

Acknowledgements

Sharon Mackenzie, B.A. Fine Arts and Theatre (UBC), T.T. (UBC), M.Ed. (UBC) is a teacher at Kidston Elementary School in Coldstream, British Columbia. She initiated the Meadows School Project five years ago with her grade six class and a group of adults ranging from 75 to 98 years, setting the stage for development of meaningful and sustainable relationships between youth and the residents of Coldstream Meadows, a supported retirement community in Coldstream, British Columbia. Although the students maintain their core curriculum studies throughout the program, the content of their basic courses is adapted to align their learning with the intergenerational experience. Likewise, the seniors' programme is altered to match activities with the school children. The approach has met with astounding success.

I acknowledge my husband, Rod Spruston for his unwavering support and encouragement of my work, as well as the sacrifices of time and energy he has made throughout this journey.

I acknowledge Naomi Cloutier for editing and validating my work. Thank you.

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It was quickly discovered that love moves in as mutual respect grows.

Through joint activities and communication, new learning opportunities present themselves. Students develop responsibility and practice time management, while mixing their academic studies with real life discussions over the science of aging, history, and life skills.

Seniors become resources, acting as sages to their young protégés.

The seniors' residence is a wonderful jewel box. Each day when the lid is opened, faded treasures are polished and tenderly held by young hands, to reveal qualities that engender human relationships, dusted with the magic of time spent.

(Sharon Mackenzie 2004)

Chapter 1 – Connecting Across the Lifespan: An Intergenerational Ethnography

The research conducted involved a close examination of the interpersonal relationships and the communication that developed between older adults (aged 75–98) and young children (aged 9–10). I was interested in the inherent success factors of an intergenerational immersion program as well as the expected outcomes. In the demographic context of the upcoming groundswell of the “baby boomer” senior population, this research is relevant to the quality of life for us and our offspring. It is also relevant to the field of communication due to a growing interest in intergenerational communication, and the related issues of age-stereotyping, the intercultural communication aspects of intergenerational relationships, and the social integration of people with dementia.

There is a burgeoning interest among health care professionals, gerontologists and communication researchers in communication and interaction with the elderly. The population of the western world is aging rapidly and our life spans are increasing, leading to the development of grandparent-grandchild and great-grandparent-grandchild relationships and an interest among researchers and educators in the potential connections made between children and older adults in purposefully orchestrated opportunities. Concurrently, we are becoming more interested in how humans successfully adapt to such long life spans. I believe the research presented in this case study addresses the importance of such relationships on the attitudes of the children towards their elders.

I have used a grounded theory approach to develop themes that highlight the communication between children and older adults. Glaser and Strauss (1999) developed grounded theory as “the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research” (p. 4). Recognizing the value of field notes, observations, and insights is a mainstay of

grounded theory. The insights gained during and after my research often confirmed the work of Glaser and Strauss.

Additional theory was generated over a four-month time frame from first-hand experience in the classroom and at the seniors' residence, from reading the children's personal reflections from the past five years, as well as from three decades of my extensive experience as a mental health nurse, the last twelve years of which have been in the geriatric field.

Upon completion of this thesis, I wish to have achieved my personal goal: to validate the Meadows School Project as a proactive preventative program with some far-reaching consequences. It is proactive in that it explicitly addresses a myriad of aging issues with the children. It could be inferred as preventative of some of the negative attitudes that possibly develop when children are not familiar with elderly people. During my research, I recognized the inherent value of the development of relationships, relationships that would otherwise have not occurred.

I wished to develop a rich ethnographic description that would bring to light the development of interpersonal relationships between young children and elders. Themes have emerged related to the acceptance of diversity as well as the recognition of commonalities. Ageism, defined simply as bias against a person or group on the grounds of age, was recognized and addressed by both groups. Did such a program improve the mental and physical state of the elders? Dementia affects many of the elderly residents. Did the inherent acceptance of all participants enhance the lives of the residents in general and specifically the people with dementia? Did it leave lasting impressions upon the children?

My chief interest in pursuing this research stemmed from my career as a geriatric mental health nurse where I often encounter the aftermath of broken relationships between elderly

people and their families. Does the Meadows School Project act as a deterrent for financial or emotional abuse of seniors? Does the project serve as a preventative measure? I realize that I will not be able to answer these questions in the course of my current research as it would require longitudinal studies to follow children into their adult years, continuing to evaluate their attitudes and actions towards the elderly. It would be beyond the scope of the current project.

The Meadows School Project re-established traditional grandparent-grandchild roles in a transient society, where many children do not know their grandparents and negative stereotypes are bound to develop. I was also interested in the mental, emotional and physical benefits of the project for the seniors. I have primarily focused on the development of relationships between young children (aged 9–10) and older adults (aged 75–98) and the aspects of a well orchestrated intergenerational program that promoted and nurtured these relationships.

In the course of aging, many seniors become physically and psychologically compromised and relocate to a residential facility such as Coldstream Meadows. In this setting they are isolated from young people, living in an “institution” solely devoted to the care of the elderly. At the same time, young people in our society are isolated from people who are older than they are. They attend an “institution” solely dedicated to the education of children. What are these two cohorts missing by not interacting with one another in the larger society? I believe they are missing a great deal. For this reason, this study is also an intercultural case study.

The wisdom of the elder and the wisdom of the child and the barriers that separate them is the theme of this work. I looked for the success factors inherent in the program for the children and for the older adults by examining the communication connections that evolved from the CSM project and relating the stories of the moving moments that I witnessed. I also wished to validate the program by discovering the positive aspects of this particular intergenerational immersion

program that provides hope for the aging and depth of experience for the young. I expected to find positive reactions to the program from the older adults as well as from the children, and looked for the program's inherent success factors. I also wished to validate the effectiveness of the program by documenting in rich descriptive detail the interactions between children and older adults. I expected to find positive reactions to the program from the older adults as well as from the children.

Although I have speculated on some of the anticipated outcomes of the project, I have concluded that the effects of this program have left lasting impressions on some of the children: Their future career choices have been influenced by their Meadows School Project immersion.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Williams and Nussbaum (2001) trace the potential for misunderstanding between separate birth cohorts, attributing the observed rift to the fact that “chronological distance between interactants means that they lived through very different historical periods and may be operating with different communication patterns, needs, skills, and experiences” (p. x).

Williams and Nussbaum also provide considerable amplification and reinforcement of the foundational themes and direction of the Meadows School Project. Stereotypes held by children, with reference to seniors, and stereotypes held by the elderly, with reference to children, are a predominant theme in their book *Intergenerational Communication Across the Lifespan*. Their work also recognizes the need for formal intergenerational programs designed to counteract the negative perceptions of the elderly in our society and the minimal intergenerational contact outside the family. The influence of stereotyping upon communication with older adults is further explored by Hummert, Shaner, Garstka, and Henry (1998).

The current research explores the stereotypes held by each cohort, and focuses on how these stereotypes influence the development of effective relationships.

Anderson, Harwood, and Hummert (2005) also examine age stereotypes in an interaction model. Among other factors, their research looks at the effect of the child’s perception of the elder’s health on the nature of communication with a child. The context of the actual relationship between a child and an elder (close relative or acquaintance) is also investigated. This work summarizes much of the previous research on stereotyping and has consequently been a relevant resource.

Angus and Reeve, in their 2006 article “Ageism: A Threat to ‘Aging Well’ in the 21st Century,” examine how our collective fear of aging and the multitude of prejudices toward older

men and women affect all areas of professional and public life. People from all walks of life, including health professionals, bring to their workplaces the stereotypic attitudes referred to as ageism. In this article, they speculate that our stereotypic attitudes stem from deeply entrenched value patterns in Western society which are defined by a strong performance orientation that celebrates economic productivity and independence. These values generate an unconscious stream of assumptions about the lives of older people.

Ageist assumptions become ingrained in social structures such as the workplace, bureaucracy, public institutions, and the health care system. Ageism can manifest itself in the form of individual acts of discrimination and can have an impact on a wider scale by influencing scientific research, policies, programs, and legislation that affect older people. The implications of ageist attitudes toward older people touch all of us and demand remedial responses from all of us” (Angus & Reeve, 2006, p, 137).

Achenbaum (2002) discusses how elderly people confront the challenges in the last stages of their lives...we also count on others (family and surrogate kin) to assist seniors when they are no longer capable of exercising independent judgement...professional caregivers often have more rights and get greater reimbursement for services than kin. Ironically, in an effort to protect the old, we sometimes rip their network of love and support (p 5).

Palmore (1990) holds that age-related stereotypes have damaging effects on both the elderly and the young as these stereotypes tend to dehumanize the elderly and distort the proper socialization and perception of the elderly by young people (p.18).

Williams and Nussbaum (2001) devote the third chapter of their book to intergenerational attitudes and stereotypes as they are wide ranging and pervasive in our society. Some of the

stereotypes they found typically associated with older people included their being irritable, nagging, grouchy, weak, verbose, and cognitively deficient.

The status of the elderly has gradually eroded with the change from a rural agrarian society to a modern, technological and urbanized society. Older people are no longer revered or sought after for their wisdom. Intergenerational contact has declined and a glaring need for the development of formal intergenerational programs that promote positive relationships to develop between the young and the old has emerged.

Palmore (1990) listed nine characteristics that are typically associated with the elderly: “ill health and illness, asexuality and impotency, ugliness or unattractiveness, cognitive and mental decline, uselessness and isolation, loneliness, poverty, and depression” (p. 18-21).

Harwood, McKee, and Lin (2000) highlight the barriers to effective communication between young and old and schematically draw the positive-negative and high-low change orientation for the both the older adult and the younger adult. Americans tend to stereotype elderly people as “warm” and “incompetent.” These stereotypes promote a mixed reaction from others. People tend to feel both pity and admiration for the elderly. People tend to want to help the elderly and at the same time exclude them. Social exclusion leads to “limited access to vital emotional and physical resources and it also leads to innumerable negative health outcomes...Excluding older people precludes the kind of intergenerational contact that could curtail ageist thinking and behavior” (Cuddy, Norton, & Fiske, 2005, p.280).

The status of the elderly can be compared to that of children. In essence, children continue to encompass a subordinate class within society, with neither chance nor opportunity to challenge the conventions of dominant ideology from within, or the practices and processes that lead to their marginalization.

Unlike other outsider groups—women, people with disabilities, gays and lesbians, minority ethnic groups—who have mobilized their own social movements to assert their political identity, children need allies. Adult conceptions rest on the notion of a child as a fixed material object with little or no social status (Cuddy, Norton & Fiske, 2005, p. 275). From this viewpoint, the child is invisible, and “childhood is a transitional phase which is only complete once children enter adulthood” (Mathews, 2003). It could be speculated that one could substitute the word “seniors” for the word “children,” and the description would be equally fitting in describing elderly members of society. There are very real parallels to be drawn between the social status of a child and the social status of the elderly.

In addition, studies show that there is a relationship between close contact and interaction with the elderly and favourable change in the attitude of adolescents toward the elderly (Bales, Eklund, & Siffin, 2000; Langer, 1999; Scott, Minichiello, & Browning, 1998). One way of reducing stereotypes of aging held by youths is, therefore, to establish intergenerational projects and programs in which the two age groups are brought together in joint, collaborative endeavours. Community and educational programs can be designed with this objective in mind (Williams & Nussbaum, 2001).

Such programs will go a long way in helping youth to better understand what they perceive as some of the peculiar behaviours of the elderly and eventually dispel stereotypes about them. Youth need to be made aware and informed of the nature and processes of both individual aging and population aging and how these affect everyone’s life. This will help foster an appreciation of aging as a normal life process and thereby eliminate some of the stereotypes held. Five intergenerational programs with some traits similar to the MSP project are described in the literature. One outstanding program was described by Zinn (2002). This program joins a licensed

daycare centre and an extended care nursing home under the same roof in Ohio and involves purposeful arrangements of visits and daily interaction between the two communities with the goal of establishing the commonalities shared by both generations. The children are preschoolers, and the success of the program might be a reflection of the young age of the children and their assumed openness to relationships with the elders. The children are prepared for meeting people with dementia and allowed to reflect afterward on what they have seen and experienced.

Activities are chosen to promote “equal status contact.” The goal is to establish the commonalities shared by both generations. I would predict that the longitudinal effect on the children might be more sustained and leave lasting impressions if the children were older (10 or 11 years old). The MSP reflects this philosophy in that it generates respect for people with dementia. Students from grade 5 and 6, who are significantly more sophisticated than preschoolers, are more likely to incorporate the experience into their repertoire in a sustainable way.

Mary Gordon established a program in Toronto in 1996 called “Roots of Empathy” aimed at fostering empathy in children, thereby decreasing aggressive and bullying behaviour. It is an evidence-based program promoting caring relationships with infants and parents presented to all students in the elementary classroom. Over the course of a year, a parent and a baby visit the classroom where the children learn about child development and nurturing an infant. In the course of their experience, the students learn to express their feelings, fears, and dreams and are encouraged to share these in their artwork and in their story telling. I found similarities with the philosophy of the Meadows School Project in that inclusion and acceptance of diversity are two of the MSP’s primary pillars.

This research confirms earlier findings that education is a significant factor in sustained attitudes and actions of children towards their elders (Williams & Nussbaum, 2001, p.7). The research will also confirm and add to the growing recognition of the value of intergenerational communication and the growing imperative for the development of programs such as the Meadows School Project. Broader themes of stereotyping, inclusion of people with dementia, and the cross-cultural nature of the project that support this research, are also explored in this project.

Chapter 3 – Methodological Considerations

Methodology

The qualitative methodology that I will utilize will be based on ethnographic case study; therefore, I will develop a rich description of the program and the relationships that develop. A variety of points of view will contribute to the tapestry of the experience.

I sought rich dialogue and “thick” description in an ethnographic manner. I have woven secondary data gathered by Mrs. Mackenzie into my project. I had access to the daily reflections that the children have written. Sheilagh Rogers of CBC Radio (2004) produced a one-hour documentary about the CSM school project and I have the recorded CD of her visit.

In this ethnographic approach I have become a participant observer, due to my extensive experience working with older people. Ethnography “considers the immediate situation in that the exact account of the primary subjects is provided” (Real, 1996, p. 21). I also directed questions to the children about their thoughts on becoming caregivers someday as part of the philosophy of the project is caring for seniors. Access to the school program and to the CSM residence was not an issue.

Method

I began my research by attending the school program as a participant observer. Since my professional work deals exclusively with the elderly, I was invited to talk to the children about dementia and depression. My participation in the students’ learning as well as my professional experience with the senior population allowed me to conduct a more authentic and rich ethnographic study.

I obtained written consent from the children and formally interviewed 15 students (approximately half of the participants) at Kidston School, depending on which children from

whom I received consent forms were at school on the days that I visited. I also interviewed 10 of the 22 seniors who volunteered to participate in the school program at their home at Coldstream Meadows. I used a Dictaphone, with the verbal consent of the interviewee, for a select few interviews, but generally took notes as soon after an interview as possible. The following interview questions, amongst others, were asked:

- What are your past relationships with seniors/children?
- What has it been like to have a relationship with a senior/child?
- Has this experience changed your ideas about the other cohort? (This information was often volunteered, before I asked about it).
- How much time do you spend with your grandparents or great-grandparents or with your grandchildren?

I also informally interviewed Rob Borden, the owner and marketing manager of Coldstream Meadows, a selection of parents, and Mr. Adam, the principal of Kidston Elementary School.

I have a selection of photographs of the project that are a part of a calendar produced last year. I also took photographs of the children who I interviewed as well as pictures of a Christmas party with the seniors at Mackie House. I had access to the children's "reflections" (written journals recorded daily) from the past five years, and Mrs. Mackenzie's class survey results pre- and post-program. I had access to the senior's written answers to the most recent surveys pre- and post-program. I kept a diary of the time I spent in the classroom and at the Meadows activity centre. I analyzed the data by searching for themes or common threads within the data. I searched for similarities in the written and verbal responses and then categorized my findings into themes.

I was able to access the program with ease as my work has often taken me to visit at CSM where I am comfortable in the setting and feel accepted by CSM staff. I have also developed a working relationship with Sharon Mackenzie who helped me with my plans to pursue my research and stated to me, “You have added another dimension to the program” (S. Mackenzie, personal communication, November, 2005).

Since my professional focus is often on dysfunctional families who neglect their elder emotionally, or spend their inheritance before a parent has died, I found this program to be a refreshing approach to intergenerational relationships. It will necessitate that I be reflexive regarding my personal role in this field of the research. I shared my insights about dementia with the children and I talked to them about the characteristics of depression in the elderly. However, I experienced some logistical difficulties in eliciting a full range of data due to time restrictions. There are inherent limitations based on short-term memory retention problems for the children and for the adults. There were time and access limitations because the children went off to various senior visits, activities, and chores throughout the day, and it was not possible for me to follow each of them.

The “cross-generational immersion” positively influences youths’ perceptions of, and attitudes toward the elderly. Furthermore, knowledge of aging and aging issues prepare adolescents, when they grow older, to be in a position to make eminently sound decisions on matters affecting society in general and the elderly in particular (S. Mackenzie, personal correspondence, 2003).

Chapter 4 – Data Analysis

My field notes consisted of 40 pages from my participant observation, and my interviews with children, older adults, and parents. Collectively, my notes served to delineate the themes and thus define the theoretical framework that I anticipated this research would reflect. I arrived at the themes by categorizing the data that I had collected into similar topics that continued to come out of the data. I recognized the usual pattern that evolved during any encounter between two groups new to one another. I focused on the underlying themes, beginning with the initial fear and hesitation, the recognition of differences, recognition of similarities, acceptance, and the establishment of relationships. The themes were expressed in the interviews by the children and by the adults.

One of the priorities of the program was the children's recording their daily reflections in their journals. These entries were to answer the questions: What did I do today? What was my involvement with or for the seniors? What did I learn today that is important to me? How do I feel about the day? I found additional musings from the children's reflections (daily diaries) that further reinforced the themes of fear, recognition, acceptance, and beginnings of sustainable friendships. I had access to the written reflections that were compiled each year from 2001 until 2006.

The children are not learning in a traditional classroom setting but in a seniors' home, as they physically move to the residence for a total of two months (on two separate occasions), or for a total of eight weeks of their school year. The environment is drastically different than a desk in a classroom, with a teacher overseeing them at the front of the room. A group of high school students interviewed the children about how the environment influences meaning; I had access to

the students' interview notes which further illuminated and reinforced the themes that emerged from the data.

Stereotyping and Discrimination

From the older people's perspective at Coldstream Meadows, stereotypes about children were initially present. Some seniors thought children were "noisy and rude, uncaring and selfish, uninterested in older people and insensitive to older people in general." However, I heard from them almost unanimously that these children were "polite and friendly and very well behaved." The seniors usually attributed their appropriate behavior, and polite and friendly manner to the guidance that the children received from the teacher. The first year that the children arrived at Coldstream Meadows, the seniors did not want to engage with the children at all. They watched them from a distance, for example through the window or behind a curtain, but despite invitations from the children, they remained hesitant. Finally, one particular older woman visited the chapel/classroom and began to participate and then contribute to the lessons. Eventually others joined her, and finally emerged the beginnings of acceptance and welcome.

Sharon Mackenzie developed the Meadows School Project specifically to address the increasing alienation between generations in our society. She intended "to begin the dissolution of unspoken beliefs and prejudices held by youth about seniors and by seniors about youth" (S. Mackenzie, correspondence, 2003).

One parent wrote a letter in response to Mrs. Mackenzie's request for parents' feedback:
I believe the barriers or stereotyping are being broken down for both seniors and students.
I believe that these past weeks have been laden with invaluable experiences for my

daughter, and that she now has a deeper understanding of our senior community and also of the diversification of society (written communication, 2002).

Fortunately, I was able to attend the first day of the program at the seniors' residence to observe the general attitude of the children toward the experience. I was also in attendance for a few regular routine days at the school, and I participated in the Remembrance Day gathering and the Christmas store at Kidston School. I attended a Christmas party at Mackie House. I accompanied the children and several parents to see the Nutcracker ballet, and I went to the Valentine's Day party at the Coldstream Meadows activity room. These encounters with the children provided a context for my observations in that I observed the children interacting with the seniors in the larger group setting. I observed a general respectful and helpful demeanor from the children towards the seniors and a receptiveness and helpfulness from the seniors towards the children.

I was at CSM for the first day of the spring school project (the children return to CSM for three weeks on site) on May 1, 2006. The children renewed their friendships, took up their chores of table-setting, feeding the rabbits and the llamas, and continued with their academic work. They will be learning about depression to complete their studies on seniors' health. They will visit the local cemetery to explore some of the history of the local area in keeping with the theme of learning about the history of their community and their ancestry.

At the outset, the children are introduced to the concepts of the consequences of aging by various professionals in the community including a speech and hearing therapist, a nutritionist, and a public health nurse, a representative from the Alzheimer Society, and me in my role as a geriatric mental health nurse. They learn about mobility challenges, communication difficulties due to deafness and sight problems, cardiovascular disease and related conditions such as

osteoarthritis, dementia, and depression related to losses. They receive a comprehensive overview of what to expect and expectations of their behavior prior to meeting with the seniors as well as information about the science of aging throughout the project.

Mrs. Mackenzie outlines some specific behavioural expectations for the children including no running, shouting, or shoving inside the residence, walking slowly and not walking up behind someone suddenly. She teaches them to make eye contact, speak loudly, clearly and slowly, as well as to greet each senior that they meet with a friendly, "Hello, how are you?"

Initial Fear and Hesitation

The children's fears and hesitations are addressed at the outset of the program. They start their first day learning from a speech-language professional who explains to them the possible barriers to communicating with older people, the physical effects of aging on a person's eyesight, hearing and, in some cases, comprehension. She also gives them some practical tips regarding speaking loudly, slowly, and enunciating words and phrases. The children embark on a course called the "Science of Seniors," which presents some of the common diseases that afflict the elderly: osteoporosis, rheumatoid arthritis, bunions, shingles, balance problems, cardiovascular disease, and more. A public health nurse visits at the outset of the project as well as a person from the Alzheimer's society. I talked to the children about dementia, and in May I talked to them about depression, as these issues are the focus of my work with the elderly at the Mental Health Centre. The children are provided ample time to ask questions and also have quizzes to test their knowledge of seniors' health. I received a card from one boy, thanking me for telling the class about dementia with a postscript stating "this was my idea to give you this card and not the teacher's" (confidential written communication, November, 2006).

The comments from the reflections books indicated some initial hesitation from many of the children, “Sure they’re wrinkled and old but that doesn’t matter. I learned a lot about me and the other people,” wrote Sam (2004).

Monica wrote on the first day in her reflections book, “At first I felt I shouldn’t be in their home, but in the end I felt like I would enjoy it here” (2006). When I talked to her she also said, “I was kind of scared about going because people talk about seniors like they’re really mean and grouchy all the time and I was kind of really nervous about that” (personal communication, 2006).

Jay wrote, “I felt scared at first but then we got to know each other and we had lots of fun and laughs” (reflections, 2005).

Jennifer records, “It was the first time meeting Mrs. Thom. I felt really nervous. I learned that it is really hard for some seniors to hear” (reflections, 2002).

Melanie demonstrates an initial ambivalence during the first week when she writes “She was fun to be with. I felt anxious to be with her” (reflections, 2005). And John wrote “I felt nervous at first and then we got to know them” (reflections, 2003). Bruce wrote, “I thought it would be old people who are crabby and have medical problems, but it was nothing like that” (reflections, 2002).

During my attendance at the first day of class in the chapel, I had the impression that the children had been prepared prior to arriving as the general tone was one of enthusiasm and impatience to “meet the seniors.” In fact that was the question on everyone’s mind as I heard several children ask “When will I meet my senior?” I did not detect any visible signs of hesitancy or nervousness. There seemed to be a buzz of excitement as they were now in a new environment and seemed to be looking forward to the next few weeks.

Caitlyn wrote, “At the beginning I thought we were just going to be hanging around old fogies. But after a couple of days I realized that I was so wrong. I thought the total opposite than it really was” (reflections, 2001).

Lori reported, “I thought our generation is so different from theirs that they wouldn’t be open to us” (reflections, 2002).

Jason told me that he initially thought “seniors were weird...old and sort of weakly...I wasn’t really interested in this program when I first came. Now I can’t wait to get back there” (personal communication, 2005).

Veronica said “I thought they would be boring, you know” (personal communication, 2005).

When I interviewed the seniors I did not hear any negative or hesitant comments. However, the program is now in its fifth year and a somewhat established program. All of the resident participants sign up for inclusion in the program voluntarily. The seniors were generally accepting and welcoming of the children. They also maintain control over how often they want a child to visit them, if at all. Some of the seniors prefer to visit with the children in the activity room only. Others welcome the children to visit them in their rooms or to accompany them for a walk, or a trip on the CSM bus to go downtown.

A number of the seniors do not have any grandchildren in the near vicinity, or do not see their grandchildren regularly, saying, “They are busy with their own lives.” They unanimously expressed appreciation of the children’s visits and company. Two people referred to themselves as helping the children learn and one of the students called the seniors “teachers who teach us about life.” One student stated “I think they thought we would be brats...but they changed their minds” (personal communication, 2005).

Mrs. Mackenzie sent a written survey around to the seniors asking:

Could you please help me by writing about how you view this project: its pros and cons, the impact you think a program like this has in the short term and can have in the long term. In short, have you seen success in this program and its goals, what have you liked, disliked or seen happening?

Mr. Winslow wrote, "It is very enjoyable to have interaction with the children. In my mind 99% of the kids enjoy and learn a great idea from this interaction. The children are wonderful company and they enjoy hearing stories from long before their time" (written communication, 2003).

Another senior, Mrs. Lowry, wrote:

I met with the children on a daily basis and I thoroughly enjoyed their company...It quickly became apparent that we all were learning a lot about each other. The children were all so polite and gentle with the elders. The children learned quickly how to converse with the elders; my hope is that will stay with them always. Some were very shy at first and we tried to ease them so by the time they left, they were very secure and able to talk very well (written communication, 2003).

It was interesting that during the first year that the program was introduced to CSM, the residents did not initially sign up voluntarily. It took one senior woman, who curiously poked her nose in the door of the chapel, to attend and participate before other seniors joined in. After this initial hesitation was overcome, some were already signing up for the following year!

There were two families who requested that their children be removed from Mrs. Mackenzie's class. Their objections seemed to focus on the fear that their children would suffer academically with a teacher who preferred an experiential style of teaching and learning. One

couple stated that their daughters already had grandparents with whom she had excellent relationships and she did not need the immersion type of experience. This particular event led to a discussion about altering the program so that parents and children had a choice about signing up for the program or choosing a more traditional type of learning. The seniors choose to sign up for the children to visit them, so should the children and their families also have a choice regarding participation?

Acceptance of Differences

The initial introduction to the intergenerational experience is a major part of setting the stage for acceptance of people who are different. This year, the project had only completed one week, when a provincial teachers' job action occurred. The project was interrupted for two weeks since the teachers were on strike. Mrs. Mackenzie explained to the children that they could not attend CSM as a class, but they were free to visit the seniors as volunteers. Three girls did visit. One of them, Jayne, visited daily for the first week and then two other girls joined her. They went for a few hours each day. I thought it was an indication that some children felt quite comfortable going to visit the seniors on their own, after only one week of the program. Jayne's mother told me that her usually shy and retiring daughter was now really coming out of herself and showing more self confidence and assertiveness since being out at Coldstream Meadows.

One of the residents in particular has dementia to the stage that she becomes confused at times and her verbal skills are declining. She often appears disoriented, but she is completely included in the program, attends activities with children, and visited the Kidston School classroom for the Christmas store. I sat beside her at a gathering one morning with the children, and I asked her if she was enjoying having the children visit. She replied, "Yes. This is such fun.

Now let's have another drink." She receives emotional benefit from the association with the children, despite any cognitive difficulties that she may encounter.

The children are introduced to the concept of dementia as a disease that afflicts some people as they age. They approach all of the residents with the same dignity and respect without any visible discrimination. The program builds inclusion into the messages that the children receive from the teacher and from the staff and seniors at CSM.

One student's reflections comment stated, "It was hard to talk to the lady because every so often she would repeat herself. Then I learned that she has Alzheimer's disease, a disease that some older people get" (written communication, 2001).

"Mrs. Farmer has Alzheimer's disease and kept forgetting things, but I liked talking to her," wrote Amy (written communication, 2002).

Peter, one of the students in Mrs. Mackenzie's class, has cerebral palsy and he is in a wheelchair. I was impressed by the manner in which the children treat Peter. He is included in every activity and discussion. Peter's mother visited the class and explained to the students about his disability and how he actually talks much more easily when he is in the hot tub at home (his muscles relax). There was an audible silence from the class while she spoke. The children asked some interesting questions, "Could he have his brain repaired?" and "Is he left-handed?" (His disability affects his right side.) His mother replied in a matter of fact manner, "I guess he has to be."

One classmate volunteered, "I knew Peter last year; he was in my class. He is kind and funny and smart. I really like him." It was an informative talk which likely led to a greater acceptance and inclusion by the rest of the class of Peter as a person. He had a special senior

buddy, Mrs. Bradley, who, he reported, gives him candy. Mrs. Bradley told me that she has a place in her heart for Peter. She told me, “We have a bond” (personal communication, 2006).

Recognition of Similarities

A parallel between the seniors and the children can be drawn as they have much in common. Both groups are isolated in their respective institutions with little or no opportunity to interact with the outside world. Both groups tend to be forgotten by the mainstream of our productive, consumer-driven, active society. In a quiet space where two people share their stories and secrets, the common bonds are established. Their affinity for each other becomes expressed in the simple appreciation of one another’s company. The children identified some of what they have in common with the elderly people.

Monica told me “seniors are actually really nice; they’re just the same as me” (personal communication, 2005).

Jason said, “I did like their place and pretty much that they are nice people. Yeah, I’d just like to go there again” (personal communication, 2005).

Amy wrote in her reflections book “Today I learned that seniors are really nice to us and most of them want us around.” And she also wrote, “I learned how to speak to seniors. I am getting really used to this place”(written communication, 2003).

Monica, referring to a deaf resident, said, “She is just like anybody else, and whenever we come in she always helps us and welcomes us in because she never gets to see anyone”(written communication, 2005).

Veronica told me that she liked the program “because you get to see what seniors are all about. So you can see how they are so much the same and different. Because they can remember

more things than you think they can. You learn a lot about the past and what happened before you were alive” (personal communication, 2005). Veronica went on to say, that she was surprised that seniors liked to play games. “I never would have thought that they would play pool and get excited about it. So that is how they were the same as us” (personal communication, 2005).

Sandra wrote, “I learned the seniors aren’t just couch potatoes. They can do anything that we can do. I hope that when I become an old senior I can do this program with kids in the future” (written communication, 2004).

Jordan stated, “It was really nice to learn that seniors are actually interesting” (personal communication, 2005).

Jayne wrote, “Seniors can be a lot like kids in their own way. So now I have all the answers to all my stereotypes. I also learned not to hurry seniors and I won’t do that in the future” (written communication, 2001).

Establishment of Relationships

It is significant to ask if there are possible gains in terms of the development of specific friendships between older and younger people and their effects on both (Rawlins, 1995). In this context, the MSP school project takes on another layer of meaning, considering that many of the seniors do not have family visiting and, in particular, do not see their grandchildren, or great grandchildren, on a regular basis. The interpersonal relationships developed with the Kidston School children takes on a greater significance in that the children fill a surrogate role for many of the elders and vice versa.

Melanie enthusiastically recounted her first day:

I went on the bus ride and I got to know about seven people already by just looking at them and talking with them and getting to know them. And they have so much to tell. When we come

there, they just light up because they don't get much company.... It's just great because the seniors love us. As soon as they get to know you, they are just forward.".... When I said 'bye' to Mr. Winslow, he said "No, call me grandpa"....I just feel very comfortable around seniors now. I feel like I can talk to them (written communication, 2005).

In response to the questions that I asked the children concerning how much time they spend with their own grandparents and great-grandparents, there were some common responses. Many of them thought that the Meadows School Project had influenced their attitudes towards their own grandparents or that they might be seeing them in a new light. In response to the question, "What did the meadows project mean to me?" Mark (2003) wrote in his reflections book:

Coldstream Meadows was like a wake-up call for me...I have two great-grandmothers here in Vernon...I only see them once or twice a year. They are lonely and all they want is their family to visit them. I feel very lucky to live in Canada and I need to spend more time with my family. This experience has changed me and it has been a once in a lifetime opportunity.

Jordan (2005) stated "I think my attitude has changed...I am more interested now in what my grandma has to say than I used to be."

Lynn (2001) wrote, "This project was very important.; it [sic] was waaay [sic] more than just going to school in a chapel and seeing seniors. We really connected."

Shelly (2005) said that she really didn't think about her family tree before, but now she wants to know more about her family and her grandparents' families.

One question on the student survey at the end of the fall session asked if the program had made a difference to their interest in their own family tree. Most of the children thought it had made “a lot of a difference.”

Shelly wrote, “Jayne and I are going with Mr. Main because he likes us a lot and we’ve really grown to know him.” Andrea simply stated, “I felt comfortable being here” (written communication, 2003).

Amy told me that she really liked helping seniors. I was interested to know if the children had ever considered becoming a caregiver; a nurse, doctor, care aide, physiotherapist, or social worker, or if they would consider recommending caregiving as a career to someone else. Generally, they had not considered caregiving as a career.

Amy (2005) said she was “just getting through grade five first” and she was not thinking that far ahead yet. I am personally interested in promoting a career choice in the caregiving area as I am acutely aware of the future wave of baby boomers that will require care. My questions might plant a seed for some of these children to seriously consider care giving careers in the future.

Monica (2002) wrote on the last day, “I’m going to miss Mr. Main, Mr. Passmore, and Mrs. Dillon. I will try to come back. I will not forget them. They will always be in a special spot in my heart. I hope they will not die for a long time. They will not forget me.”

Saying goodbye generated tears and sadness for many of the children. Corrine (2002) wrote, “I’m going to miss them a whole bunch. It was a crying emotional time for us. Most of us were sobbing in tears. It was so sad.”

The seniors collectively gave the children a “thank you” card that simply read:

Not goodbye but until we meet again...

We have enjoyed spending time with you all.

Thank you for all the time you spent with us and for all you have done: baking reading, decorating, pumpkin carving, singing, dancing and much more.

Parents were more than willing to talk about the benefits of the project both for their children and also for their families. One mother told me that she thought the project was the best environment for her son as he did not do well in a traditional classroom setting and he seemed to be thriving in the hands-on environment and enjoying getting to know the seniors (personal communication, 2005). I was impressed that there was a consistently high level of participation from parents as they assisted with supervising the table setting jobs, and overseeing the chocolate-making and sewing projects in the Christmas store. Parents identified the importance of their children learning respect for their elders and learning about human interactions in a real life situation. One parent wrote, “It may appear that this program is all fun, but in coordinating their participation in all activities children are taught to multi-task, coordinate themselves, plan, organize, be responsible and follow through on commitments as well as be flexible. They also get a lesson in intergenerational compassion” (written communication, 2003)

Another parent wrote, “As parents we appreciated the sense of community the program promoted...our son was excited about attending each and every day” (written communication, 2003). And another, “The stories the children heard and the games they played will be memories that will last a lifetime...this project should continue for years to come” (written communication, 2003).

The Program is Fun!

The element of fun that the program offered was a major contributing factor to its success. The references to the fun that the children have as well as the comments from the seniors about how the children light up their otherwise mundane lives were numerous.

The children learned to knit and to crochet. One young man wrote in his reflections book, “Crocheting is really hard; I would not want to take it up for a living.” They also pitched horseshoes and shot pool with the seniors. Veronica was surprised that seniors like games and get excited about playing. Another student wrote that he had learned on that day that “some older women can really spike the [volley]ball hard...some seniors are strong and active” (written communication, 2001).

There were numerous comments about the interesting stories that the seniors told the children. Jordan told me that “it was really fun learning about the things when we weren’t alive” (personal communication, 2005).

Mr. Winslow (98 years old) told me that the children really liked to visit him, and he thought it was because he likes them so much and that they like his stories. More than half of the children that I interviewed mentioned Mr. Winslow’s stories. He went to a one-room schoolhouse, sometimes rode a horse to school, and when he got the strap for misbehaving at school one day, he got the strap from his father again the same day at home as well. He believes that children today are not disciplined the way that he was, as a child. He thinks it is a big mistake that children are not physically punished anymore. He did think that the children that visit Coldstream Meadows are very well behaved and he attributes that to their “excellent teacher” (personal communication, 2006).

One day, I observed a spelling bee in the activity room involving all of the children and about twenty-five seniors, as well as a handful of parent-volunteers. The children divided into

four teams and competed for spelling the words correctly. The seniors were attentive and Mrs. Dobbin was mouthing the correct spelling so some children could read her lips. There was enthusiastic applause for correct spelling and silence when someone stumbled. It seemed that fun was had by all while the learning activity was going on. One senior said that she was impressed by how well the children spell and how much they know today.

The children reported that feeding the rabbits and the llamas was lots of fun. A baby llama was born during the children's stay, and one elderly lady told me that no one had known the mother was pregnant! One senior took a coat out for the baby llama to wear to keep warm.

Music was an integral part of the program. Mr. Carter has been entertaining most of his life. He told me that he played in a band for dances for many years. He wore his headset and played his keyboard or his banjo while teaching the children some traditional railway songs with the accompanying actions. The children also put on skits and puppet shows, and sang together as a class. A few students played the piano or sang solo or duets.

Remembrance Day, Christmas, and Valentine's Day were all celebrated with the whole group and included any other seniors who chose to attend. The children made cards for each of the seniors on such occasions. The children also made get well cards for seniors who were ill or in the hospital.

Each student had a senior "buddy" with whom he or she had become more closely acquainted by interviewing them, or simply by sharing time to read together, or playing a game together. The seniors chose how often they want a child to visit and signed up for visits. The children always visited in pairs for safety reasons. Many of the children travelled into town on the CSM bus, accompanying a senior for shopping, an appointment, or going out for tea.

Cross-Cultural Aspects of the Program

Communication between people who are developing quite differently in terms of their physical, cognitive, or psychosocial selves and who have experienced quite different life events in unique historical contexts presents an interactive challenge...these individuals belong to different developmental cultures and some features of intergenerational communication can be likened to intercultural communication (Coupland & Nussbaum, 1993, p.57).

Culture is a means of distinguishing one social group from another and it defines the human species (Hall, 1991). There is an acquired non-verbal side to culture that is expressed in the juxtaposition of the two cultures of the very old and the very young. There are factors in our society that present very real barriers between generations. There are language, societal practices and relational barriers. The media's usually negative portrayal of the elderly depicts them as under-represented, which further contributes to cultural barriers (Williams & Nussbaum, 2001, p.259–61).

Initially there was the predictable hesitation and tentative uncertainty, particularly as expressed by the children. It was, for some, their first introduction to people who live at a seniors' home or in an institutional setting. It was a unique experience to leave the confines of their school institution and attend such a very different environment for five weeks and again for three more weeks in the spring. The expectation was to get to know the senior residents and to travel through the various stages towards development of cultural sensitivity. The stages include denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration (Bennett, 1966). I think the purposeful design of the Meadows School Project enabled the children to move quite quickly towards acceptance, adaptation, and integration. The design included a built-in orientation to the

science of aging and discussion about the various medical conditions that often accompany age and very often contribute to communication difficulties (deafness, eyesight problems, and dementia). The inherent message was inclusion and acceptance of people who are different from us.

Mrs. Mackenzie provided positive role-modelling as she knew many of the seniors from previous years and consistently demonstrated a responsive and caring attitude towards each of them.

The core academic subjects were adapted. Social Studies related to the local history of the Coldstream area. They discussed the history of world wars, the history of immigrants, and the history of technological development. The children also developed their own family trees and some of them told me that they had never been interested in their ancestry before researching it for class.

Fine Arts consisted of the children being introduced to music and songs of the past. They also learned to knit and crochet, and some sketched portraits of the seniors. The physical education included attending a fun and fitness class with the seniors, playing games in the yard (horseshoe pitch and volleyball), and running prior to starting the day. Language Arts included writing the seniors' stories, participating in spelling bees with the seniors, writing daily reflections, and composing thank you and get well cards. I believe each facet of the program contributed to breaking down the barriers between the children and the seniors.

Cultural differences were quickly forgotten as two ten-year-old boys batted a balloon above their heads with an elderly woman in a wheelchair. Her face was rapt with concentration. She did not usually show any interest in physical activity. With her arms outstretched and a smile on her usual expressionless face, she was successfully assisting them in keeping it up and off the

ground. I witnessed the enthusiasm on the children's faces as they played pool with an elderly gentleman whose face was also beaming. I observed the boy's question at a social gathering to a woman suffering from dementia, "Would you like a cookie and a drink?" and her immediate smiling, nodding response.

Chapter 5 – Conclusions: Where Do We Go from Here?

Since becoming involved with the Meadows School Project, I have continued to be impressed with the benefits for both the children and the seniors. Despite the decision of two families to remove their children from the class this year, the continuing benefit for the other children and for the seniors is obvious. I was interested in the sustainability of the program, and I have met some of the older children who attended the Meadows School Project three or four years ago and are now in grade nine and ten. One boy continues to volunteer at CSM. One girl works as a candy striper at the hospital. Each spring all former students of the program are invited to revisit Coldstream Meadows, and I attended the reunion last year. They came in large numbers, all greeting the seniors by name, and many wanting to talk to their former teacher.

The program is in its fifth year of operation. Mrs. Mackenzie has had a dream to expand the Meadows School Project to other schools so that the positive impact can be more widespread and influence more children and seniors. In the course of teaching the program, she has consistently promoted its benefits and recommended its expansion. This year, she was granted a leave of absence for part of next year. This time will enable her to work with the curriculum planner of British Columbia to plan the implementation of the program in more schools throughout the province and to plan how to train teachers to adopt similar programs.

In the course of my own involvement witnessing first-hand the program's myriad of benefits for children, seniors and families, I also promoted the program to my colleagues. Consequently, Sharon Mackenzie and I have been invited to speak at the British Columbia Psychogeriatric Conference, being held in Kelowna on June 3–5, 2006. It will provide another opportunity to present this unique intergenerational immersion program to people who work with the elderly in the mental health field.

Since the Meadows School Project resumed again on May 1, 2006, for a further three weeks, I had an opportunity to attend the program again, and observe, as well as participate. I arranged for my son Jeremy, a film editor in Victoria, to come to Vernon and film a short feature for Mrs. Mackenzie and I to use in our presentation at the Psychogeriatric Conference in June. There is also an annual ice cream reunion at Coldstream Meadows in May 2006. All of Mrs. Mackenzie's former students from the past five years are invited to return and reconnect. I attended that gathering last year (2005) and was amazed at how many young people (now in grade 7, 8 and 9) arrived. I witnessed some heartfelt reunions with kids hugging seniors, and some enthusiastic conversations ensued. The ice cream did not seem to be the primary draw.

Each student also filled out a survey that asked them how often they see seniors now, if they think the Meadows School Project changed their attitude towards seniors, and if they would consider volunteering with seniors, or pursuing a career as a caregiver? About half of the respondents from grade eight and nine indicated that they would consider volunteering or pursuing a career as a caregiver. It would be mere speculation to say that their past experience attending school at CSM continues to be an influence on their career choices, but I think the connection is a logical one.

Another offshoot of this project is the evolution of an intergenerational committee that is about to form. I received an invitation from Mrs. Mackenzie to attend the inaugural meeting of the Meadows School Project Board of Directors. It will be made up of three seniors, two staff, five parents and six or more children, and this unique membership of various ages and orientations will truly reflect the nature of the original project. The first order of business will be to plan the annual ice cream reunion, determine the survey questions, and plan the logistics of

transporting students from their schools to Coldstream Meadows. I am quite willing to participate as I have become enthralled with the intent and successful results of the project.

I believe there is a further need for research in the intergenerational field particularly looking at intergenerational educational programs such as the Meadows School Project. The time has come for the development of further intergenerational connection programs since the current social climate of our society tends to isolate the very young from the very old and does not provide ample opportunity for children to learn how to talk to seniors, how to take time to listen to their stories, and how to learn to care about and for them.

It is an urgent and often neglected need that people of different generations connect with one another. If the forum is not provided, many young people are not given the rich opportunity to explore their history through the experience of an elder. In my work, I personally witness the aftermath of broken down relationships between generations. The Meadows School Project is an island of hope for the children it has touched. The hope will be that other educators take up the torch and proceed to guide more young people in learning the innate value of getting to know and becoming friends with an elder.

Barrow and Smith (1979) said:

If young people never get to know old people, prejudice and discrimination against the elderly will continue. Growth and aging are both a part of life. To understand both and to see both happening are perhaps the fullest way to experience living...The aged who feel rejected by the young, seek to find acceptance only among other aged and thereby segregate themselves from the young, who in turn reject elders more because they have no close contact with them (p.220).

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*Appendix 1 – Invitation to Participate***LETTER OF INVITATION**

October 4th 2005

Dear

I would like to invite you to be part of a research project that I am conducting. This project, **Meadows Project Communication Research**, is part of the requirement for a Master's Degree in Applied Communication, at Royal Roads University. My name is Mary Spruston and my credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by calling Phillip Vannini @ 250-245-9929.

The objective of my research project is to study the development of interpersonal relationships between children and elders at Coldstream Meadows. In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Masters of Arts in Applied Communication, I will also be sharing my research findings with Sharon Mackenzie and Kidston Elementary School. The sole purpose of the research project, besides fulfilling the requirements of a degree, is to gather data to demonstrate the inherent benefits of exposing young people to elders, and the benefits for the seniors in their relationships with children.

My research project will consist of open ended questions, interviewing the children and the seniors and observation of the program as it progresses. It is foreseen to last eight months.

The foreseen questions will include:

Tell me about your past relationships with children/seniors?

What do you think it will be like to have a relationship with a child/senior?

Has this experience changed what you think about children/seniors? How?

Your name was chosen as a prospective participant because of your membership in Mrs. Mackenzie's class or your residence at Coldstream Meadows and your willingness to get to know a child. I am interested in how the program promotes relationships between children and seniors and the inherent benefits of the project.

Information will be recorded in hand-written/audio-recorded format and, where appropriate summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless your specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential.

A copy of the final report will be housed at Royal Roads University and will be publicly accessible.

Please feel free to contact me at any time should you have additional questions regarding the project and its outcomes. I will share the results of the project with the students and the seniors upon completion.

You are not compelled to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. Similarly, if you choose not to participate in this research project, this information will also be maintained in confidence.

If you would like to participate in my research project, please fill out the attached consent form and return it to Mrs. Mackenzie. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Mary Spruston

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

My name is **Mary Spruston**, and this research project, **Meadows Project Communication Research**, is part of the requirement for a Masters Degree in Applied Communication at Royal Roads University. My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by telephoning Phillip Vannini @ 250-245-9929.

This document constitutes an agreement to participate in my research project, the objective of which is to study the development of interpersonal relationships between children and elders at Coldstream Meadows Project.

The research will consist of open-ended questions, and is foreseen to last eight months. The foreseen questions will refer to:

What are the aspects of the program that promote the development of relationships between children and seniors?

What are the inherent benefits of the project?

In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Masters of Arts in Applied Communication, I will also be sharing my research findings with Sharon Mackenzie and Kidston Elementary School. One purpose of the research findings is endorsement of the program and its philosophy of generating intergenerational communication. Information will be recorded in hand-written format and, where appropriate, summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential.

A copy of the final report will be housed at Royal Roads University and will be publicly accessible.

I do not perceive any conflict of interest issues inherent in this research.

You are not compelled to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. Similarly, if you choose not to participate in this research project, this information will also be maintained in confidence.

By signing this letter, you give free and informed consent to participate in this project.

Name: (Please Print): _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

p.46 Appendix 3: Reflections Questions

p.47-49 Appendix 4: Copy of Eclectic Feedback

REFLECTIONS

1. The reflections must be done every day:
 1. because there will be so much happening that is different every day, it is easy to forget all that has taken place.
 2. because you need to take time to think about what you have learned being at The Meadows School.
 3. because you will need this information in a month to write your report on this activity.

2. Each day you must take time and reflect for about 15 minutes. Think about:
 - What did I do today?
 - What was my involvement with or for the seniors?
 - What did I learn today that is important to me?
 - How did I feel about the day? (please do not just write, I felt good about today. Think about a more detailed response.
 - "Today I felt very sad because Mr. Wilson was sick with gout."
 - "Today I felt very fortunate because I got to be cared for by Mrs. Banta."

3. Check your work for details of spelling and complete sentences. Does the paragraph hold together?

Meadows School Project - Comments**June Callwood**

"This programme has such a strong ethical base, and so much compassion. It will, it WILL spread everywhere. It is the great idea whose time has come."

"I wish this programme was happening in Ontario. Well, I wish it was happening everywhere... Something this good should be imbedded in the school system. I have known other inter-generational programs (a choir, for instance, of seniors and kids) but this is the best."

"Your project is glorious and the good news of it should be spread far and wide."

Lieutenant-Governor of BC, Iona Campagnolo

"Congratulations on achieving such success with your innovative approach to teaching tolerance and understanding while bridging the generation gap."

Office of the Minister of Education

"We offer you encouragement to ensure that the project is well known in your community. We'll be happy to share this most successful practice."

Shelagh Rogers, Sounds Like Canada host, CBC Radio

"That was one of the richest mornings of my life. I not only admire the work you are doing, I love it. You have charged the seniors lives with more energy and openness, and charged the students lives with more compassion. Wow!

I am so happy to have witnessed your program...indeed a model for the rest of Canada."

CBC Listener, Alberta

"Your show last week featuring the teacher who taught her BC class in the nursing home was just superb! I wished instantly I could take a recording of the whole show and have every school and nursing home listen to it and be inspired. Our cultural "apartheid" of keeping the children, adults and the aged separated is one of those unfortunate and unhealthy features that I wish we would change in Canada. The show left me feeling so amazingly good."

CBC Listener, Ontario

"I was very moved by your piece on Sharon MacKenzie and her innovative idea of moving her classroom into the nursing home for a period of time each year. Her dedication and tenacity changed the lives of the students and seniors....I hope that lots of other teachers were listening to that piece and will entertain the idea in their communities."

Gardy Wilson, 97 years, Coldstream Meadows resident

"I think and know it is a great idea to have this programme and project here. It is very enjoyable to have interaction with the children. In my mind 99% of the kids enjoy and learn a great deal from this interaction. The children are wonderful company and they enjoy hearing stories from long before their time. I SINCERELY hope this project continues on a long term basis as it is beneficial for all concerned."

Stanley Morse, 89 year, Coldstream Meadows resident

" I am very proud to be asked to be with the children and share their problems and to be able to help them anyway I can. I love them and they do respond in that way. It has been a pleasure to share in their development. At 88 years of age it has done good for me walking, shooting pool, with the group. I love them!"

Margaret French, 91years, resident

" Children ask intelligent questions, stimulating my brain as I pass on memories long forgotten, but which come back to me as I see how interested in the past these young students are."

Flo Lindley, senior

"The children were all so polite and gentle with the elders. They helped with writing and reading which some of us could not do, as well as playing games of all sorts. It was a great time of togetherness for all. Some of our grandchildren are many miles away, so this is a great time for us as well. I think this programme should be kept up indefinitely for the good of all."

Ethel Page, 90 years

"I definitely do like the idea of having the students getting involved with the exchange. Without children it is so dull, they bring new ideas. I would say that it is an asset to have the children in our lives."

Boy student

"Meadows School was like a wake up call for me. It makes me feel like I've taken life for granted. Life is short and precious but I feel terrible because I have two great grandmothers that live here in Vernon. I only see them once or twice a year. Coldstream Meadows was like a reality check. I need to spend more time with my family. This experience was a once in a lifetime opportunity and I loved it."

Parent of student

"This has been a great experience for my child because it provided a unique opportunity to learn things about human interaction that are not readily available in the traditional classroom."

Parent of student

"It may appear that this programme is all fun, but in coordinating their participation in all the activities, children are taught to multi-task, coordinate themselves, plan, organize, be responsible, and follow through on commitments, as well as be flexible. They also get a great lesson in intergenerational companionship---something a lot of adults could use."

Parent of student

"I believe the programme is great for the children, as it teaches them what it is like to be with seniors and what we get like when we are old. In the long term hopefully the children will want to keep visiting and maybe eventually volunteer."

Parent of student

"I thought this project was very successful. My daughter gained new friendships with an age group that is essentially difficult or impossible to orchestrate outside of this mode. The class behaved so well and showed respect to their elders. It was so obvious that the seniors loved these children. Any reservations by doubting seniors or children seemed to fade away quickly after contact was made."

Sheet 1

Sept. 2005 I am presently in grade 5 Name _____

Pre-visit attitudinal assessment

1. I have regular contact with seniors.
1(never) 2(rarely) 3(monthly) 4(weekly) 5(daily)
2. I see my grandparent(s)
1(never) 2 3(at holiday time) 4 5(daily)
3. I see senior (retired) family friends
1(never) 2 3 4 5(daily)
4. In a week, I would estimate that the time I spend with seniors is
zero less than an hour 1-2 hours more than 2 hours
5. I have spent a whole day with a senior in the last year.
Yes No
6. The number of seniors I have regular contact with in my life is
None 2 3 4 More than 4
7. If I see a senior downtown, I
feel shy and look away look at them and smile speak to them
8. I would say that my experience dealing with seniors is
none a bit some quite a bit a great deal
9. I think that seniors are: (circle the five descriptors **you agree with the most**)
*weak *sleepy *grouchy *humourous *energetic *interesting
*scary *smelly *nice to look at *not so nice to look at
*smart *slow *boring *impatient *loving *poor
10. I have thought about being a caregiver when I am grown up, to seniors in a seniors' home.
never sometimes all of the time
11. When I am around elderly people in town or in my home, or theirs, I feel
bored happy nervous scared
12. I think (how often) about getting really old
never sometimes always
13. When I think about me getting to be old, I feel
scared nervous sad curious happy

Sept. 2005 SENIORS Name _____
Pre- visit attitudinal assessment

1. Before the Meadows School Project, I was around children
*never *rarely *monthly *weekly *daily*
2. I have grandchildren.
-yes, I have _____ grandchildren,
____ great-grandchildren.
-no, I do not have any grandchildren.
3. I see my grandchildren/great-grandchildren
rarely sometimes often
4. I have grandchildren who live
*in town
*within an hour's drive
*out of province
*out of the country
5. The number of children I have regular contact with in a normal
week while living at Coldstream Meadows is
None 2 3 More than 4
6. In my younger days I was around children
*rarely *sometimes *often

Appendix5: Children's Brainstorming.

I attended the brainstorming feedback on the last day of the fall semester at CSM and this is what the class spontaneously compiled in response to "What we learned at the Meadows School Project":

WHAT WE LEARNED AT THE MEADOWS SCHOOL PROJECT
2005 FALL SEMESTER

WE LEARNED...

- to have more respect for others
- how to knit
- that not all seniors are always tired
- seniors aren't boring
- to talk slower and enunciate around seniors
- to make eye contact because seniors expect that. They were taught that it is a sign of respect, and when we give eye contact we show respect towards them.
- some seniors don't see their grandchildren very often so they like us to call them Grandpa or Nana. (Mr. Wilson -97yrs. Mrs. G. Fraser - 93 yrs.)
- that we can learn lots of interesting things from the seniors
- seniors are more capable of doing stuff than we realized
- if you respect seniors then they will respect you
- even though we speak more loudly, we don't yell.
- a lot of seniors are lonely without us, and they don't see their relatives.
- seniors are happy when someone is with them.
- they love us
- you should spend time with seniors because there is more on inside than what you see on the outside
- seniors can be really fun a lot of the times.
- seniors are people just like us even though they can't walk as fast as we do
- that seniors like to be with someone rather than be alone
- that when seniors smile it makes you feel good.
- a lot about their histories and their families
- that some seniors have mental problems
- that you should have three people to help with Mr. Wilson and his wheelchair
- that Mrs. Burt has lots of things to show
- to not use slang when we talk to seniors
- that they can do a lot for themselves and don't always need help

- that Mr. Pasaj gave Patrick and other kids candy
- that they like to spoil us
- that Mrs. Jorna really liked it when we gave her hugs and smiled
- that some seniors think that they have money to give away, when they shouldn't
- to not judge a book by its cover
- that dementia can make a senior change his or her mind really fast
- that seniors always were kind to us
- how to talk to seniors
- that seniors are nice
- that when you eat lunch with them they will put your napkin on your lap
- how to play games
- that you can make senior's with dementia really happy and really mad, but they forget you made them mad just as fast
- that you can make a new friend in even just one hour
- dementia causes seniors to have a bit of unpredictable behaviour
- that you have to be careful when you interview them because some questions may upset them (about the war, or someone who is dead)
- that seniors can make fun with 'what you have'. At lunch they made fun with a spoon and just tapping it.
- that seniors like to show appreciation towards kids and their kindnesses
- that Mrs. Close asked me to lean up against her knees when we had to sit on the floor in the Activity Room for an event
- that seniors listen very closely
- that seniors wait and prepare for you, and love your visit!
- that when things get tough, they always get better
- that sometimes they act like your parents towards you, just as if they were parents of young children all over again.

