful to describe Heather.

The life experience Heather chose to share took place when she was 16 years old and attending a Royal Ballet Academy away from her native homeland. The school decided to submit the girls to external ballet exams. About one third of the class failed and Heather was one of them. It was her first experience with failure. Heather said that when the girls received notice about their pass or fail, "those who hadn't passed were very upset and there was quite a lot of drama ... everybody was doing either a happy dance or the opposite all around me" (C1H, p. 8). However, Heather remained calm in spite of the news and, in fact, surprised herself with her calmness: "I could distance myself from it in some way and that was useful" (C1H, p.8). She had an opportunity to retake the exam six months later and did really well, which she thought was "ridiculous" (C1H, p. 9) as there was not enough time to improve her performance significantly in six months.

Heather reported learning several lessons from this experience: “I learnt later on that you often get another chance” (C1H, p. 9). She also learned that external factors play a role in decisions that may have nothing to do with you. In retrospect, she believed that some of the students were failed because this was the first time the external examining body had had an opportunity to test girls from that prestigious ballet school and they “were just going to take them [the school] down a peg or two” (C1H, p. 9).

What Heather says she learned about herself: “I realized that the other kind of reaction just wasn’t part of who I was ... and that I could be strong in the face of adversity” (C1H, p. 13). “The value of being self-contained in the moment” (C1H, p. 16), and “perhaps that was the first time I woke to that, that I had a kind of inner strength that I could call on” (C1H, p. 16). “Awareness of self-reliance, how I behave is okay for me ... especially in teenage time when you want to behave like everybody else ... it was the start of self-discovery” (C1H, p.18).

Heather summed up the impact that these lessons had on her life: “It also showed me that of course you get another chance, that often other opportunities come along so it’s not the end of the world” (C1H, p. 13). She reflected, “I didn’t do so well this time, you know, I’ll have another chance to do better. I think that over the years that has been really useful to me” (C1H, p. 19). “I think it was the awareness to wider factors playing in that’s also been a lesson. To be aware that it’s not just your own little world, it has to do with the whole context of the situation” (C1H, p. 15).

Case Two Description

The nominator, Maureen, between 50–60 years of age, had been the head of a municipal government body for almost 20 years. She currently works as a consultant and is still very active as a community volunteer. She is a widow, with three children and is a cancer survivor.

Our wise nominee in this case is Ruth. Ruth has recently retired from a management career in the health sector. She is a widow, with one son and now has a new partner and two new step-children in her life.

Maureen and Ruth have known each other for about 15 years. They met when Maureen was a political appointee and served on the Board of a District Health Council while Ruth, at the time, headed up a health organization and reported to that Board. They have become personal friends supporting each other through the passing of their husbands and dealing with Maureen's earlier diagnosis of cancer.

Maureen sees Ruth not only as a supportive friend but also as a respected professional. While describing why she chose Ruth as her wise nominee, Maureen offered a detailed description of Ruth's personality traits, competencies, and skills as thoughtful, compassionate, empathetic, principled and ethical, curious, thinks out of the box, open to new experiences, reflective, quiet, introverted, leads with firm gentleness, resourceful, tends to undersell herself, uses good judgment, engaged in the arts, strong, generous, and dependable.

Ruth chose to share a work situation in which she learned several lessons. She was asked to assist with quality improvement in a large hospital. She was assigned to

eliminate wait times in an outpatient chemotherapy department. The main problem proved to be the wait time for results on blood work. By questioning staff, Ruth led the team to find a solution which required recalibrating the equipment that tested the blood. This resulted in eliminating work duplication as staff, who previously did not trust the results of the test equipment, were manually checking the results. This work duplication was completely eliminated.

Ruth described multiple lessons resulting from her experience: she learned there is tremendous capacity out there and you have to enable that capacity to find solutions; you just have to listen to find solutions to problems. She learned to give credit where credit is due and to consider everyone involved; not to make assumptions about people no matter what their status, and to consider how they need to be dealt with.

Ruth reports on the personal impact this experience and its resulting lessons had on her life: “It was complex enough that I figured I could probably tackle most problems ... it gave me a sense of confidence” (C2R, p. 21).

Case Three Description

Bill, the nominator, and Edward, the wise nominee, have known each other for about 20 years. Bill, 60–70 years of age, is a veterinarian, entrepreneur, and former TV host and newspaper columnist. Edward is 83 years of age, a widower with three children and six grandchildren. He is a former meteorologist, trained in the United States, who worked for the Canadian government on issues related to the pollution of international waters and with the United Nations on acid rain projects.

They have shared common interests. They served on a Church Board together and Bill has interviewed Edward for a television program he hosted and for a newspaper column he wrote. Bill says of Edward: “he’s quite active in environment and ecology and issues of that kind” (C3B, p. 1).

Bill explains why he nominated Edward as a wise designate: “I think he is a wise person, and I think that his qualities, his mannerisms, his presentation is what I see as a person who has much to offer” (C3B, p. 17). Bill further describes Edward as quiet, reserved, interested, one who seeks information and knowledge, and a good listener. Bill sees Edward as a gentle man, with an easy manner. He describes him as friendly, educated, intelligent, a role model, and a man who is interested in the environment and ecological issues, a traveler, an active volunteer, and one who copes well with life circumstances.

Edward chose to describe a life decision he made at age 42 to accept a job here in Canada and to move his young family from the United States. Previously Edward had been a teacher and researcher and he was working on a doctoral degree. His doctoral work was interrupted by health problems which shifted his options and he decided to take the Canadian job. He describes it as “the biggest decision in my life” (C3E, p. 13). He weighed his options at the time, obtained the support of his family, and said: “I never was sorry for coming over here” (C3E, p. 14).

The impact of the experience and the lesson Edward learned was: to have faith in your decisions and “once you’ve made the decision then go” (C3E, p. 20).

Case Four Description

The nominator of Case Four, Phyllis, is a professor and life coach who lives in the same community enclave as her wise nominee, Barbara. Phyllis, between 50–60 years of age, has two teenage children. One of them is at university and this has allowed Phyllis some extra time to look in on Barbara and to run occasional errands when needed. The two met about 10 years ago through a community gathering and although there is almost 30 years difference in their ages, they have formed a mutual friendship.

Barbara, now 83 years old, is retired. She formerly taught physical education and supervised theology students for 20 to 30 years. She was married to a pediatrician and professor. They adopted three children and Barbara today has five grandchildren. Barbara's husband recently passed away. Phyllis had known Barbara's husband as he had been a professor at her university and Barbara had known Phyllis' father-in-law through their church. Together, Barbara and Phyllis have realized, they have earlier connections than their recent friendship.

Phyllis described Barbara as someone who exudes calmness, stability, and resilience. Barbara stays centered and grounded; she remains present which can be reassuring; she has been through a lot but navigates herself through life's dealings "like a big ship on the sea of life and ... waves can come and storms can go and she just seems to maintain this course that she has plotted" (C4P, p. 4). Phyllis describes Barbara as "sharp as a tack" (C4P, p. 5). She sees her as someone who has integrated a lot of knowing; she is well read; non-judgmental; very honest. Phyllis believes Barbara to be holistically wise; and has noticed that Barbara makes quiet observations and listens with

openness and discernment that demonstrates an element of love and understanding. She is very accepting “just sees humanity for what it is” (C4P, p. 6). Phyllis describes Barbara as: being engaged with the world, people, her reading, ideas, and life; continuing to contribute and to give back; both mentally and physically active; someone who reacts to situations in a mediating way by “not getting hooked” (C4P, p. 14); and someone who “grants almost a feeling of permission” (C4P, p. 17) for you to carry on without necessarily knowing the right answer.

One reason Phyllis nominated Barbara for this study resulted from their shared experience of attending a book club together over one winter at a Spirituality Center. Phyllis saw how well respected Barbara was by the group and how she interacted with them. Barbara maintained a low profile, mingled like everyone else but was able to integrate many concepts and took on the role of a quiet, passive leader.

Spirituality and religion play a huge part in her life and she is interested in and has taken university courses on humanistic psychology.

Barbara’s choice of situation where she learned a life lesson had to do with one of the workshops Barbara attended during her training as a supervisor to theology students. Over a ten-day training period, Barbara worked one-on-one with a supervisor on a daily basis to reflect on her experiences and learning in the other workshop sessions. Her supervisor at that time modeled how a good supervisor should listen and Barbara reported learning to be a better listener through those sessions. In her own words she learned to be a “thick” listener which enabled her to listen to her students and others over the course of her life in a way that made them feel heard.

Central Themes

The interview and questionnaire data focused on several topics. First, the relationship between the nominator and nominee was explored. Second, I questioned all participants about their understanding of wisdom in general. Third, with the nominators, descriptions of their nominees' personality traits and behaviours were sought. Lastly, with the nominees, I explored their life lesson learning process. From the analysis of the data, common themes emerged about the experience of and understanding of wisdom. These themes describe the practices moderating the life lesson learning process for this group of wise nominees.

Four central themes emerged from the data: (a) know yourself; (b) be fully engaged in life; (c) make sense of your experiences; and (d) believe in universal support. The first three themes focus on self-reliance. The fourth theme appears as a contradiction to the first three themes yet it emerged as a complement, an anchor for the study participants. All of the nominators and wise nominees in this study reported being religious or spiritual and this aspect of their lives was very important for each of them. They did not dwell on their brand of religion or spirituality or discuss it extensively. What became evident through our discussions was that they saw themselves as part of a bigger picture, part of the whole, that the world did not revolve around them and that they were humbly and consciously dealing with life as fully as possible. The fourth theme addresses the nominees' connectedness to their world.

Theme 1: Know Yourself

Barbara told me, “there’s a saying, be who you are or you are no one” (C4B2, p. 12). I believe that to be a profound statement and that to be who you are means first to know who you are. All of the nominators described their nominees as being strong individuals or as seeming to have an inner strength. That tangible inner strength seems to result partly from the quiet confidence, self-awareness, and self-acceptance these wise individuals demonstrate.

The first theme, know yourself, has two associated categories (a) self-awareness and self-acceptance, and (b) confidence.

Self-awareness and Self-acceptance

Edward spoke of being self-aware in this way: “You have to know a lot about yourself ... you have to be very self-aware in terms of your strengths and your limitations” (C2R, p. 12). Barbara spoke to some of the possible results of being aware of your own strengths and weaknesses. A wise person “is comfortable in their own skin” (C4B, p. 11), and, when they know their own strengths, weaknesses, and uniqueness, “they can see it in other people clearly... it makes you non-judgmental ... and able to have good relationships” (C4B1, p. 11). Further Barbara says:

It’s possible to know yourself better and when you get to know yourself better, it’s always a bit of a tough ride because you see all of the rough stuff and the not so good stuff and, therefore, it’s very easy to be kind to somebody else. (C4B2, p. 10)

One of the nominators, Maureen, spoke to the value of self-acceptance: “Well their self-acceptance is what allows them not to have to prove things by being authoritative” (C2M, p. 9).

Confidence

Being self-aware and accepting of their own strengths and limitations results in a confidence that these wise nominees are perceived to possess. They have confidence in and trust their capabilities, their intuition, and therefore their decisions. They don’t dwell on past decisions. Edward says: “I think people can get too much tied up in what happened in the past. You should remember it because you don’t [want to] make the same mistake twice, but there’s no use of ruining your life thinking about what went wrong” (C3E, p. 13).

Ruth speaks of having confidence in her capabilities and of relying on her intuition but following that up with hard work: “I was brought up to be very independent and to trust my capabilities” (C2R, p. 19) and “I rely on my intuition quite a lot ... then I back it up with facts and building the case” (C2R, p. 13). Confidence means not only relying on your capabilities but it also appears to enable one to take risks. Ruth speaks to risk taking when she says: “Go for it, right? Like try, what’s the worst that could happen, they could have said no” (C2R, p. 6).

Confidence in one’s abilities means not having to seek external recognition or approval. Ruth spoke to this matter in some detail when she discussed the improvement in wait times at her hospital. The reduced wait time was a huge accomplishment for her group but she personally didn’t require recognition for those improvements. She was

happy with the team results and the comfort of the patients. Phyllis likewise spoke of an incident when she and her nominee, Barbara, attended a book club and she could see how the group respected Barbara's opinions: "People really respected her view and yet she didn't need it" (C4P, p. 8). Phyllis recognized that Barbara did not require that external recognition.

Confidence is demonstrated when these individuals are comfortable asking questions or asking for help when it is needed. Ruth says: "Knowing yourself means having the confidence to ask questions and not feel anxious about it" (C2R, p. 15), and "I do know when to ask for help" (C2R, p. 30). Bill says of Edward, he "has excellent questions that draw out a speaker ... so you know, everyone in the audience has benefited from that question" (C3B, p. 8).

Theme 2: Be Fully Engaged In Life

The second theme that emerged was the concept of full engagement with life. It was not just the idea of being busy but of being fully present. All four nominators spoke to witnessing this in their nominees. The categories associated with this theme are: (a) being active, (b) being disciplined, (c) being hard working, (d) being interested, and (e) having respectful communications.

Active

Sheila says of Heather: "There's liveliness about her mind and she's physically active" (C1S, p. 13). Maureen, likewise, describes Ruth as, "she's physically active ... she's intellectually active" (C2M, p. 14). Bill spoke of Edward's ongoing engagements,

“He continues to be very active ... continues to put in many, many volunteer hours” (C3B, p. 12), and Phyllis spoke of Barbara’s engagement, “very active and very engaged with the world ...and not just in terms of engaged with people ... [also] with her reading and she’s engaged with life” (C4P, p. 13).

The nominees echoed and gave credence to the nominators witnessing of their activity and engagement. Heather speaks to her physical activity: “I did yoga for years ... I like to cycle, I like to walk ... I like to be fairly physically active” (C1H, p. 36), and Barbara says: “I was always very active in sports and music and theology” (C4B1, p. 2). Edward continues his activity on environmental issues and Ruth is physically active, a runner, and keeps herself mentally active. She is currently studying theology.

Disciplined

Our discussions about discipline focused on the idea that discipline meant allocating time for thinking and reflection as well as alone time or building balance by allocating time for physical activities as described above. These wise individuals routinely find ways to quietly remove themselves from the daily bustle. Heather is very disciplined with several daily routines, quiet meditative time each morning and evening as well as dedicated time to her writing: “I do some writing in the morning usually even if it’s just half an hour” (C1H, p. 33). Her early ballet training taught her to be disciplined and being too strict and disciplined with herself is something she keeps in check: “That’s a side I have to watch” (C1H, p. 34). Barbara allocates early morning time to contemplation and thinking about her day. Ruth is a disciplined runner and spends a fair bit of alone time that allows her to think. She says, “I have a lot of solo kinds of

interests” (C2R, p.23). Edward reported he never got involved with a practice like meditation but did recall that throughout his working career he made a point of clearly dividing his time between family and work. He, like the other three wise nominees, routinely makes time to attend religious services.

Hard Working

I would describe all of the study participants, nominators and nominees alike, as hard working individuals. Both Edward and Ruth addressed the concept of hard work and of collecting information before decision making. Edward said, “You’re continually collecting information and then you use that information to make decisions” (C3E, p. 5). Ruth says, “I work hard but I know how to have fun too” (C2R, p. 20). “I play hard, work hard” (C2R, p. 25), and “I don’t give up” (C2R, p. 20).

When I asked Heather if she passed her second ballet exam because she had trained harder she replied: “we worked incredibly hard anyhow so it’s hard to say that I worked any harder” (C1H, p.11).

Interested

I doubt you could be fully engaged with life if you were not honestly interested in aspects of life. These participants are active and hardworking because of their interests. They are interested not only in many activities and passions such as music, the arts, travel, volunteer work, or the environment, but they also share a love of continuous learning. Barbara says of wise individuals: “They believe that they can learn from anybody and everybody ... every day of their lives an open attitude to learn” (C4B1, p.

14). Ruth echoed this sentiment with, “I’m naturally just curious about all kinds of things, I love learning things” (C2R, p. 34). In particular she talks of her personal interest, “I have a big interest in history and family history” (C2R, p. 23), and Maureen in her description of Ruth says, “She’s very engaged in the arts, she loves the theatre and music, and she subscribes to that” (C2M, p. 14).

Bill says, “I think that travel is a great advantage to someone in acquiring wisdom” (C3B, p. 3,) and he and Edward share that common interest and discuss their travels. They have both done a great deal of travel over the course of their lives. As have most of the study participants. Heather likes to read, attend the symphony, and she also has done a lot of traveling in her life. These individuals all have a broad range of interests.

Respectful Communications

The concept of respectful communications threads its way throughout the interviews and was addressed by both the nominators and nominees. Careful, quiet, and unbiased listening stood out as paramount in the communication process and practices of all of the wise nominees. The nominees talked to a willingness to share their ideas if invited. They unanimously agreed they offered advice only when asked. The manner of responding to a situation in a respectful and appropriate manner was noted as an important part of good communications and was witnessed by the nominators of these individuals. The silent communicative role of being a role model was discussed and each of the wise nominees was described as a role model.

Respectful listening. Barbara simply stated, wise people, “they are good listeners” (C4B1, p. 14), and “some people feel that they have never been listened to” (C4B2, p. 6). So it’s not just about listening. It’s about listening with intent, being engaged in the listening process. The concept of being quiet so as to be a better listener was repeated. Nominator Bill says:

It’s very important to listen and so it’s hard to listen; if you’re talking all the time and very vocal or loud, you’re probably not listening or you’re not really communicating with the person very well in my opinion, I think you must always be respectful, and quiet allows you to be a better listener. (C3B, p. 5)

Ruth adds:

They’re listening intently to whatever’s going on, and they may not comment for quite some time, it may even be days later that they comment on something, but I have a sense that they’re on task, they’re fully engaged. (C2R, p. 11)

She speaks further to this topic when she says: “I do what I call listening for the whisper” (C2R, p. 17).

Nominator, Phyllis says, “Wise people don’t talk very much ... that quietness, it’s like there is an observation and a listening that is openness, non-judgmental but there is even almost an element of love in it and understanding” (C4P, p. 5). Edward speaks to the concept of removing one’s biases when listening: “I think he has to listen to the whole issue, he can’t be too dependent on his own biases” (C3E, p. 17).

Willing to share experiences and provide advice. Barbara says, “You must be able to somehow communicate this wisdom that you’ve acquired to others in order to be

recognized as wise” (C3B, p. 3). Although the nominees spoke to a willingness to share their ideas they all wait to be invited for their opinions or advice. Heather doesn’t usually offer advice: [I] “tend not to do it unless I’m asked” (C1H, p.28). “I don’t think it’s even necessarily giving advice it’s saying well this is what I do, you can try it if you want, and yeah often that’s appreciated” (C1H, p.30). Edward agrees, “I don’t give any advice unless they ask for it” (C3E, p. 25), and Ruth says, “I ask first, would you like a thought on that or would you like some advice ... I ask if it would be welcome” (C2R, p. 32).

There appears to be no sense that these individuals are out to prove themselves in any way. They do not try to impress others with their words of advice or demonstrate their expertise on a subject. They wait to be invited and the sharing takes on more of a helpful tone as opposed to an authoritative tone.

Respond respectfully and in an appropriate manner. The nominator, Bill eloquently spoke to this topic: “Whether it’s advice that you’ve been asked for or help with a particular problem or counseling for some reason, then I think it does need to be offered in a respectful, quiet, good manner” (C3B, p. 5), and “a wise person is able to offer that wisdom in an appropriate manner” (C3B, p. 4). He further says he looks for that advice to be offered in a non-condescending way.

Role model. As I asked about the role of mentoring I also asked about the concept of role models. Edward offered: “I suppose you are a role model even though you don’t know it” (C3E, p. 27). Interestingly, both Phyllis and Bill, who nominated older individuals as their nominees, spoke to the concept of aspiring to emulate some of their

nominees' characteristics. Bill spoke to the concept of viewing his nominee as a role model:

I suspect that those qualities that I have identified, I aspire to possess. I would like to think that I would be able to act in a similar manner and demonstrate some of those qualities. So yeah I see him as a role model. (C3B, p. 10)

Communicating silently through your actions and behaviours is a powerful way to communicate, according to the nominators and nominees in this study.

Theme 3: Make Sense of Your Experiences

Making sense of your experiences means dealing with life situations in a calm, centered, thoughtful, and reflective manner. This theme emerged from discussions about the behaviours of the wise nominees as witnessed by the nominators when dealing with situations and as expressed by the wise nominees themselves. This theme encompasses the categories of: (a) approaching situations with a broad and objective perspective, (b) maintaining calm reactions when dealing with a life situation, (c) employing a reflective mode when dealing with and learning from the experience, and (d) making conscious decisions.

Broad, Objective Perspective

Heather relayed her perspective on viewing a situation in its whole context and how that fosters an attitude of non-interference:

I think it's also to do with a certain considering attitude to life perhaps, so you, not only look at situations but think about a wider context ... it's to do with looking at the wider picture so it's not a narrow focus (C1H, p. 4).

Heather also says, "it's being able to give an objective view and good advice ... well the objective view implies this kind of non-interference" (C1H, p. 6). Edward spoke again of suppressing your biases and remaining neutral when collecting information:

Try to suppress your own biases. I realize none of us can and any decision we make is bound to be influenced by our biases, so that means collect the information objectively and look at both sides of the case ... as near as possible look at all sides. (C3E, p. 8)

The nominator Sheila addressed this issue when she discussed wise individuals in general and their ability to remain objective when listening to multiple perspectives of a story, "they can listen to all sides of a story and they don't get swamped and they don't get swayed too far" (C1S, p. 6).

Calm Reactions

Both nominators, Sheila and Phyllis, addressed the ability of wise individuals and their nominees in particular to remain calm, unshakeable, and not overwhelmed when dealing with life circumstances. Sheila said: "Basically she's unflappable and it doesn't mean she's cold or unemotional or any of those things ... you have your lows and your highs but the core is solid and you don't lose yourself in a problem" (C1S, p. 5).

Phyllis said of Barbara, "nothing is a big deal" (C4P, p. 9), and "she exudes some sort of calmness and stability and ... that is what draws me to her" (C4P, p. 4).

This idea of being drawn in by the calm and inner strength of the nominees repeated itself throughout our discussions.

Reflective

The subject of reflection was discussed repeatedly throughout the interviews. The role reflection plays in the process of learning from life experiences is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. Here Ruth eloquently spoke to the value of incorporating reflection into daily life:

It's huge, taking time to reflect on what happened today or what happened in that project ... reflection is very important on all sorts of fronts, it gives your mind a chance to generate things that wouldn't otherwise come to you ... that's what it comes back to, reflection, you have to give your brain a little space for that because we can fill our brains with the day and everything. (C2R, pp. 22–23)

Conscious Decisions

The stories of the wise nominees were replete with examples of conscious decision making examples and goal setting. Heather decided ballet school was not for her at age 17 and so she left England and returned to her native South Africa. She also talked of making the conscious decision recently with her husband to sell their home in Toronto and to move to Ottawa to be able to assist with raising their grandchildren.

Maureen said of Ruth's decision to have a child in spite of her husband's ailments: "So they consciously decided to have a child knowing that she would be a single parent" (C2M, p. 1), and "so they embraced the life they could have" (C2M, p. 4).

Ruth spoke of setting long and short term goals for herself:

I set out a longer term goal of sitting on boards, so I went to the school of business at the director's college and I got my chartered director qualification ... and then I have short term projects that I'm working on. (C2R, p. 25)

Edward said, "I've always been pretty certain of where I'm going to go" (C3E, p. 20), and he talked about weighing the pros and cons and consciously deciding to move his family to Canada from the United States.

Barbara addressed the issue of conscious effort in a more indirect way when she described characteristics of wise individuals. She said that a characteristic of wise people was that they accept who they are and the path they are on, and if it is not right for them "they make the effort to change it" (C4B, p. 14). She sees wise persons as making conscious choices to change their lot in life.

Ruth speaks to the value of having patience and consciously taking your time to resolve some issues:

If the solution isn't clear or the way isn't clear, I've learned, just wait, and it's amazing if you wait, sometimes it just suddenly comes to you ... some people would leap to pick a solution, pick one of those options, and I've learned and again it's an intuition thing. If I'm hesitating on anything, I pay attention to that and I wait ... and nine times out of ten it's worth it. (C2R, p. 23)

Theme 4: Believe in Universal Support

The study participants all acknowledged being religious or spiritual and that the practice of their religion or spirituality was a big part of their lives. They are not,

however, limited by their religious practices. They are open to other religious or spiritual points of view. For example Barbara said: “Most of the theology that I know is that of the Christian background but my interests are mostly, you know interfaith” (C4B1, p. 5). Edward agrees that religion has been a large part of his life. He says of those that do not adhere to religious practices or beliefs, “I don’t have strong biases one way or another against other people” (C3E, p. 22).

The nominator, Maureen, spoke to this subject when she said: “There’s wisdom in knowing that it’s not about you, that you can’t do it all on your own” (C2M, p.19). It was clear from their accounts that these individuals found support from their religion, their spirituality, or a source beyond themselves. Heather spoke to this when she found herself not upset by her ballet exam failure. She said, “that was the first time I woke to that, that I had a kind of inner strength that I could call on” (C1H, p. 16). She also said: “I feel very blessed ... and I often feel carried” (C1H, p. 21).

I did not title this theme a belief in religion or spirituality because I had a sense from these individuals that their beliefs were bigger than their brand of religion or spirituality. It was more a faith in the universe and a belief that support exists for those who seek it. This theme of external support emerged from the three following categories of data derived from the interviews: (a) a feeling of being part of the whole; (b) a general trust in life and people; and (c) the concept of maintaining a positive attitude.

Feel Part of The Whole

The nominees all referred to a sense of connectedness or a feeling of being part of the whole whether through the environment, the people in their lives or their beliefs.

Phyllis said, “It’s kind of accepting the whole, of loving the whole of humanity for all its foibles” (C4P, p. 6). Edward spoke to his sense of connectedness, “There’s really nothing I’ve done that is personal, it’s always been a team effort” (C3E, p. 16). Ruth also addressed the concept of team effort and connectedness, “There’s tremendous capacity out there ... and so much of it is groups coming together in a synergistic way” (C2R, p.17).

Barbara spoke of wisdom and connectedness, “I think I feel wise when I experience just being a part of the whole, part of humanity” (C4B1, p. 15). She addressed the topic of connectedness again when she discussed the “butterfly effect”:

It’s the term used that any given thought or action of anyone, anywhere in the world has an effect somewhere else ... in theological terms, some people speak of the power of prayer... and in another lingo it might be the power of positive thinking ... that is in fact, you’re not just sitting and thinking and doing nothing.

There is an effect somewhere, somehow. (C4B1, p. 13)

Maureen talked about generosity as resulting from a sense of connectedness, “I think wisdom allows you to be generous because it puts your life into context, it’s grounded you, you’re part of this whole master plan ... it allows you to be generous because things are in perspective” (C2M, p. 22).

Trust

These participants expressed their feelings of trust: trust in general; trust in life; trust in people; and trust that solutions to problems will be found. Heather expressed, “a trust in guidance” (C1H, P.4). Ruth said, “I do believe we bump into the people we need

to bump into” (C2R, p.29) and “you just need to trust . . .it’s just trust that they are there for very good reasons” (C2R, p. 17).

Positive Attitude

As far as I could understand, these participants have had their share of ups and downs in life. Collectively they have dealt with the passing of spouses, major illnesses, and all of the regular happenstances of life. They have managed to cope well with the significant matters of their lives. Bill spoke of Edward’s ability to cope, “He has had some health issues himself and he lost his wife just a few years ago and has coped well” (C3B, p. 9). Phyllis spoke of Barbara’s resilience and coping abilities: “She has been through a lot in her life, instances that might derail a lot of people or leave them feeling sorry for themselves” (C4P, p. 3). But in fact, these individuals don’t seem to feel sorry for themselves they express feelings of gratitude and feel fortunate in their lives.

Barbara talked to the issue of gratitude:

I guess the other thing is the element of gratitude, cause if you do know yourself, you get to know the sort of good fortunes of various types that you’ve had in your life: it could be your parents; your family home; your opportunity for education; for travel; for whatever. (C4B1, p. 12)

Heather also spoke to feeling lucky, “I do look back at my life and think about various times, you know, I’ve had a very rich life, a very fortunate one I would say” (C1H, p. 19). As Ruth talked about her work experiences she said, “I always lucked out on bosses, on my superiors in all my jobs, seriously, people who trusted my capabilities, believed in me” (C2R, p. 29). These positive attitudes and feelings of being lucky seem to result from

the participants' sense of connectedness and overall reverence for life. Heather said: "I suppose as long as we are alive, there is hope" (C1H, p. 27).

Chapter Summary

This chapter recounted the stories and relationships of the dyads in each case and described the four central themes that emerged concerning the behaviours, attitudes, characteristics, and competencies of the study's wise participants.

The first three themes revolve around self-reliance. They are know yourself, be fully engaged in life, and make sense of your experiences. The fourth theme, believe in universal support, addresses the fine balancing act that these wise individuals incorporate in their daily lives. The balance between relying on themselves to deal with life experiences and trusting that an external support system, greater than themselves, exists to help them to deal with life.

The next chapter, Chapter 5, answers the study's research questions and discusses the study's significant findings. Reflections on the scope and limitations of the study are addressed as well as the implications for further research.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This thesis has begun the exploration of how some individuals, recognized by others to be wise, have acquired their wisdom. The assumption was made that the acquisition of wisdom is a lifelong, iterative process but that the examination and description of the learning process from a single life event would shed light on that process. The findings of Chapter Four indicate that life management practices and approaches to a life experience impact the cognitive learning process and outcomes for the study's wise participants. Those life management practices were summarized under the four central themes that emerged from the data. Three of those themes focus on practices of self-reliance and the fourth deals with the spiritual beliefs and practices of these wise individuals. This study's findings begin to address the gap in the wisdom literature that exists, as pointed out in Chapter Two, about the development of wisdom (Birren & Svensson, 2005; Glück & Bluck, 2010; Jordan, 2005). This final chapter further addresses that gap in the literature by analyzing and presenting the findings from the three research questions that were posed at the outset of the study. This discussion sheds further light on the development or acquisition of wisdom.

A comparative look at research questions 1 and 2 is made from two perspectives, the nominators and the nominees. The methodology employed in this study that builds on previous research, which nominates wise individuals, pushed that tradition by including

the contributions of the nominators in the study. The findings of research questions 1 and 2 are then related to the findings of the Holliday and Chandler (1986) study.

Research question 3 is answered in some detail and these findings are linked to each step of the Experiential Wisdom Acquisition Model. Reflections on the study include: the study's limitations; and its implications for the education system, society in general, and future research. Concluding thoughts on the thesis end this chapter.

Research Questions

Research Question 1, Asked of Nominators: How Do Individuals Describe Their Experience of and Interactions With Wise Persons?

The nominators see their wise nominees as respected, supportive friends with whom they share common interests. They view them as interesting, engaged, and active people. They are generally impressed with the nominees' abilities to be resilient and to cope well with life matters. They recognize their nominees have an inner strength that allows them to deal with situations in a calm and centered way; they view them as role models. The nominators have observed the contributions their wise nominees make in group settings and how much they are respected by others. They see their nominees as fair, unbiased, and non-judgmental people and they especially regard their nominees as respectful listeners.

Research Question 2, Asked of Nominees: How Do Wise Individuals Report Living Their Lives?

This group of wise nominees reported leading fairly quiet and private lives. Besides being hard working, they reported being disciplined. Discipline for them means maintaining a balance in their lives and dedicating time to exercise and contemplation. They are interested in many activities and have a huge curiosity and fondness for learning. They all spoke of being open to listening to all sides of a story and of trying to maintain a non-judgmental and unbiased viewpoint and to see the story in its wide context. The nominators all reported they were willing to share their ideas and opinions but offered advice only when asked and then in an informative rather than an authoritarian manner. These nominees all reported making conscious decisions in their lives.

The nominees share strong beliefs in religion or spirituality. They practice their various types of religion or spirituality and reported this was a significant part of their lives. Although their beliefs differ, the nominees share a common belief that they have access to an external source of strength greater than themselves that is available when needed. This group of nominees led me to believe that when faced with a serious problem, they would not likely ask themselves “why me” but rather “why not me”? They maintain a solid perspective placing themselves and their situations into the larger scheme of things.

These wise individuals maintain a general trust in life and in people, and they maintain a positive outlook on life. They report feeling fortunate for the many things they have in their lives and they practice gratitude.

Two Perspectives

Research Questions 1 and 2 addressed the general concepts of wisdom and the personal experiences of wisdom from two distinct perspectives; first, from the perspective of the nominators, and second, from the perspective of the wise nominees. These two perspectives provided a great deal of corroboration for each other and led to the four central themes that described the actions and characteristics of wise individuals that emerged from the data analysis in this study.

The four themes, *know yourself*, *be fully engaged in life*, *make sense of your experiences*, and *believe in universal support*, describe the daily life management approaches that this group of wise individuals practice. The first three themes focus on self-reliance; the fourth on spirituality or connectedness. Many of the descriptors used by the nominators and nominees in this study align closely with those found in Holliday and Chandler's (1986) Factor Structure of Wisdom. The Holliday and Chandler descriptors were ranked and summarized into five factors (a) exceptional understanding, (b) judgement and communication skills, (c) general competencies, (d) interpersonal skills, and (e) social unobtrusiveness (see Appendix A). The first three of these five factors summarize the skills and competencies of the prototype of a wise individual and the fourth and fifth factors address the interpersonal and social skills of the prototype of a wise individual. The current study and Holliday and Chandler's study approach the topic of wisdom for two very different reasons yet there is a great deal of corroboration in the findings. It is encouraging to note that the actions and characteristics of wise individuals found in this study are consistent with the literature.

Research Question 3, Asked of Nominees: How Do Wise Individuals Report Learning From Life Experiences?

This study set out to go beyond the broad generalizations and descriptions of wisdom that characterize past research. The intent was to explore in more depth the iterative construct of wisdom and this was addressed through research Question 3. This question posed to the wise nominees aimed to obtain a detailed description of their cognitive understanding of their life lesson learning. The objective was to have them describe to the best of their ability the learning process that followed from a specific incident in their lives that had affected them significantly. To enable my posing Research Question 3, first the process of wisdom acquisition was hypothesized and diagrammed as the Experiential Wisdom Acquisition Model in Figure 1. The Experiential Wisdom Acquisition Model is original work and should be considered a first attempt to describe the process. The interview questions about the active learning components were formulated based on the hypothesized wisdom acquisition process.

In Bluck and Glück's (2004) study, events as reported by that study's participants were organized into three types of situations: life decisions, life management strategies, and reactions to negative events. Using Bluck and Glück's structure and categorizing the experiences the wise nominees of this study chose to share, their experiences were categorized as follows: (a) the wise nominee, Edward, of Case Three reported an event that fell into the life decision category, (b) Ruth, of Case Two, and Barbara, of Case Four, reported on life management strategies, and (c) Heather, of Case One, reported on a reaction to a negative event. See Table 3 that summarizes the wise nominees' experiences and life lessons.

Table 3: Nominees' Experiences and Life Lessons

Case	Shared Experience	Lessons Learned	Experience Categorized
One Wise Nominee, Heather	Failed ballet exam	-Often get a second chance -External factors you have no control over often play a role -She could be strong in the face of adversity -Beginning of her self-discovery	Reaction to Negative Event
Two Wise Nominee, Ruth	Quality improvement in work place – reduced wait times in hospital (required a decision)	-She could probably tackle most problems -Tremendous capacity exists; you just have to enable it to find solutions -Solutions are all around; you just have to listen	Life Management Strategies
Three Wise Nominee, Edward	Moved family from USA to Canada (required a decision)	-To have faith in his decisions -Once you make a decision, have confidence to move forward with it	Life Decision
Four Wise Nominee, Barbara	Training as theological coach	-Learned to be a better listener	Life Management Strategies

When asked directly to describe how their lessons were learned and specifically how the learning process transpired, the participants reported they had not given much previous thought to the process and did not appear to have a clear awareness of the distinctive steps involved in the acquisition of the lesson. Heather, Case One nominee, commented: “How the process works, that would be very hard to say” (C1H, pp. 19–20).

Findings Linked to the Experiential Wisdom Acquisition Model

Corroboration of the Experiential Wisdom Acquisition Model was sought and some support for the model was found. It was difficult for the wise nominees to articulate their life lesson learning process but when they were asked specific questions about the four active processes, react, reflect, integrate, and validate, as depicted in the Experiential Wisdom Acquisition Model they did have relevant things to say.

Step One – React. Each wise nominee’s reaction to their personal life experience was different depending on the type of event they described.

The wise nominee of Case One, Heather, who reported on her reaction to a negative event, her ballet exam failure, reacted intuitively to that situation and surprised herself with her reaction. It appeared to be an unconscious response. Heather’s reaction was to stay calm in the face of her failure: “I probably wondered why I wasn’t more upset actually” (C1H, p. 12).

The two wise nominees who chose situations that involved decision making were aware of their reactions to their situation. They talked in particular about information gathering. Ruth of Case 2 said: “It’s in the process ... it was a whisper” (C2R, p. 19). She described listening to everything, reflecting on her meetings, wondering about what did not make sense, not being afraid to go out and get information, the answers to unanswered questions. She described having trust in her ability to find those answers and reported that she didn’t give up. Edward of Case 3 said: “You’re continually collecting information and then you use that information to make decisions” (C3E, p. 5).

Heather's response to her failure was intuitive and immediate. She responded automatically almost without any introspection; much like Schön's (1983) knowing-in-action. However, the reaction to the two decision making situations happened over an extended period of time. The results of their responses to the problem took time to be realized. The solution to Ruth's problem took months to surface and Edward took some time to weigh his options before taking the job and moving to Canada. In these last two situations, the participants gathered external information and looked inward before making their decisions.

Figure 1, the Experiential Wisdom Acquisition Model diagrams Step One – React as including the two sub-steps of gathering external data, and looking inward to former experiences and knowledge before reacting to a situation and achieving results.

All four wise nominees were described as calm individuals by their nominators. It would be safe to say that besides the specific situations they shared in their interviews these individuals would likely all react to things in a measured and calm manner. Sheila echoes this when she wrote about Heather: "She has a strong sense of balance, does not get knocked off her center by anything" (C1S, Q). (Q refers to the questionnaire completed by this nominator).

Step Two – Reflect. Two of the nominees spoke of their practice of putting time aside in their daily routines to reflect. They live lives that incorporate reflection. Heather practices daily meditations and Ruth says: "Reflection is very important ... I need a lot of time on my own by myself" (C2R, p. 23).

Not only are these nominees reflective in general but Heather uses words like wondering, questioning, and thinking when discussing learning and Ruth specifically spoke to taking time to reflect during the work situation she chose that resulted in a life lesson. Reflection clearly seems to be an important component of the wisdom acquisition process and a practice for these wise nominees.

Step Three – Integrate. The nominees referred more to a building upon lessons rather than to integrating lessons. About Heather’s lesson that happened early in her life, she reported: “That was the beginning of self-discovery in a way and became something I could build on” (C1H, p.19). Ruth’s comments about the iterative process of lesson accumulation and knowledge building were:

What we know when we’re 24 is a whole heck of a lot different than what we know when we are 60 ... I think it is a big process of assimilating and amassing all of this and continuing to have it as the databank sort of thing ... building on the lessons” (C2R, p. 27).

Edward spoke of the cumulative and building upon effect of decision making and the resulting lessons: “It just allows you to address much bigger problems and more important problems” (C3E, p. 19).

It is clear from their descriptions that these study participants see lesson learning as a scaffolding process; building one life lesson upon another. Barbara sees things a little differently. She sees the experience as changing the person: “I’d call it more a change in your person ... it means that my presence that I bring to anybody ... has been changed by that experience and, therefore, hopefully my presence is a better one” (C4B2, p. 9).

Barbara's position that each experience changes the person aligns with Jarvis' (2006) holistic perspective on learning. As well, her perspective aligns with that of Dewey (1938) as evidenced by his statement: "Every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes" (p, 35).

Step Four – Validate. These wise individuals all appear to have a strong sense of self. All four nominators described their nominees as having a quiet or inward confidence. Ruth says, "you have to be very self-aware in terms of your strengths and your limitations" (C2R, p. 12), and that she was brought up to trust in her capabilities.

These individuals don't appear to need or seek external approval for their actions. Heather reports she uses the outcomes of an event to speak for themselves as corroborative evidence; she looks for "a healthy or beneficial effect ... if there's a good result" (C1H, p. 25) to validate her actions. She also trusts her feelings to assess a situation: "When something feels right, you know it and it's a good feeling (C1H, p. 7).

The nominees do seek validation for information or ideas. Heather reported: "I have a sounding board with my husband" (C1H, p. 25), and Ruth reports reading, going to conferences, and engaging in discussions with a trusted few friends as a means of validating ideas. Edward spoke about including his wife's opinions and feelings when making decisions for his family.

Avoidance strategies. Avoidance strategies were not addressed in this study other than to hypothesize that they are often an alternative choice in life. The scenarios and situations the wise nominees chose to share involved acquiring a life lesson and therefore

avoidance strategies did not apply in these situations. Rather these individuals chose to engage in an active learning process that led to life lesson acquisition.

Study Reflections

Limitations

This study has limitations. It will not be feasible to generalize this small case study to a larger population. For as Yin (2009) states, “case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes” (p. 15). Not only is the sample size small but the individuals who participated in the study form a homogenous group. All of the participants are well educated Caucasians, residing in urban areas in southern Ontario. It would be difficult to generalize the findings of this study with such a small homogenous sample size to a larger population.

This group of participants was systematically and deliberately selected and I believe the study participants are indeed wise individuals. The intention was to choose good models we could learn from and I felt that objective was met. But, because this was such a select group, it would be advantageous to find other groups of wise individuals, perhaps selected by other criteria, that would corroborate these findings.

This study should be considered the first in a series of studies that will focus on the wisdom acquisition process. The wise nominees in this study could report on an experience that resulted in a life lesson and, although they did demonstrate some understanding of that learning process when probed, it was clear they did not have a clear and complete sense of the cognitive process involved in that learning. For future studies,

clearer methods to explore the cognitive learning process should form part of the study design.

Educational Implications

It has been my intention to design and deliver workshops for adults on the acquisition and practice of wisdom and this study's findings provide some information that could be incorporated into such a workshop. Currently, however, I am viewing this research as the first in a series of studies required to fully explore the construct of wisdom. Although it was not my original intention to align these findings with teaching in general, I think this study begins to highlight some important implications for educational systems.

As being wise is perceived to be a desired human attribute (Takahashi & Bordia, 2000), it would seem important for our educational systems to incorporate the learning, life management, and spiritual practices of wise individuals into their teaching policies and practices. Palmer (1998/1999) has said:

I have seen the price we pay for a system of education so fearful of things spiritual that it fails to address the real issues of our lives—dispensing facts at the expense of meaning, information at the expense of wisdom. (p. 6)

This study generates a call for action for our educational systems to reconsider the focus on teaching practices that narrowly aim to dispense facts and find solutions to problems. Rather, education for the future should focus on practices like the art of reflection and other learning strategies and life skills that wise individuals practice.

As the wise nominee Ruth points out, sometimes it is valuable to reflect on a situation and wait for the right solution to surface. The teaching of the skill of reflection might benefit students across their lifespan.

The respectful and reciprocal relationship of the dyads in this study demonstrates that in life we are both teacher and student simultaneously. Incorporating the art of teaching and the recognition of this dual role into school studies might provide students with a skill they could use throughout their life time. Another implication for the education system lies in recognizing of the increasing longevity of individuals and that learning opportunities continue throughout life. The educational system should be encouraging and incorporating pathways for lifelong learning.

Sternberg (2001b) presented a methodology for including instruction in wisdom to middle-school children based on his Balance Theory of Wisdom. He derived 16 principles for how wisdom can be developed in the classroom, 12 wisdom lessons, and six procedures teachers could employ to teach according to these principles. Sternberg received considerable criticism for his model from critics such as Paris (2001) which Sternberg (2001a) refuted. Whether Sternberg's model would prove to be an effective way to teach wisdom or not, it remains encouraging that he has set the stage for the teaching of wisdom within the educational system.

Societal Implications

The Government of Canada is gathering data from different sources on individual and societal well-being. Many items are being measured, along with key influence factors

including: sense of belonging, trust in others, educational attainment, and physical activity (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, n.d.). The short well-being questionnaires that were completed by the researcher on behalf of the wise nominees for this study align the life style practices of these wise individuals with some of the key influence factors being collected by the government. This suggests that learning from the behaviours of wise individuals could have important implications for societal well-being. All of the wise nominees reported never smoking in their lives. As already discussed they are all active individuals. Not only are they physically active but all of the nominees reported belonging to three or more social groups. They all volunteer their time; two of them reported volunteering more than four hours per week and they all reported a strong sense of belonging to their local communities. Trust in others has already been discussed throughout the study's findings and all individuals reported that they think others can be trusted. Further research that examines the link between wisdom and well-being could have important implications for society. This study found other aspects of wisdom that could be explored through future research.

Implications for Further Research

This study, which aimed to explore the acquisition of wisdom, is a first step in examining the development of wisdom. Additional research will be required to explore further the process and development of wisdom and the learning of life lessons. The framework on the acquisition process that has emerged from this study offers a modest beginning toward understanding the wisdom acquisition process.

This study raises some questions around the topic of wisdom that would be worthwhile exploring through future research. For example, each of the nominators in this study chose a nominee of the same gender and two of the participants, Bill and Edward, made comments that it would be hard to find someone wise with whom you completely disagreed. Brown (2005) has suggested that wisdom is contextually defined, and I believe that people are wise some of the time and in some situations. It is clear that the nominators in this study appeared to see their nominees as wise in general. More research needs to be undertaken to explore wisdom as the interactions between individuals.

As individuals we deal with our world both alone and through our interactions with others. The Holliday and Chandler (1986) findings grouped the descriptors of wisdom into five factors. The first three of these factors, exceptional understanding, judgment and communication skills, and general competencies, seem to address the way an individual makes sense of the world. The last two factors in the Holliday and Chandler Factor Structure of Wisdom address an individual's mode of interacting with the world. These two factors are titled, interpersonal skills and social unobtrusiveness. In this study, the two lifestyle practices that emerged as central themes that address an individual's singular behaviour are, know yourself, and make sense of your experiences. The other two lifestyle practices, be fully engaged in life, and believe in universal support system, address our interconnectedness with the world. Future research that would examine wisdom as an interactive process would be enlightening.

Edward, one of the wise nominees, raised an interesting question that also begs for future research. He asked if wisdom was linked to success. It would be interesting from a societal perspective to explore if indeed these two aspects of human existence are linked.

Concluding Thoughts

An emerging framework that describes the Experiential Process of Acquiring Wisdom has evolved from the findings of this study. The three components of this emerging framework are: (a) the operational definition of wisdom as defined in Chapter One, (b) the Experiential Wisdom Acquisition Model as shown in Figure 1 in Chapter Two, and (c) the four life management practices that emerged as the central themes from the study's data in Chapter Four.

This study found that it is not what these wise individuals deal with that defines them as wise since they experience the same life ups and downs as everyone else; rather it is how they deal with life situations that sets them apart. The study presents findings that suggest wisdom is acquired across the human lifespan by applying the life management practices as described by the study's group of wise participants to everyday experiences. These individuals moderate their opportunity to learn from life experiences with life management practices that incorporate working to know yourself, being fully engaged with life, and making sense of your experiences. These practices contribute to these wise individuals having the ability to apply knowledge, beliefs, common sense, intuition, and values to deal effectively with life situations. These wise individuals also believe that a system of universal support exists that can be tapped into when needed.

They trust in and honour their spiritual beliefs and allocate time in their lives to reflect on and foster their beliefs.

Wisdom is a complex phenomenon. This study is a first step in an attempt to unravel the development of this complex phenomenon.

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Appendix A

Factor Structure of Wisdom

1. *Exceptional understanding*
 - Uses common sense
 - Has learned from experience
 - Sees things within a larger context
 - Observant/perceptive
 - Understands him- or herself
 - See the essence of situations
 - Intuitive
 - Philosophical
 - Empathic
 - Not necessarily formally educated
 - Open-minded
 - Flexible
 - Understands people
 - Thinks for him- or herself

2. *Judgement and communication skills*
 - Aware
 - Is a source of good advice
 - Comprehending
 - Understands life
 - Worth listening to
 - Considers all options in a situation
 - Reflective
 - Thinks carefully before deciding
 - Foresightful/farseeing
 - Weighs the consequences of actions
 - Sees and considers all points of view
 - Uncondescending
 - Conservative
 - Astute
 - Knows when to give/not give advice

3. *General competencies*
 - Curious
 - Thoughtful thinks a great deal
 - Understands/evaluates information
 - Well-read
 - Intelligent
 - Articulate
 - Alert

Respected
Self-actualized
An advisor or mentor
Complex
Older
Able to predict how things will turn out
Educated
Successful
Methodical
Experienced
Knowledgeable

4. *Interpersonal Skills*

Fair
Sensitive
Reliable
A good listener
Even-tempered
Poised
Likeable
Relaxed
Modest/humble
Sociable
Moral
Patient
Unselfish
Kind
Spiritual
Happy
Mature
Compassionate

5. *Social Unobtrusiveness*

Discreet
Non-judgmental
Non-impulsive
Quiet
Plans carefully

Table IX: Variables defining the five factors in the principal components analysis. (p. 61)
from:

Holliday, S. J., & Chandler, M. J. (1986). *Wisdom: Explorations in adult competencies*.
Basel, New York: Karger. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

Appendix B

Letter of Information for Nominator

Title: WISDOM IS A VERB: A STUDY IN WISDOM ACQUISITION
How Individuals Describe Learning and Integrating Life Lessons

I am writing to request your participation in a research study aimed at exploring how wisdom is acquired across the human lifespan. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of individuals thought by others to be wise. I am a Master's student in the Faculty of Education at Queen's University. This research has been cleared by the Queen's University General Research Ethics Board.

For this research, I wish to document the views of individuals who have been identified as wise about the topic of wisdom; in particular how these individuals describe learning life lessons and integrating those lessons into their existing knowledge. I would also like to interview the nominators, the teachers, professors, professionals and community leaders who will help select the wise individuals for this study. As a nominator, you would be provided with a list of characteristics and behaviours of wise individuals to help with your selection. The individual you would nominate would be someone known to you that you believe to be wise and that would make a good candidate for this study. You would be asked to complete a short questionnaire that should take approximately 15 minutes to complete and would be aimed at identifying your recommend study candidate.

If your nominee agrees to participate in the study and is selected for an interview, I would also like to conduct an interview with you that would take approximately 30 to 45 minutes. That interview would be aimed at understanding your relationship to your nominee, why you chose this individual and how you would describe your perceptions and experience of this individual. The interview would be guided by open-ended questions and conducted at a time and location that is convenient for you. The interview would be recorded and I will take written notes during the interview in order to make a written record of the sequence of questions and answers. These notes will be entered and maintained as a computer file. The taped interview would be transcribed and then the tape would be destroyed. None of the data will contain your name or the identity of your work. The place of work, if applicable, will be identified using general terms only. Data will be secured in a locked office and I will take every step I can to guarantee confidentiality. Any follow-up for the purpose of clarification may take 15 minutes or equivalent by email or phone.

I do not foresee risks in your participation in this research and your participation is entirely voluntary. You would not be obliged to answer any questions you find objectionable, and you are assured that no information collected will be reported to anyone. You would be free to withdraw from the study without reasons at any point, and you may request removal of all or part of your data. You may notify me or my supervisor if you wish to withdraw at any time.

This research may result in publications of various types, including journal articles, professional publications, newsletters, books, and instructional materials. Your name will not be attached to any form of the data that you provide, neither will your name or the identity of your place of work

or school, if applicable, be known to anyone tabulating or analyzing the data, nor will these appear in any publication created as a result of this research. A pseudonym will replace your name on all data that you provide to protect your identity. If the data is made available to other researchers for secondary analysis, your identity will never be disclosed.

If you have any questions, please contact me at telephone 416-410-7138 or by email at ce.taylor@cogeco.ca or you can contact my supervisor, Dr. Nancy Hutchinson at the Faculty of Education, 613-533-3025 or by email at nancy.hutchinson@queensu.ca. For questions, concerns, or complaints about the research ethics of this study, contact the Education Research Ethics Board at ereb@queensu.ca or the chair of the General Research Ethics Board, Dr. Joan Stevenson, 613-533-6081 (chair.greb@queensu.ca).

Sincerely,

Connie Taylor

Appendix C

Letter of Information for Nominee

Title: WISDOM IS A VERB: A STUDY OF WISDOM ACQUISITION
How Individuals Describe Learning and Integrating Life Lessons

I am writing to request your participation in a research study aimed at exploring how wisdom is acquired across the human lifespan. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of individuals thought by others to be wise. I am a Master's student in the Faculty of Education at Queen's University. This research has been cleared by the Queen's University General Research Ethics Board.

For this research, I wish to document the views of individuals who have been identified as wise about the topic of wisdom; in particular how these individuals describe learning life lessons and integrating those lessons into their existing knowledge. You have been nominated by [insert the name of nominator] to take part in this study as a wise nominee. I hope you will agree to participate and be interviewed. One to two interviews of 45 to 90 minutes would be required. The approximate duration of each interview would be mutually agreed upon in advance of each interview. The interviews would be guided by open-ended questions and conducted at a time and location that is convenient for you.

The interviews would be recorded and I will take written notes during the interview in order to make a written record of the sequence of questions and answers. These notes will be entered and maintained as a computer file. The taped interviews will be transcribed and then the tape will be destroyed. None of the data will contain your name or the identity of your work. The place of work, if applicable, will be identified using general terms only. Data will be secured in a locked office and I will take every step I can to guarantee confidentiality. Any follow-up for the purpose of clarification may take 15 minutes or equivalent by email or phone.

I do not foresee risks in your participation in this research and your participation is entirely voluntary. You would not be obliged to answer any questions you find objectionable, and you are assured that no information collected would be reported to anyone. You would be free to withdraw from the study without reasons at any point, and you may request removal of all or part of your data. To withdraw, contact me or my supervisor.

This research may result in publications of various types, including journal articles, professional publications, newsletters, books, and instructional materials. Your name will not be attached to any form of the data that you provide, neither will your name or the identity of your place of work or school, if applicable, be known to anyone tabulating or analyzing the data, nor will these appear in any publication created as a result of this research. A pseudonym will replace your name on all data that you provide to protect your identity. If the data is made available to other researchers for secondary analysis, your identity will never be disclosed.

If you have any questions, please contact me at telephone 416-410-7138 or by email at ce.taylor@cogeco.ca or you can contact my supervisor, Dr. Nancy Hutchinson at the Faculty of Education, 613-533-3025 or by email at nancy.hutchinson@queensu.ca. For questions, concerns, or complaints about the research ethics of this study, contact the Education Research Ethics

Board at ereb@queensu.ca or the chair of the General Research Ethics Board, Dr. Joan Stevenson, 613-533-6081 (chair.greb@queensu.ca).

Sincerely,

Connie Taylor

Appendix D

Consent Form for Nominator

For Connie Taylor
of the Faculty of Education, Queen's University

Title: WISDOM IS A VERB: A STUDY OF WISDOM ACQUISITION
How individuals describe learning and integrating life lessons

Please sign one copy of this Consent Form and return to Connie Taylor. Retain the second copy for your records.

I have read and retained a copy of the letter of information concerning the study 'Wisdom is a verb: A study of wisdom acquisition, How individuals describe learning and integrating a life lesson' and all questions have been sufficiently answered. I am aware the purpose of this study is to shed light on the practical aspects of wisdom and to understand the lived experiences of individuals thought to be wise. I am also aware of the procedures of this study, and I have been informed that any interview I participate in will be recorded via an audio recorder. I am aware that I may be requested to participate in an interview. The duration of the interview could last from 30 to 45 minutes. I will complete a questionnaire that will take approximately 15 minutes to complete in advance of any interview and any follow-up for clarification may take 15 minutes or equivalent by email or phone.

I have been notified that participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any point during the study and I may request the removal of all or part of my data without any consequences to myself. I have also been told that steps will be taken to ensure that all information will be kept as confidential as possible. I agree not to share the content of the interviews with anyone.

I am aware that if I have any questions about this research study, I can contact Connie Taylor at 416-410-7138, or by email at ce.taylor@cogeco.ca or I can contact the supervisor, Dr. Nancy Hutchinson, at the Faculty of Education, 613-533-3025 or by email at nancy.hutchinson@queensu.ca. I am also aware that for questions, concerns or complaints about the research ethics of this study, I can contact the Education Research Ethics Board at ereb@queensu.ca or the chair of the General Research Ethics Board, Dr. Joan Stevenson, 613-533-6081 (chair.greb@queensu.ca).

Participant's Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Please write your e-mail or postal address at the bottom of this sheet if you wish to receive a copy of the results of the study.

Appendix E

Consent Form for Nominee

For Connie Taylor
of the Faculty of Education, Queen's University

Title: WISDOM IS A VERB: A STUDY OF WISDOM ACQUISITION
How individuals describe learning and integrating life lessons
Consent

Please sign one copy of this Consent Form and return to Connie Taylor. Retain the second copy for your records.

I have read and retained a copy of the letter of information concerning the study 'Wisdom is a verb: A study of wisdom acquisition, How individuals describe learning and integrating a life lesson' and all questions have been sufficiently answered. I am aware the purpose of this study is to shed light on the practical aspects of wisdom and to understand the lived experiences of individuals thought to be wise. I am also aware of the procedures of this study, and I have been informed that any interview I participate in will be recorded via an audio recorder. I am aware that I will be requested to participate in one or two interviews. The duration of an interview could last from one to two hours and the approximate duration will be agreed upon in advance of the interview. Any follow-up for clarification may take 15 minutes or equivalent by email or phone.

I have been notified that participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any point during the study and I may request the removal of all or part of my data without any consequences to myself. I have also been told that steps will be taken to ensure that all information will be kept as confidential as possible. I agree not to share the content of the interviews with anyone.

I am aware that if I have any questions about this research study, I can contact Connie Taylor at 416-410-7138, or by email at ce.taylor@cogeco.ca or I can contact the supervisor, Dr. Nancy Hutchinson, at the Faculty of Education, 613-533-3025 or by email at nancy.hutchinson@queensu.ca. I am also aware that for questions, concerns or complaints about the research ethics of this study, I can contact the Education Research Ethics Board at ereb@queensu.ca or the chair of the General Research Ethics Board, Dr. Joan Stevenson, 613-533-6081 (chair.greb@queensu.ca).

Participant's Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Please write your e-mail or postal address at the bottom of this sheet if you wish to receive a copy of the results of the study.

Appendix F

Nominator Questionnaire

Please Note: The information provided in this questionnaire will be kept as confidential as possible, please see the attached Letter of Information for more details.

Instructions: Accompanying this questionnaire is a descriptive list of characteristics and personality traits of wise individuals that was developed in 1986 by researchers Stephen Holliday and Michael Chandler titled "Factor Structure of Wisdom". This list is provided merely as a tool and a starting point to help you with your selection of a wise nominee. It is your knowledge and personal opinions that are of interest for this study. There is no one universally accepted definition of wisdom, so please rely on your own understanding of wisdom and being wise when nominating someone for this study.

Your Personal Information

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Fax: _____

E-mail: _____

Occupation: _____

AGE: under 25 ____; 30-40____; 40-50 ____; 50-60____; 60-70____; over 70 ____.

Contact Information of Nominee

Name of individual you nominate as wise: _____

Address of nominee: _____

Telephone of nominee: _____

Fax of nominee: _____

E-mail of nominee: _____

Relationship to Nominee

How do you know the nominee? _____

For how long have you known the nominee? _____

What adjectives would you use to describe the nominee? _____

List some of the characteristics or traits of this individual that in your opinion distinguishes them as wise:

Appendix G

Interview Guide for Nominator

Participant's Name: _____
Interview Date and Time: _____
Location: _____

Preamble

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study and allowing me to record our interview. I am very happy that you have consented to share your personal opinions and experiences on the topic of wisdom.

The overall purpose of this study is to investigate how wisdom is acquired across the human lifespan. The study aims to better understand one or two aspects of the wisdom acquisition process by exploring the lived experiences of a few individuals thought by others to be wise. I am thankful you have nominated [insert the name of the wise nominee] as a wise nominee for this study. I'd like to ask you a few questions about [her or him], why you chose [her or him] for the study and your understanding of wisdom in general.

Please remember there are no right or wrong answers to the questions I will ask during this interview. Also, since there is no one universally agreed upon definition of wisdom your understanding of what is wisdom is as valid as anyone else's definition and I am merely interested in your opinions. If you feel uncomfortable replying to any question, just say so and I will move on to the next question. If you want to completely terminate the interview for any reason you have every right to do so at any point in time without any explanation.

I am looking forward to moving ahead with our discussion and learning why you feel [insert the name of the wise nominee] is wise. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

This guide is divided into two parts:

- 1) Your relationship with the wise nominee; and
- 2) Why you chose to nominate this particular individual as wise.

[Note: Probes will be used only when the initial question is not answered fully or requires clarification]

Part 1: Relationship with the wise nominee

1. You have already told me on the Information Questionnaire you completed a little about your relationship with your nominee; I'd like to explore that relationship a little more. What can you tell me about your relationship with [insert name of wise nominee]?

Probe: How long have you known the nominee? Are you friends, acquaintances, or co-workers? Are you related? If so, how? What experiences have you shared?

2. Can you describe for me what being wise means to you?
3. Can you describe a few of the personality traits that [insert name of nominee] demonstrates that you believe a wise person usually has?

4. If you know more than one person you would consider to be wise, can you describe for me how their wisdom varies?
5. Can you describe an incident that you've experienced where wisdom was applied to achieve a very practical result?
6. If you had to pick only one word to describe a wise person, what would it be? Would you use that word to describe [insert the name on nominee]?

Part 2: Why nominate this individual as wise

1. Why did you choose to nominate [insert name of wise nominee] as wise for this study?

Probe: Can you tell me specifically about something [he/she] did or said that leads you to think of them as wise? Is your decision based on witnessing or being part of a single event or multiple events with this wise individual? Can you tell me more?

2. Can you tell me in some detail about one situation in particular that led you to nominate this individual as wise?
3. How did this individual interact with others in the situation you've described as a wise occurrence?
4. Can you describe how [insert name of wise nominee] interacts with others in general? Would you describe their interactions with people as consistent? Can you give me a few examples?
5. Can you describe a time when [insert name of wise nominee] acted as a mentor for yourself or for others? Could you describe that mentor role? What were the outcomes of that mentor role?
6. Quite often, people include the use of good judgement as a criterion for deciding whether an individual is wise or not. Can you give me an example of a situation or event when [insert name of wise nominee] demonstrated using good judgment to resolve a problem?
7. I am interested in exploring the actions that wise nominees demonstrate. When you think about [insert name of wise nominee], what wise actions have they employed or demonstrated in the past?
8. Would you describe {insert the name of wise nominee} as an active individual? If you do see them as active, can you tell me a little more about their activity whether it is physical, intellectual or a little of both.
9. Can you describe for me if and how [insert the name of the wise nominee] is involved in their community?

Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about wisdom and [insert name of wise nominee] that I didn't think to ask you before we terminate this interview?

Thank you so much for your participation!

Appendix H

Interview Guide Wise Nominee

[Note: to be conducted over one or two interviews]

Participant's Name: _____
Interview Date and Time: _____
Location: _____

Preamble

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study and allowing me to record our interview. I am very happy that you have consented to share your personal opinions and experiences on the topic of wisdom acquisition.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how wisdom is acquired across the human lifespan. The study aims to better understand the wisdom acquisition process by exploring the lived experiences of a few individuals thought by others to be wise. As you know, [insert the name of the nominator] has designated you as a wise person so I'd like to ask you some questions that will help shed light on the wisdom acquisition process.

Please remember there are no right or wrong answers to the questions I will ask during this interview. Also, since there is no one universally agreed upon definition of wisdom, your understanding of what is wisdom is as valid as anyone else's definition and I am merely interested in your opinions. If you feel uncomfortable replying to any question, just say so and I will move on to the next question. If you want to completely terminate the interview for any reason you have every right to do so at any point in time without any explanation.

I am looking forward to moving ahead with our discussion and learning about your personal experiences with learning life lessons and acquiring wisdom. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

This guide is divided into six parts:

- (2) Relationship to nominator
- (3) Wise event
- (4) Learning a life lesson
- (5) Integrating the lesson
- (6) Applying the lesson
- (7) Other

[Note: Probes will be used only when the initial question is not answered fully or requires clarification]

Part 1: Relationship to the nominator

1. Your nominator has already told me a little about your relationship with each other, I'd like to explore that relationship a little more.

Probe: In what capacity did you first meet [insert the name of nominator]? How long have you known [insert the name of nominator]? How would you describe your relationship? What experiences have you shared?

2. What does being wise mean to you? Please ignore whether this applies to you or not.

Probe: Which personality traits do you believe a wise person has? Can you describe for me if wisdom has a practical component to it and tell me a little about an incident you are aware of where wisdom was applied to achieve a practical result?

3. If you know more than one person you would consider to be wise, can you describe for me how their wisdom varies?
4. Without giving it much thought, can you pick one word you would use to describe a wise person? Just give me the first word that comes to you.
5. Elaborating a little on your relationship with your nominator, are you able to share an experience that may have led them to nominate you?

Probe: Can you describe one or two events?

6. Since I am very interested in understanding the experience of being wise, I wonder in what situations in your life you have experienced feeling wise. If not all the time, do you feel wise at least once in a while? Can you describe what times those would be?
7. Can you describe what influence time has on whether an event is considered wise or not?

Part 2: Choosing a wise event

1. I asked in advance if you could think of at least one event when you felt you behaved, acted, thought or felt wisely, can you describe that one event or situation in some detail for me?

Probe: At what point in your life did this event occur? Did the event or situation happen quickly or did it unfold over a period of time? Had anything like this happened to you prior to this event? If something similar had happened to you earlier, can you describe that situation and if it helped you to deal with the situation you choose to describe?

2. How did you deal with this event? Can you describe what you chose to do?

Probe: How long did you take to react to the situation? Can you describe any instinctive reactions you employed? If you had chosen to think the situation over, did you contemplate for a long time before you acted? Did you think about the choices you made later? In retrospect what would you have done differently? In what way were your best abilities employed to deal with the situation at the time? If you were to react different today to that same situation, what would today's reaction be?

3. What was the outcome of your wise event?

Probe: Who was affected by the situation and/or the outcome and in what way? Have you had other experiences subsequently that would have you deal with the situation differently now? If so, can you describe those experiences?

4. In what way were the initial results of the event recognized as wise?

Probe: When did you realize the event was handled well?

5. What impact did this particular event have on your life?
6. What lasting or temporary impact did the event have on others?
7. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about this event?

Part 3: Learning a life lesson from the wise event

1. What did you learn from this wise event? Can you describe the lesson you learned? How did this become a life lesson for you? Why do you consider the lesson a life lesson? How does a life lesson differ from a situational lesson?
2. Do you view that situation differently today than when it originally occurred and if so, what is that different view?
3. Can you describe the process you went through to learn this life lesson?

Probe: Did the lesson just seem to come to you immediately or did you spend time thinking about the situation for a while? What other similar experiences led to your absorbing the lesson? Can you tell me about the thinking processes it took before a lesson resulted? What actions were involved in your learning process?

4. What role does reflection play in learning a lesson? Can you describe a time when you sought solitude to think over a situation?

Part 4: Integrating the life lesson with former knowledge and experiences

1. What pool of experiences do you call upon to help you deal with life situations?

Probe: For example, when you think back on your wise event, did you decide how to react to that situation by considering past situations you had experienced?

2. When you think about a lesson you believe you have learned, what external evidence do you look for to corroborate your thinking? How do you go about gathering that external evidence to support or dispute your life lessons?
3. Can you tell me about an experience or event that appeared different with the passage of time? For example, what once looked to have a positive outcome now appears negative or vice versa.

Part 5: Applying the life lesson at a later point in time

1. How have you been able to apply the lesson you learned from the wise event you chose to discuss at another point in time? What were the outcomes of that later event?
2. In what way have you been able to share your learning experience with anyone else as a means of helping them with something they were going through? How did they benefit from your sharing?
3. What are your thoughts on offering advice?

Probe: Do you offer advice freely or do others have to ask for your advice before you will give it? In what way is sharing experiences important to you?

4. What opportunities have you had to act as a mentor? Describe a situation when you were invited by another person to act as their mentor? What value do you place on mentoring?

Other

1. Can you tell me about any volunteer work you do? Within your community, what type of activities are you called upon to participate in?
2. What type of physical activities do you participate in? What type of intellectual activities do you engage in?
3. In what way, has your participation in this study provided you with an opportunity to reflect on the value of the life experiences you already have?

Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about wisdom that I didn't think to ask you before we terminate this interview?

Thank you for your participation?

Appendix I
Confidentiality Agreement

Research
Confidentiality/Privacy Agreement

In consideration of my work on the research project *Wisdom is a Verb: A Study of Wisdom Acquisition* conducted by *Connie Taylor* at Queen's University, I

_____ hereby agree that:
(*Individual's Name*)

In the course of conducting my responsibilities on this research project, I may have access to personal and confidential information and data. I understand that there are legal restrictions on how this information may be collected, used, stored and disposed of and I agree to abide by those legal restrictions and respect the confidentiality and privacy of all information and data.

I understand that all information and data provided to me in the course of my role on this research project is to be used solely for the purpose of performing my duties. I agree to protect the confidentiality, privacy and physical security of the information I receive and to use it only for the purpose(s) for which I have been granted access.

I will not divulge either orally or in writing to any third party (either during my engagement or thereafter) any private personal and/or confidential information or data of which I may become aware in the course of my duties except as may be necessary within the mandate of my responsibilities on this project.

I hereby agree to abide by the restrictions placed on this information by the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA), the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA) and any other pertinent privacy statute, which is now or may later be in force.

Upon completion of my duties, I agree to return to *Connie Taylor* at Queen's University in its entirety, all information or data obtained during the course of my mandate and further agree not to retain copies of any information or data that belongs to this project.

Dated this _____ day of _____, 20__.

Signature: _____

Appendix J
Well-Being Questionnaire for Wise Nominee

Name: _____

Marital Status: _____

Number of Children: _____

Level of Education: _____

SMOKING:

daily smoker ____; occasional smoker ____; former smoker ____; never smoked ____.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY: active ____; moderately active ____; inactive ____.

SOCIAL ACTIVITY:

(political, service club, religious affiliated, cultural/educational or hobby, professional association, sports or recreational group)

none ____; 1 or 2 groups ____; 3 or more groups ____.

VOLUNTEER: YES ____; NO ____.

IF YES: up to 1hr per week ____; 1-2.5hrs per week ____; 2.5-4hrs per week ____; more than 4hrs per week ____.

SENSE OF BELONGING TO LOCAL COMMUNITY:

very strong ____; somewhat strong ____; no sense of belonging ____.

CLOSE FRIENDS AND FAMILY: none ____; 1-5 ____; more than 5 ____.

TRUST IN OTHERS: can be trusted ____; cannot be trusted ____.

Date: _____

Appendix K

List Of Codes

Ability	Creative	Grounded	Need
Academic	Cumulative		Non-judgmental
Acceptance	Curious	Hard Times	Nurture
Act(ions)		Harmonious	
Actualization	Decide	Hear	Objective
Active	Dedication	Honest	Observation
Acquired	Demonstrate	Honour	Offer
Advantage	Dependable	Hope	Old
Advice	Difference	Humanity	Open-minded
Adversity	Disagree	Humble	Opportunity
Advocate	Discernment		
Altered	Disciplined	Information	Passion
Appreciate	Dispositions	Inner Strength	Perceptions
Appropriate	Distance	Integrate	Permission
Assessment	Doing	Intelligence	Personality-
Aware		Interests	Traits
	Easy	Introvert	Polite
Beliefs	Educate(d)	Intuition	Practical
Bias	Effective	Involved	Present
Broad perspective	Encourage	Iterative	Problem
	Engaged		
Capable	Emanate	Joy	Question
Calm	Emotion	Judge(ment)	Quiet
Careful	Equanimity		
Centered	Evaluate	Knowledge	React
Certain	Examine		Read
Change	Example	Leader(ship)	Recognition
Clever	Experience	Learning	Reflect
Commitments		Lesson	Relationship
Common Sense	Facts	Listen	Reliable
Confidence	Faith	Loud	Religion
Comfortable	Failure	Love	Reserved
Communicate	Family	Lucky	Resourceful
Complain	Feel		Respect
Condescending	Forgive	Manipulate	Response
Connect	Friendly	Meaningful	Result
Contribute		Mentor	Role model
Conscious	Generous	Morals	
Consistent	Gentleness	Mortality	Satisfied
Cope	Give	Motivate	Self-acceptance
Core	Goals	Move	Self-aware
Counsel	Gratitude		Sensitive

Serenity
Share
Sharp
Similarities
Solutions
Spiritual
Stability
Strength
Strong
Study
Success

Supportive
Surprise
Sustainable

Time
Think
Thoughtful
Travel
Trust
Try

Undersell
Understanding
Uniqueness
Unshakeable
Upset
Useful
Utilizing

Validate
Values

Watching
Weakness
Whole
Wide
Wisdom
Wise
Witness
Woke
Wonder