WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO GROW OLDER?
STORIES FROM PIANO STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

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Preface

This monograph is an account of my own interdisciplinary narrative inquiry about aging and piano teaching and learning. Although I received advice from my supervisors and committee members, as the researcher and sole author, I am responsible for the contents and accuracy of the thesis.

As the principal investigator, I obtained ethics approval for my project (see Appendix A). My application for ethics approval was in November 2021 with approval in December 2021. I subsequently applied for and received a renewal of ethics approval in December 2022.

Abstract

The purpose of this interdisciplinary narrative inquiry was to contribute to a better understanding of age and aging in piano teaching and learning (piano pedagogy) through an exploration of the musical life stories of older people. Learning piano in later life is a growing area of interest that deserves more attention. Piano, in particular, is popular with older people and instrumental music teachers. However, we lack empirical knowledge about older adult piano pedagogy. Children are the focus of most music education research. In addition, of the literature on older adult piano pedagogy, some demonstrates a perspective of aging that focuses on decline and the health and well-being benefits of music participation. Although this research is welcome, it offers a limited representation of piano students that can perpetuate age stereotypes. One way of challenging assumptions and increasing understanding about aging in this context is to highlight, in their own words, the experiences of older people in lifelong piano participation. To that end, my research addressed the following question: How do older students and teachers experience aging in the context of lifelong piano learning and/or teaching? Informed by a feminist gerontology perspective, I used a visual elicitation technique and interviews to explore four student and three teacher experiences of aging and lifelong piano participation. The results of this study were framed around meaningfulness and meaning. Specifically, the participants of this study understood aging in lifelong piano participation in terms of musical and social connectedness, musical development, and understanding and wisdom. The main contribution of this thesis is the musical life stories of the women who shared their experiences of lifelong learning and/or teaching piano. This study adds to the research on piano pedagogy by offering insights from older people that expand our understanding of aging and meaning in lifelong piano teaching and learning.

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On a personal note, I would like to thank my family, far and near. My focus on my studies has been trying and I appreciate their patience and support. Especially, I am grateful for my sons Alexander and Aaron, and most importantly my husband Tom.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"The experience of learning the piano, or even of trying to learn, stays with people all their lives" (Parakilas et al., 2001, p. 110)

1.1 The Research Problem

Learning and teaching piano (piano pedagogy) from the perspective of later life is a growing area of interest that deserves more attention. In Canada, the population is aging and the proportion of older people is expected to continue to increase over the next several decades (Arriagada, 2018). Public interest in aging has also increased, with a rise in negative views of aging especially noticeable during the COVID-19 pandemic. We hold opposing views of aging, with "discourses restricted either to positive or negative imagery" (Katz, 2015, p. 27). Sweetland et al., (2017) refer to these views as "the *real vs. ideal* model" that "obscures thinking about aging as a period of life like any other, with its upsides and downsides" (p. 9). One the one hand, we idealize aging, as illustrated by the popularity of stories about exceptional older people. On the other hand, we think of aging in a negative way, focusing on declining health for example. Especially popular are narratives about anti-aging and age-defiance, as evidenced by the popularity of books with titles such as *How Not to Age* and Levitin's (2020) bestseller *Successful Aging: A Neuroscientist Explores the Power and Potential of our Lives.* Unfortunately, Levitin disparages aging in the book's dedication, writing, "To my sweet wife, Heather, who never gets old" and, "We need not stumble, stooped and passive, into that good night; we can live it up" (p. xii). In research, an anti-aging attitude can be seen in a recent study by Kiewra et al. (2023) titled, "Moving beyond fulfillment: Wisdom years stories of passion, perseverance, and productivity" published in *Educational Psychology Review*. The study participants were older people who were exceptional in their fields and were interviewed to investigate how they remain productive in later life (euphemistically called "wisdom years"). The authors concluded with advice for readers such as, follow your bliss and work hard. Such views of aging lack nuance and promote stereotypes of older people. Given that negative views of aging are widespread (World Health Organization, 2021), harmful (Barber, 2020; Burnes et al., 2019; Chang et al., 2020; Jackson et al., 2019; B. Levy, 2009; Marshall, 2015; World Health Organization, 2021), and increasing (Ng et al., 2015; Ng & Chow, 2021; World Health Organization, 2021), there is an urgency to the need for increasing understanding about aging.

Participation in the arts is important to Canadians with 50% of those age 15 and older making or performing art – 15% making music, for example singing, playing an instrument, or remixing (Hill, 2019, p. 38). Music learning is a popular activity for older people (Bruhn, 2002; Lane, 2019; Roulston, 2010b; Wristen, 2006), and piano learning is especially popular (Bowles, 1991; Flowers & Murphy, 2001; Jutras, 2006; Reifinger, 2016). Older people are "broadly understood as people aged 50 and older" (World Health Organization, 2021, p. XXIII). Although there have always been older piano students, the visibility of the adult student has increased. Recent webinars about teaching adults have been offered by music organizations such as Conservatory Canada, the Frances Clark Center, and Faber Piano Adventures. For older piano students, there are many support groups such as the Facebook group *Adult Piano Returners* started in 2021 by a prominent piano pedagogue, author, and composer and including more than 29 thousand members as of June 2024. There are several other Facebook groups for adult piano students ranging in size from very small (14 members) to very large groups (47,000 members), some with a specific focus such as adult beginners. There are also many books written with adult piano students in mind, such as *Making Music at the Piano: Learning Strategies for Adult Students* by Maris (2000). In addition, there are piano methods specifically written for teaching adults by the main publishers such as Alfred, Bastien, the Fabers, Hal Leonard, etc.

Despite the interest in piano teaching and learning with older people, we lack empirical knowledge in this field of study. Children, rather than adults, are the focus of most music education research (Bugos, 2017; Coffman, 2002; Dabback & Smith, 2012; Madura Ward-Steinman, 2011). In addition, much of the literature on older adult music education presents a partial perspective of later life, focusing on health and well-being (Laes & Creech, 2023). For example, several studies have been conducted about the health benefits of piano led by Bugos and her colleagues (2007, 2016, 2017, 2021, and 2022), one of the main research groups in this area. One of the purposes of this type of research is to contribute to knowledge that might help to inhibit biological decline and promote health and well-being through music learning. This type of research is certainly welcome and needed. However, I agree with the critique of Laes and Creech (2023) that "a well-being discourse alone does not necessarily recognize the varying needs of individuals and communities" (p. 13). As with any research about older people that is focused on only one aspect of aging (health and well-being), music research focused on health

and well-being can promote a limited representation of older people that can perpetuate age stereotypes.

Fortunately, there is evidence of changing attitudes in older adult music education reflecting a more critical approach to music education in later life that counters negative views of aging (see for example, Kruse, 2022; Laes, 2023; Laes & Creech, 2023). However, there continues to be a lack of research about the experiences of aging, especially from the perspective of older music students and teachers themselves. In their review of the portrayal of older adult learners in adult education journals, Chen et al. (2008) addressed the issue of assumptions about age, describing the importance of understanding older adult learners: "Assumptions about older adult learners can either enhance or limit the research agenda and practical engagement with older adult learners" (p. 4). The same may be said of assumptions about older adult teachers. However, little is known about aging and teachers (Goodson, 1992; Rousmaniere, 2021), and there is little knowledge of any type about aging and music teachers of adults (Bowles, 2010; Hallam et al., 2016).

One way of increasing understanding, raising awareness, and questioning assumptions about piano teaching and learning among older people is through a consideration of the views of aging and musical experiences of older piano teachers and students themselves. In addition to topics related to playing the piano, this consideration involves both the "interpretation and articulation of meaning in later life" (Baars & Phillipson, 2013, p. 1) and the critical reflection on our "unexamined cultural assumptions" (Mezirow, 1978, p. 104), including negative views of aging. Therefore, the purpose of my study was to understand better age and aging in the context of piano teaching and learning through an exploration of the musical lives of older people. The main goal of my research was to present a more detailed and nuanced portrayal of aging in piano pedagogy. To that end, my question was, How do older students and teachers experience aging in the context of lifelong piano learning and/or teaching?

1.2 The Researcher

Who am I to try to answer questions about aging and piano teaching and learning? My experiences learning piano, both as a child and as an adult, and teaching piano with younger and older adult students mirror the experiences of the participants in my study, especially the teachers. In addition, I have a lifelong interest in aging and affinity for older people. As a younger person I imagined older people to be wise and at peace, a stereotype that I have

reluctantly released. Like everyone, my view of aging has been shaped by my life experience. As an adolescent, I regularly visited my great-grandmother in a local nursing home, and volunteered there. After graduating from university, I worked as a receptionist in a home for the aged, and eventually became the director of intake, meeting with prospective residents. My position provided me the opportunity to begin studies on aging, which was a relatively new field. In fact, I graduated from the first centre in gerontology at a Canadian university (University of Toronto)—a multidisciplinary centre for research and education in aging, founded by Dr. Blossom Wigdor. The goal of the graduate level diploma program was to educate people already working in the field. After becoming disillusioned with long-term care, I moved to community support for older people and worked for Meals on Wheels. With my education and work among older people also came an awareness of negative views of aging.

My experience with the piano began with my childhood piano teacher, an older friend who we regarded as family. He was a kind man and a classically trained professional pianist who also played by ear. He patiently taught me for several years, despite my lack of practice and insistence on long fingernails in adolescence. My lessons with him were student-centred and without any judgement or pressure of formal evaluations. He would play several pieces of music, including popular music, and allow me to choose which piece I would like to learn. Unfortunately, I quit lessons in adolescence when it was no longer "cool" to play piano, and it was not until after his death that I returned to piano lessons in middle adulthood. As I resumed piano studies, I decided to become a piano teacher and worked through a curriculum and examination system in piano performance and pedagogy. Eventually, I began teaching beginner piano students of all ages. However, after relocating to another city, my focus moved from the practice of learning and teaching piano to academic studies in piano pedagogy and education.

It was my experience as an adult piano student that rekindled my interest in issues of age and aging. I noticed that children were the focus of piano teaching. Although my teachers were supportive and mentored me in my efforts to become a teacher, I learned that piano was an activity for children. I remember the sting of attending my first piano performance exam and the administrator assuming that I was there for my child. I also remember being the only adult in a music theory classroom full of children. Additionally, I learned that adult and older adult piano students are not always welcome. Indeed, a man who studied with me told me that he had trouble finding a teacher who would accept adult students. My growing awareness of the lack of

acceptance of older people crept into my teaching and daily life as a university student, and I found myself referring to myself as "the old lady" as if to let people know that I was aware of the fact that I did not belong. Although I felt like an outsider, I was encouraged and supported by the models set by my teachers and mentors. These people shared stories of their own musical journeys, some of them also returning to piano and becoming teachers in middle adulthood. Their stories showed me possibilities and allowed me to imagine a similar path for myself.

As an older person with more life experience, I now feel better able to examine aging in the context of piano teaching and learning. However, I recognize that aging is a continuum and that my views of aging will likely change over time just as they have developed over the course of my life. Indeed Joan Erikson, who collaborated with her husband Erik Erikson on an eight-stage life cycle theory about human development, came to reevaluate the final stage of their theory as she herself experienced old age. The Eriksons developed their theory in their middle years, but Joan later rethought the eighth stage and old age. In a filmed interview, Erikson said that she and her husband were wrong about the eighth stage—that wisdom and integrity were not guaranteed in old age. Explaining that in middle age, they lacked the experience of later life, she said, "I feel as if we owe an apology … We hadn't been there and so we didn't know the difference" (Davidson Films, 1995).

1.3 The Thesis Outline

I began this dissertation with a brief description of the context of my study in piano teaching and learning in later life. I called for a more critical approach to researching and understanding aging with a focus on the experience of growing older and on the voices of older people themselves. I ended with a brief narrative of my own experience with piano, as well as my interest in aging. My narrative served to show my insider position as an older woman with experience in learning and teaching piano, as well as my education in gerontology and work experience with older people. To paraphrase Katz (2014), this "subjective dimension" means that I include myself in what I study and write about (p. 21).

In addition to a review of the relevant older adult music education and piano teaching and learning literature, the following chapter provides descriptions of the gerontology perspectives and theoretical frameworks that informed my research. I define key terms, *gerontology, age, aging*, and *ageism,* and describe mainstream and nonmainstream gerontology perspectives, while giving my own. I then introduce my theoretical frameworks: meaning and the serious leisure

perspective. I also discuss my decision to use these approaches, including how they were adapted and how they served my study. I end the chapter with a review of the research literature on older adult music education, especially piano teaching and learning literature. In particular, I examine the approach to age and aging in this literature and suggest that this literature might benefit from the addition of research using a feminist/critical gerontological perspective.

The third chapter is my plan of inquiry, including my perspective, research methodology, methods of data generation, approach to analysis, quality, and ethical considerations. I chose narrative inquiry for this interdisciplinary study, using the rivers of experience elicitation tool and semi-structured interviews to generate data from seven older adult piano students and teachers. Through narrative inquiry, I explored participants' experiences and perceptions about age and aging in relation to their musical lives, and considered the ways in which these experiences might affect piano participation. The chapter ends with a brief explanation of my approach to the presentation of the results of my inquiry.

The two chapters that follow contain the results of my inquiry: the first is a presentation of the participants' musical life stories, and the second provides my interpretation of the participants' stories in discussion with related literatures. In the first results chapter (4), I interpret and present each participant's musical life story, mainly in her own words. The participant life stories serve to provide examples of experiences of teaching and learning piano from a later life perspective. The focus is on individual stories and particular life experiences. In contrast, the second results chapter (5) provides my interpretation of the participants' experiences using meaning (Edmondson, 2015) and serious leisure (Stebbins, 2013, 2017, 2020b) frameworks. I describe three key aspects of meaning (connectedness, musical development, and understanding and wisdom) in discussion with related literature from gerontology, leisure, music and piano teaching and learning. In the chapter, the focus is on the participants' life stories as a collective, highlighting both their similarities and singularities.

In the concluding chapter, I summarize my research and discuss the results of my study in relation to my research question. I reflect on my experience of the study, while addressing the significance, contribution, limitations, and implications of the study for piano pedagogy and research.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Perspectives and Review of the Literature on Older Adult Music Education and Piano Pedagogy

In the previous chapter, I called for a move away from the dominant gerontology perspective of aging toward a more critical understanding and presentation of experiences of aging with regard to piano participation. I also suggested that the experiences of older people could inform piano teaching and learning. In this chapter, I situate my project in gerontology and discuss the literatures related to older adult music education and piano teaching and learning from a gerontological perspective. I begin with a brief overview of gerontology and the feminist gerontology perspective that guided my research. Next, I describe the theoretical frameworks that informed my analysis. Finally, I discuss related adult music and piano education research and my place in it.

2.1 Perspectives from Gerontology

Gerontology is the study of "old age and later life (however either are defined)" (de Medeiros, 2017, p. 1). *Age* can be defined simply as the length of time lived since birth (Baars, 2012b; Bytheway, 2011; World Health Organization, 2021). The World Health Organization (2021) defined *aging* as,

> the process of becoming older and represents the accumulation of changes over time, encompassing physical, psychological and social changes. The changes that constitute and influence ageing are complex. At a biological level, ageing is associated with the gradual accumulation of a wide variety of molecular and cellular damage. Over time, this damage leads to a gradual decrease in physiological reserves, an increased risk of many diseases, and a general decline in the capacity of the individual. Ultimately, it will result in death. (p. 163)

Given the source of the above definition of aging, the focus on biological aging is unsurprising. However, age is more than chronology, and aging is about more than biological change. *Age* and aging are also "about the experience of growing older" (Bytheway, 2011, p. 6). Although aging begins at birth, we tend to associate aging with old age. However, there is little agreement on what it means to be old. Various perspectives influence our understanding of older age, and although age is associated with biological changes, it "is also socially and culturally shaped" (World Health Organization, 2021, p. 163). Our views of aging are influenced by *ageism*, a term created in 1968 by the gerontologist Robert N. Butler.

Ageism refers to,

> the stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel), and discrimination (how we act) directed towards people on the basis of their age. It can be institutional, interpersonal or self-directed. Institutional ageism refers to the laws, rules, social norms, policies and practices of institutions that unfairly restrict opportunities and systematically disadvantage individuals because of their age. Interpersonal ageism arises in interactions between two or more individuals, while self-directed ageism occurs when ageism is internalized and turned against oneself. (World Health Organization, 2021, p. xv)

Ageism can be positive or negative, but positive ageism has been studied less (Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2018; S. R. Levy & Macdonald, 2016). Sheri Levy and Jamie Macdonald (2016) wrote, "An unintentional underemphasis on the study of positive views of aging and older persons is still problematic, resulting in an insufficient understanding of the actual range of views of aging and older persons" (p. 8). In addition, Lagacé and Lennox-Terrion (2019) suggested that the idea of positive ageism is contradictory: "Even when positive age-based stereotypes are conveyed, they still are stereotypes, which prevent the emergence of a realistic view of the aging process and the empowerment of older adults" (p. 617). Although ageism can be directed towards any age, my focus in this study is mainly on older age. Harmful effects of negative age stereotypes may include the occurrence of cognitive and physical challenges (B. Levy, 2009; B. R. Levy & Banaji, 2002), and self-criticism (Gullette, 2018; B. R. Levy, 2001). Internalized age stereotypes can negatively influence older peoples' views of other older people as well as of themselves (Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2017; B. R. Levy & Banaji, 2002).

2.1.1 Mainstream Gerontology

The focus of mainstream gerontology is on human physical, psychological, and social changes over the life course. Moreover, as Sasser and Moody (2018) wrote, "The largest body of research both within and outside of Gerontology related to exploring the questions "When does aging begin?" and, "What constitutes the aging process for all members of the human species?" focuses on biological aging" (p. 17). As discussed above, the study of old age and later life is dependent on how these concepts are defined, and is reflected in various gerontological perspectives. Unfortunately, age-related decline is the dominant view of the public, at least of the American public (Sweetland et al., 2017), and remains the focus of gerontology research,

especially in mainstream gerontology. Decline "describes the period in which mental and/or physical health begins to diminish" (de Medeiros, 2017, p. 11). De Medeiros (2017) wrote:

> It is worth noting that the decline view of aging, linked to physical and psychological change over time, has been and continues to be a prevailing view in the field, despite efforts to move away from it by focusing on concepts such as wisdom (Edmondson, 2009), resilience (Lipsitt & Demick, 2011), successful aging (Rowe & Kahn, 1997), progress narratives (Gullette, 1996), and others. (p. 5)

Notwithstanding de Medeiros's (2017) assessment that successful aging moves away from the decline view of aging, the concept of successful aging is not without criticism, including her own (see Rubinstein & de Medeiros, 2015).

Developed as an attempt to critique and move away from the association of age with decline, *successful aging* is perhaps the most influential concept in gerontology (Dillaway & Byrnes, 2009). De Medeiros (2017) cited Pressey and Simcoe (1950) for introducing the modern concept of successful aging in a large case study comparison of middle class, older "successful" and "problem cases" (Pressey & Simcoe, 1950, p. 168). While problem cases were not described, the authors concluded that the strongest indicator of the successful older person was "the active outgoing philosophy of life" (p. 175). Although other work was published on successful aging (Baltes & Baltes, 1993; Havighurst, 1961), it was Rowe and Kahn in the 1980s and 1990s who brought the theory to prominence again with their model of successful aging that encompassed three components: "low risk of disease and disease-related disability; maintenance of high mental and physical function; and continued engagement with life, which includes relations with others and productive activity, either paid or volunteered" (Rowe & Kahn, 2015, p. 593). There continue to be many critiques of Rowe and Kahn's model (see especially Calasanti & King, 2021; Katz & Calasanti, 2015; and Martinson & Berridge, 2015 for a systematic review). Critical perspectives related to the successful aging framework argued against the "wide-spread notion of ageing as a problematic condition" (Bülow & Söderqvist, 2014, p. 147) and underscored "the paradox of sometimes unintentionally producing negative consequences by having too much emphasis on 'good health' and 'productivity'" (Bülow & Söderqvist, 2014, p. 146). In their critique of "successful aging," Katz and Calasanti (2015) encouraged continued debate and questioning, suspicion of "the popular appeal of positive discourses," and reflection "to see clearly which interests are served and knowledges mobilized by the ideas we espouse" (p. 31).

Although I appreciate the intention and significance of the successful aging model, I agree with the critiques that point out ageism in successful aging models. I prefer alternative models of successful aging, such as *harmonious aging*, which "stresses the complementary coexistence of body and mind, harmonious family and social relationships, and a balanced outlook that appreciates both opportunities and challenges in old age" (Liang & Luo, 2012, p. 333).

While the focus of mainstream gerontology is on theories of aging—"how and why aging happens" (de Medeiros, 2017, p. 42), my focus is on understanding experiences of later life and therefore other gerontology perspectives are better suited to my approach to research. Next, I describe nonmainstream gerontology, created from the overlapping approaches of critical, cultural, feminist, and humanistic gerontology.

2.1.2 Nonmainstream Gerontology

In contrast to mainstream gerontology, the attention of nonmainstream gerontology (critical, cultural, feminist, and humanistic) is more on human *experiences* of aging over the life course. While nonmainstream approaches to gerontology have developed separately from the mainstream and from each other, they are nevertheless overlapping. For example, feminist gerontology, is described by Hooyman et al. (2002) as integrating critical gerontology, feminist, and life course approaches. They wrote, "Feminist gerontology provides a conceptual base from which to critique society's response to aging women and men, document the diversity of their voices, and envision a social agenda where diversity is valued" (p. 5).

Critical gerontology is predominant in nonmainstream gerontology, and is defined by Katz (2015) as "an interdisciplinary sub-field consisting mostly of humanities and social science scholars who challenge the assumptions of mainstream gerontology and biomedical models of ageing." (p. 30). This critical perspective is so named by gerontologists who embrace a broader view of gerontology (see especially, Baars & Phillipson, 20013; M. B. Holstein & Minkler, 2007; Katz, 2005; Twigg & Martin, 2015). Critical gerontology grew out of Western political and economic crises during the 1970s and 1980s—structural mechanisms that negatively affected the lives of older people through reductions to social services and "labelling of older people as a 'burden' and 'cost' to society" (Phillipson, 2007, p. vii). The 1990s brought influences from the humanities that included feminism and postmodernism (see especially Ray, 1996, 1999) and life history perspectives, and a focus on meaning and on "the importance of older people as agents within gerontology" (Phillipson, 2007, p. vii). Baars and Phillipson (2013) wrote about

the interconnection between *critical gerontology* as the analysis of structural mechanisms "such as social inequality," and *humanistic gerontology* as "the interpretation and articulation of meaning in later life" (p. 1).

Whatever the conception of gerontology, I agree with Bytheway (2000) that the task is "to work towards a better understanding of how we age, how we make sense of our experience of ageing, and how we relate to, and work with, people who may be older (and who may be younger) than ourselves" (p. 788). Finally, the need for research and practice that focusses on growing older, from the perspective of older people, is expressed by Katz (2014) who observed, "In far too many of our universities and learning centers, aging and the lifecourse are marginal concerns (outside of medical faculties)" (pp. 17–18). One goal of my research is to bring aging and the life course from marginal to central concerns.

2.2 Theoretical Frameworks

My study was informed by two theoretical frameworks, meaning and serious leisure. From the participants' musical life stories, I learned about the ways in which the women in my study understood and found meaning in lifelong piano participation. I initially thought that my interpretation of the data fit best within *wisdom* frameworks from psychology (especially Peterson & Seligman, 2004), and I followed this path for a time. One motivation for my project was to provide an alternative narrative to that which is dominant in gerontology and adult piano education literature (i.e., successful aging). However, much of the wisdom literature relevant to my research comes from the field of positive psychology, which, like successful aging research, is out of step with my critical perspective. The boundaries of wisdom frameworks caused me to feel an increasing desire to try to 'fit' my data to the wisdom literature in positive psychology, an impulse at odds with my perspective. In addition to wisdom theory, I considered theories on topics that I had identified, such as perseverance (especially Duckworth et al.'s, 2007 work on grit), and Erik Erikson's concept of the stages of human development, especially the work done with his wife Joan (Erikson & Erikson, 1998). It was only after an extended period of reading, analyzing, and 'testing' of different theories against my data that I decided to focus on Edmondson's (2015) approaches to meaning. Although, like wisdom theory, much of the meaning literature is also based in positive psychology (e.g., Martela & Steger, 2016), Edmondson's critical approach to meaning was broader, and included wisdom, possibly due to her social science background and research interests. Edmondson (2015) noted that her approach

to meaning was not prescriptive, but involved "forms of meaningfulness ascribed to older people in relevant literature" (p. 102). This approach to wisdom and meaning in life fit better with my perspective and the results of my interpretation of the data.

Although Edmondson's (2015) approach to meaning allowed me to describe my interpretation of my data in terms of wisdom and meaningfulness, I was working with what initially seemed like a heterogeneous mixture of piano- and age-related topics. In my search to make sense of this hodgepodge, I came upon Robert Stebbins's (2013, 2017, 2020b) work about serious leisure. Stebbins's framework allowed me to draw together and organize the outcome of my analysis coherently. For example, I had initially decided to interview older piano students and teachers because I thought that they might have dissimilar views of aging and piano teaching and learning. However, I found that their views, although different, were not as different as I had expected them to be, leading me to think more deeply about the relationship between student and teacher. With its description of students and teachers in terms of a continuum of involvement, the serious leisure perspective allowed me to see the piano student/teacher relationship in a new way with regard to aging and meaning. These theoretical frameworks are described next.

2.2.1 Meaning

As with many difficult concepts, there is no universal definition of *meaning* or *meaningfulness.* I begin with a clarification. My concern in this research was not the philosophical question—meaning *of* life, but rather —meaning *in* life and the meanings attached to older age. Rudd et al., (2019) explained, "meaning in life (a subjective judgment regarding how people feel about their lives) is conceptually distinct from the meaning *of* life, which refers to the broader existential purpose people attribute to the world or to human life more generally" (p. 682). Research about meaning is dependent on the focus—in psychology, the focus is sometimes on well-being, and meaning is associated with purpose. In their review of research on time and meaning, Rudd et al. (2019) understand meaning in life by examining meaning through a lens of time: "three dimensions of meaning (purpose, mattering, and comprehension)" and "three levels of time (momentary, day-to-day, and lifetime)" (p. 680). As just mentioned, Rudd et al. (2019) categorised three dimensions of meaning: purpose, mattering, and comprehension. The authors suggested that meaning could be found in *purpose*, that is, "through connecting the present self to the self at different points in time and pursuing personal growth" (p. 686). The purpose dimension of meaning is related to motivation (Martela & Steger, 2016) and perseverance

(Stebbins, 2020b), a topic discussed in the following section on the serious leisure perspective. The second dimension of meaning is *mattering*, or what Martela and Steger (2016) call significance. Based on their reading of the literature, Rudd et al., (2019) suggested, "One primary means of facilitating a sense of mattering is connecting to others" (p. 686). A third dimension of meaning is *comprehension*, also called coherence (Martela & Steger, 2016). Martela and Steger (2016) referred to this dimension as "making sense of one's experiences in life" (p. 533). The authors also saw a distinction between *meaning* and *meaningfulness*, that is, *meaning* refers to sense making, and *meaningfulness* denotes the amount of significance that something has for a person. They also clarified the distinction in philosophical terms; meaning as coherence is "an *epistemic* notion, it is about what we know, whereas meaningfulness as significance and purpose is an *ethical* notion, it is about what we value in evaluative and motivational terms" (Martela & Steger, 2016, p. 536).

Similar to Martela and Steger's (2016) and Rudd et al.'s (2019) concepts of meaning, is Edmondson's (2015) approach to meaning. Ricca Edmondson was a social scientist and specialist in interdisciplinary and intercultural approaches to life-course meaning and wisdom. In her 2015 book, *Ageing, Insight and Wisdom: Meaning and Practice across the Lifecourse*, Edmondson presented "a triad of approaches to meaning" (p. 102). There she "disentangled" several meanings of *meaning* and "its associated insights" as found in the gerontology literature (p. 102). She organized nine meanings of meaning into three groups, which I have presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Edmondson's Triad of Approaches to Meaningfulness and Meaning

Connectedness	**Life course Development through Time**	**Understanding or Wisdom**
1) *Pointful* connectedness	4) Personal development; Identity	7) Existence as a source of insight for others (socially symbolic)
2) Spiritual connectedness	5) Having pride or otherwise in the life course	8) Insight about the human condition
3) Moral connectedness	6) Generational; orientation to a common future	9) Wisdom

Edmondson based her nine meanings of meaning on gerontology literature and therefore covered a wide variety of approaches to meaning. However, Edmondson took a different approach to the

psychological examination of meaning which sometimes focuses on well-being. She wrote, "these authors' main interest is distinguishing between searching for meaning and feeling that one has attained it, and examining the association of either with measures of psychological well-being" (p. 118) and is based on the assumption that research participants can verbalize this, sometimes in questionnaires. Edmondson pointed out that knowledge about meaning in life is not always so easily accessible, especially in life-course studies—she cautioned researchers not to make assumptions that their own expectations "or communicative conventions normally neatly match those of the people whose lives they are examining" (p. 119). This nuanced approach made Edmondson's meaning framework especially useful for the narrative life story approach in my study.

I adapted Edmondson's framework for my study using only the versions of meaning that were relevant to my interpretation of my study data. I did not address spiritual or moral connectedness in my study, nor were these topics prevalent in my data, so these categories of meaning were omitted. Additionally, in the category of life course development, I did not specifically address participant evaluation of the life course, what Edmondson called "the feelings of having pride or otherwise" (p. 108). This is a topic that might be better addressed in reminiscence and life review (de Medeiros, 2014). Nor did I seek or find "the place of individuals … within the flow of generations, or in the flow of humanity through time" (p. 108), what Erikson et al. (1986) called generativity, because my study examined aging in relation to a specific part of life, not to the life course in general. The five meanings of meaning that were used in my study are pointful connectedness, personal development, existence as a source of insight, insight about the human condition, and wisdom, which are briefly described next.

Edmondson's (2015) first group of meanings of meaning is about connectedness. My focus in this group was on pointful connectedness, which can signify connecting to other people, things, or activities. About meaningful activities, Edmondson used the term *pointful* "to underline the fact that the activities that are significant to people can sometimes be of modest proportions … but they are activities and practices that make complete sense to the individuals concerned" (p. 98). Edmondson noted that although pointfulness is currently understudied and can "easily be under-estimated," for ancient philosophers this sense of living in the moment was "intimately linked to a feeling of connectedness to the world, as well as to the art of living" (Edmondson, 2015, p. 103). Edmondson's second group of meanings of meaning concerns

"issues connected to the lifecourse as it develops through time" (p. 102). Of interest for my study was her fourth meaning, which relates to personal development and identity, although identity as it relates to development was not part of my study. On this topic, Edmondson mentioned learning from life and facing challenges. The third group of meanings of meaning is concerned with "wisdom and understanding the human condition" (Edmondson, 2015, p. 102). The first sense of meaning in this group (the seventh meaning) refers to the meanings that older people themselves convey to others through the existence of their own life courses. This sense of meaning—older people as representations of aging—was the focus of Chapter 4 of my thesis where I present the participants' life stories. Edmondson's eighth and ninth meanings have to do with understanding of the human condition and with wisdom. Edmondson (2015) wrote,

> 'Understanding the human condition' may refer to a kind of lifetime experience that is relatively low key: knowing how to encourage people to perform a task effectively, or knowing when to expect others to keep their promises, and how to react if they do not. It is also associated with lifetime-related questions such as how much one can expect to achieve during the course of one's life, or what sorts of impact it is possible to make on the public world. It includes questions about how we should regard the past and the authority or otherwise of tradition, how possible it is to live an authentic life, what is of permanent value and what is worth investing effort in. (p. 112)

My focus was subjective meaning—what is meaningful to the person themselves—not searching for meaning, but "the experiencing and thus the *presence* of" meaning (Martela & Steger, 2016, p. 542). I modified Edmondson's (2015) approaches to meaning to relate specifically to my research (i.e., musical connectedness, musical development, and understanding and wisdom).

2.2.2 The Serious Leisure Perspective

The *serious leisure perspective* (SLP) was conceived and developed by the sociologist Robert Stebbins. The SLP is a theoretical framework that synthesizes three forms of leisure: *serious pursuits*, casual leisure, and project-based leisure (Stebbins, 2020b). I drew from only the serious pursuits form of Stebbins's SLP to structure parts of my discussion about meaning and aging for the piano student and teacher participants in this study. Therefore, I was not as concerned with the SLP as theory (for critiques and developments see Gallant et al., 2013; M. Lamont et al., 2015; Veal, 2021). With regard to its perspective, Stebbins (2020a) placed his SLP within positive sociology, which, like positive psychology and gerontology concepts such as successful

aging, focuses on positive aspects of life ("rewarding, satisfying, and sometimes even fulfilling" p. 13). However, Stebbins also argued that in becoming positive, sociology "should certainly not abandon its long-standing interest in trying to understand and solve life's many difficult social problems, its disarticulations" (p. 16). That includes personal conditions (such as health, wealth, marital status, level of education, etc.) and social conditions such as "historical forces, type of government, local and national culture, gender stereotype," (p. 15).

Serious pursuits include serious leisure and devotee work. *Serious leisure* is "the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist or volunteer activity sufficiently substantial, interesting and fulfilling for the participant to find a (leisure) career there acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge and experience" (Elkington & Stebbins, 2014, p. 4). *Devotee work* is "serious leisure for which the worker gets paid and which amounts to a significant part or all of a livelihood" (Stebbins, 2020b, p. 24). This work "is activity in which participants feel a powerful devotion, or strong, positive attachment, to a form of self-enhancing work" (Elkington & Stebbins, 2014, p. 4). Stebbins considered "client-centered professions" such as teaching to be devotee work (Stebbins, 2020b, p. 24).

Stebbins (2020b) proposed six qualities that characterize serious leisure and devotee work: *perseverance*, the opportunity to follow a leisure *career*, personal *effort*, *benefits* (self-actualization, self-enrichment, self-expression, self-fulfillment, regeneration of self, feelings of accomplishment, enhancement of self-image, social interaction and sense of belonging, and lasting physical products of the activity); a unique *ethos* of the leisure community, and a distinctive *identity*. In addition, Stebbins included the benefit "self-gratification, or pure fun," which is shared with participants of casual leisure (Stebbins, 2020b, p. 26). Stebbins (2017) wrote about the effort required of participants in serious pursuits, "significant personal *effort* using their specially acquired *knowledge*, *training*, *experience*, or *skill*, and, indeed at times, all four" (p. 140). It is assumed here that, as with any serious pursuit, piano playing requires significant effort. On identity, Elkington and Stebbins (2014) wrote, "participants in serious leisure tend to identify strongly with their chosen pursuits" (p. 19), and do so in a way that "is evident to their parents, partners, and close friends" (Stebbins, 2017, p. 142).

The serious leisure perspective provided me a way of understanding activities, like piano playing, that attract people "for the inherent satisfaction or fulfilment those activities can bring"

(Elkington & Stebbins, 2014, p. 4), and is referenced briefly in empirical piano pedagogy literature (Jutras 2006; Kang, 2017; Taylor 2010a). The concept of serious leisure has been explored in the field of music (see Hallam et al., 2017; Mantie, 2022; Mantie et al., 2021; Mantie & Smith, 2017, including a chapter by Stebbins; Pike 2021; Stebbins, 1992, 2013). Stebbins (2020b) stated that most of the research about the SLP and aging has a focus on "later life satisfaction and well being" (p. 186), which is similar to the focus of the piano education research about adults. To my knowledge, there is no research that focuses on lifelong piano teaching or learning in relation to the SLP.

Stebbins's serious leisure perspective was compatible with Edmondson's meaning framework and gave it an additional dimension that could be adapted to the narrow context of piano education. The SLP provided terminology, connections, and organization for the disparate topics about piano teaching and learning that arose from my research. I did not choose the SLP for its theory; therefore, I was not "testing" my results against the SLP. However, together with the experiences of the participants, the literature about teaching music and piano, the SLP influenced my thinking about the participants' experiences, especially with regard to age, aging, and musical development. I began to think more about the relationship between age and level of involvement and to wonder whether age matters in piano learning. Despite finding the SLP meaningful from a theoretical perspective, it provided only a part of the story about aging and piano teaching and learning. For example, although the SLP featured the quality of perseverance, which supported this theme in my data, it did not contribute much to the topic of understanding and wisdom.

I chose Stebbins's serious leisure perspective to support Edmondson's meaning framework, especially in the area of musical development. Edmondson's meanings of meaning were most relevant in the areas of pointful connectedness, personal development, and understanding and wisdom. Although I drew from only the meanings of meaning that were prominent in my data, the framework allowed me to take a more open approach to considering topics such as wisdom. For a time, I seriously considered the wisdom literature as the best way to frame my results, but ultimately I found it to be too prescriptive for interpreting musical life stories. Although wisdom theory (especially Peterson & Seligman, 2004) informed my analysis, the messy nature of my data required a more inclusive approach, which I found in Edmondson's meaning framework. Peterson and Seligman's (2004) approach to wisdom focused on the

classification of character strengths and virtues, whereas Edmondson (2015) analyzed "some of the key ways in which meaning and wisdom are treated in gerontology, tracing a range of approaches to talking about meaning that highlight its significance and that of older people's insights and behaviour" (p. 1). Edmondson's focus on multiple approaches to talking about meaning worked better for a narrative inquiry about aging and piano participation over the life course.

I drew only from parts of the meaning and serious leisure frameworks, and both were adapted for the context of my study. However, taken together, the two frameworks allowed for a more coherent and nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences of aging and piano teaching and learning.

In the following section, I discuss adult music, and especially piano, education literature from a gerontology perspective. Although my focus was on piano teaching and learning, I included relevant music education literature in my discussion as needed.

2.3 Literature Review: Older Adult Music Education and Piano Pedagogy

Unlike much discussion of related literature where the emphasis is on the research outcomes found in the literature, my interest is in the gerontological aspect of the research literature about music, specifically piano teaching and learning in later life. Therefore, my discussion of the literature may include research outcomes, but I am also interested in the researcher's views of aging from my perspective in nonmainstream gerontology.

In the context of my study about experiences of aging and piano participation, *music education* refers to instrumental and vocal music performance, learning, and teaching in individual or group studio lessons or community settings. Although some music education studies include vocal music, I excluded from my research literature that is only about vocal music participation because singing is different from playing piano in significant ways. While music making for pianists is mediated through a musical instrument,

> The singer is her own instrument; the instrument is human, and therefore more sensitive and vulnerable than others, to change; the instrument’s mechanical apparatus is largely hidden from view; and the art of singing typically involves, in addition to musical and technical issues, a poetic or dramatic text which must be understood, internalised and communicated. (Burwell, 2006, p. 345)

My research is about *piano pedagogy,* which is a subdivision of music education referring to "a field of study that examines issues relating to the intersection of performance training and education, that is, it encompasses any topic relating to piano teaching and learning" (Crappell, 2019, p. 22). Piano is the central instrument for most older students (Bowles, 1991; Flowers & Murphy, 2001; Jutras, 2006; Reifinger, 2016) and music teachers (Upitis et al., 2017). The context of my research was independent (private studio teaching) individual (one-to-one) piano instruction. The individual lesson is the traditional setting for Western classical instrumental study (Creech & Gaunt, 2012), including piano study (Cooper, 2001; Stolz, 2019). Stolz (2019) wrote, "The teacher-student relationship fundamental to the study of piano transpires within the arena of the piano lesson … Despite changes over time, the one-on-one lesson remains the pillar of piano teaching" (p. 26).

Within the literature on adult music education, research about music teachers is limited, and is not focused on aging. Music teachers have been the subjects of studies about preservice teaching experience with adults (Baughman & Baumgartner, 2018), or older adults (Perkins et al., 2015; Tsugawa, 2021), teaching adult beginners (Rohwer, 2005), teaching older adults versus youths (Coffman, 2009), the benefits and challenges of teaching older people (Hallam et al., 2016), teaching approaches and adult student needs (Leahy & Smith, 2021), teaching as a second career (Taylor & Hallam, 2011), and the characteristics of music teachers of adults (Bowles, 2010). Although outside of *adult* music education, a study by Townshend (2024) tangentially addressed aging in an investigation of musician-teacher identity. In his autoethnographic narrative, written as the author faced retirement, Townshend reflected on his 40 years of service as a life-long musician-teacher. He discussed his musician-teacher identity chronologically using age and musical roles as sub-headings: Adolescence; Performance decade; The thirties—identity confusion; and The forties—cultural change impacting self-concept. However, aging was not the focus of the study, but rather a way of organizing the discussion of musician-teacher identity over the life course.

Of the literature on piano teachers, none highlights the older piano teacher or aging, even though teachers are often older people. While existing research contributes to our knowledge about adult music education and piano pedagogy, a research focus on teacher aging is missing. The educational historian Rousmaniere (2021) called for a consideration of age in research about teachers. In an essay about older women teachers she wrote, "The experience of ageing is

everywhere, once you begin looking for it, but conspicuously absent in the histories that we write" (p. 16). In addition, because the majority of music teachers are women, the case of teachers highlights the intersectionality of age and gender prejudice; i.e., ageism and sexism. This intersection is discussed in a blog post by The Cross-Eyed Pianist (Wilson, 2014). The post reports on a survey that Wilson conducted in which she asked the question, "When you think of the typical private piano teacher, who teaches at home, what image immediately comes to mind?" (Wilson, 2014, para. 1). Wilson was troubled by the mostly negative and somewhat dismissive responses given by respondents who were mainly independent piano teachers themselves. Wilson received responses such as "Probably an older, rather eccentric female;" and "Old lady next door, cardigan, cats, musical erasers." (Wilson, 2014, penultimate section). The music education scholar Elizabeth Gould (1992) wrote, "Clearly, our most important goal is to create a profession that is musically and educationally responsible as well as socially inclusive, and is based on our own education and experience as teachers in music." (p. 18). One way of addressing issues of bias such as ageism is to increase knowledge about and contact with older people (Lytle & Levy, 2019).

2.3.1 Age, Aging, and Representations of Older People in the Music Learning Literature

As demonstrated in a recent content analysis of a music education journal by Silvey et al., (2019), age is skewed towards childhood in music education, and music learning and development for older people is under researched. Most programs and related research in music education focus on children and adolescents in school settings, while overlooking adults. However, outside of the school music context, in community music literature, much research concentrates on adults (Rohwer, 2018).

Despite the longstanding interest of adults in taking piano lessons—adults have been learning piano since its invention—in piano teaching, the emphasis is on children and there is a reluctance by some teachers to teach adults (Jutras, 2006; Roulston, 2010b). A recent review of the literature on group piano lessons for all ages by Morrison (2023) reported little about adult learners compared to collegiate and K–12 group piano classes, further demonstrating the lack of research in older age groups. This orientation to children is so pronounced that references to *older* beginners in piano teaching materials indicate older children, not adults. For example, a popular method book series subtitled "For the Older Beginner" is written, not for adults, but for "beginner students ages 11 and up" (Faber & Faber, 1998). This orientation towards childhood is

the same in piano teaching and learning research; for example, a recent study explored teaching materials and practices used with *older* beginner piano students—however, the *older* students were not adults, but children ages 12–17 (Burrows & Brown, 2020).

Of the small amount of research literature about adult or older adult piano students, some is not centred on age, aging, or gerontology but is understandably focused on topics associated with piano participation and instruction. For example, Cooper (2001) studied adults' (mean age 47) perceptions of piano study with regard to long-term commitment to piano participation, and Jutras (2006) investigated self-reported benefits of adult (age 24–94) piano study. Haddon (2017) and Wristen (2006) studied the format of group lessons for adults but neither researcher commented on age related topics, although some study participants were older adults. Pedagogy related studies investigated piano practice strategy (Bugos & High, 2009), and the use of technology (Pike, 2011).

Other piano pedagogy research does address aging but does not take a gerontological approach. For example, Taylor (2010a, 2010b, 2011) and Taylor & Hallam (2008) investigated musical identity construction and self-fulfilment in older keyboard students. However, although these studies involved older students and lifelong musical experience, the focus was not on gerontology or their age as such, but was on topics such as musical identity and self-fulfilment. One could argue that a gerontology perspective is not needed for all research about older people and piano teaching and learning, especially in cases where the focus is unrelated, such as topics specific to piano teaching and learning. However, one could also argue that a gerontology approach, or at least an awareness of gerontology perspectives might be beneficial in research that involves age and aging in research on older adult piano teaching and learning.

While there is an overall lack of focus in the research literature on *adult* music education, and *adult* piano pedagogy (Jutras, 2006), much of the extant research is focused on the *older adult* learner (Bowles, 2010), presumably because many adult music learners are older (Bowles, 2010; Lane, 2019). The terms *adult* and *older adult* are loosely defined in the adult music education literature (Laes & Creech, 2023); for example, Bowles (2010) chose to leave her teacher participants "free to self-define the term *adult music learners*" (p. 53). An *older adult* student may refer to the age or stage of life, for example a person 50 or more years of age (McQueen et al., 2013). Bowles (2010) suggested that older adults were "most consistently referred to as adults of retirement age and beyond in the literature" (p. 50). Chronological age is

difficult to describe in any meaningful way. This difficulty can also be seen in the piano pedagogy literature, where the ages of older adult study participants vary widely. For example, the age of participants may be described as 60–85 years (Bugos et al., 2016; Bugos & High, 2009), 50–72 years (Li & Southcott, 2015), 65–95 years (Pike, 2011), 60–85 years (Seinfeld et al., 2013), and "mature age" may mean age 55 years or more (Taylor, 2011). Occasionally, there is no mention of chronological age, nor a distinction made between adults and older adults (Coutts, 2019).

While age is one way of representing older people, there are other ways of talking about age, aging, and older people that can be more or less ageist. The gerontologist Bytheway (2000) suggested,

> a relativist vocabulary rather than an absolutist one: older people not elderly people, and later life and older age rather than old age … We are not proposing 'older people' as a euphemism for 'elderly people' or 'the aged'. Rather we want to be able to draw upon a more inclusive vocabulary, one which does not divide life up into bite-size stages and the population into box-like categories. (p. 788)

Many different terms are used to describe older people in the older adult music education and piano pedagogy literature. For example, Li and Southcott (2015) used the preferred term *older* (*older people, older adults, older students*) that presents age as neutral and relative. However, they also used the term *third agers* for people "who have been described as being *the 'well elderly'* [emphasis added]" (p. 317), terms and phrases that are considered ageist by those who advise on bias-free language[1]. It is possible, or even likely, that the authors used the less acceptable terms as a writing style (i.e., using synonyms to avoid boring the reader). This is an ageism problem with a relatively easy solution as there are resources available for using bias-free language. However, this type of ageism may be the result of unconscious bias, thereby making it difficult to recognize and correct. Rather than unconscious bias, sometimes ageist language is used, albeit misguidedly, out of respect or deference to a population, such as the use of the term *senior citizen* by Fung and Lehmberg (2016). In the preface to their book *Music for Life: Music Participation and Quality of Life of Senior Citizens* the authors wrote, "we advocate the use of the term 'senior citizens' to pay due respect to those who are often referred to as older adults,

[1] See for example the American Psychological Association (2020) and The Frameworks Institute https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/

elderly persons, or persons in late adulthood" (p. viii). Pike (2011) also used the term *senior citizen* as well and *third-aged adults* to refer to the participants of her study, who were between 65–95 years. For example, one might wonder why Pike mentioned the term *active* in her description of her study context, which was "an outreach program for *active* [emphasis added] senior citizens (third-age) who were wishing to study piano" (p. 118) and described a participant as "the oldest member of the ensemble" (p. 121) without mentioning why the fact of the participant's age status might be relevant. Whatever the intention, sometimes the language used for referring to older people is problematic, especially when the language used serves to "other" some people. Such examples of ageist language can be seen in a doctoral dissertation by Tahara (2015) about teaching keyboard improvisation to older adults. Tahara wrote about one student participant,

> Although she was the oldest person in the class, Patty was young at heart and quickly gained a reputation as the class entertainer. She had a youthful sense of humour and regularly told jokes that made the class burst out into laughter. (p. 88)

This is an example of talk about age that is overtly ageist—what does it mean to say that a person is the *oldest* person in the class but *young at heart*? What is a *youthful* sense of humour? Another example of ageism, and possibly ableism, is Tahara's mention of the challenges faced by the piano students. Tahara mentioned mobility challenges, writing that one student used a walker and one used a cane. One might wonder how this is relevant for piano study, which involves sitting on a piano bench or stool, not standing or walking. In contrast, an article about instrumental music teachers' development of feedback across the lifespan by de Bruin (2024) was notable for its unusual framing of age and aging. While the research was not about aging as such, de Bruin used knowledge categories rather than age to frame his discussion of the teachers' development: "novice (1–5 years' experience)," "developing (5–10 years' experience)," and "expert teachers (more than 10 years teaching experience)" (p. 35). As in gerontology, most researchers in the field of adult music and piano pedagogy are probably not overtly ageist or they would study a different topic. Indeed, there is a lot of advocacy in the research about adult music and piano pedagogy. Even with my knowledge, experience, and hyperawareness about age and aging issues, I continue to catch myself having ageist thoughts or saying ageist things. We may all say ageist things at times about others and ourselves, which is why awareness and education about aging and ageism is so important.

2.3.2 Mainstream Gerontology Perspectives in the Music Learning Literature

In his review of the research literature on music performance learning in older age, Reifinger (2016) found that "music performance skills can be developed and maintained even in later adulthood" (p. 217). Despite such positive knowledge about older adult music performance and learning ability, the mainstream decline view of aging is evident in the music education literature about age. Because aging is often seen as a problem to solve, interventions are sought. Unsurprisingly, of the research literature about age in adult music education and piano teaching and learning, much concerns the health benefits of music participation. For a recent systematic review and meta-analysis of 13 studies about the effects of musical instrument training on intelligence and executive functions in healthy older adults, see Rogers and Metzler-Baddeley (2024). Piano is the focus of several studies by the main research group in the field of cognitive health benefits of musical instrument learning, Bugos and colleagues (Bugos & Kochar, 2017; Bugos, Kochar, et al., 2016; Bugos, Lesiuk, et al., 2021; Bugos, Perlstein, et al., 2007, Bugos & Wang, 2022; Hudak et al., 2019) all investigating health benefits of piano learning, sometimes called "piano training." Most recently, Bugos and Wang (2022) conducted a randomized controlled trial demonstrating that piano training enhanced executive functions and psychosocial outcomes for older people. Other studies about the health benefits of piano learning examined cognition (Jünemann, Engels, et al., 2023; Jünemann, Marie, et al., 2022; Marie et al., 2023; Worschech et al., 2023) auditory processing and cognition (Lister et al., 2023) and hearing (Zendel et al., 2019). Another recent study about aging and playing musical instruments, including piano, by Vetere et al. (2024) received a lot of coverage in the news media, demonstrating the popularity of the relationship between music, health, and aging. With regard to piano, the researchers found that playing piano was strongly associated with better working memory.

While the meaning of health is easily understood, well-being is less easily defined. In the field of aging and health, Steptoe et al. (2014) described *subjective well-being* as having three aspects: "evaluative wellbeing (or life satisfaction), hedonic wellbeing (feelings of happiness, sadness, anger, stress, and pain), and eudemonic wellbeing (sense of purpose and meaning in life)" (p. 1). In a recent review of articles about music, health, and well-being in the *International Journal of Community Music*, McArton and Mantie (2023) found a "lack of coherence in the use of health-related terms and concepts … With a few notable exceptions, health and well-being are

rarely operationalized" (p. 74). I also found this to be true in the adult music and piano learning literature. In the music education literature, the term *well-being* is much used by Hays and Minichiello (2005), but left undefined. Both terms *well-being* and *subjective well-being* are used by Li and Southcott (2015) and Seinfeld et al. (2013), but also left undefined. However, *subjective well-being* is defined in some detail by Perkins and Williamon (2014) and they referred to "psychological functioning and experience" and "how people think about, feel about and generally assess their lives" (p. 551). However *well-being* is defined, or not, and however benevolent, the focus on health and well-being benefits can promote a decline view of aging—that older age is a problem needing fixing.

The influential, but ageist gerontology concept of successful aging is sometimes used in the older adult music education and piano pedagogy literature. In his article about music and quality of life for older people, Coffman (2002) included successful aging in his list of "several concepts that have been used interchangeably with the term quality of life, including life satisfaction, meaning of life, meaning in life, sense of purpose, successful aging, well-being (mental, emotional, social, spiritual), and wellness" (p. 76). In addition, gerontologists Katz and Calasanti (2015) noted terms affiliated with successful aging as, "active," "effective," "healthy," "independent," "optimal," "positive," and "productive aging" (p. 26). In the introduction to his study about teachers of older adult musical instrument learners, Coffman (2009) described successful aging as an optimistic view of aging that demonstrates how contemporary American society "is embracing the notion that older adults have much to contribute" (p. 227). However, Coffman seemed to miss the gerontological critique of successful aging. He cited the title of the cultural critic Margaret Gullette's (1997) book *Declining to Decline*, to illustrate "this emerging view … that embodies determination and hope" (p. 227) while missing the fact that Gullette is a critic of the successful aging concept and its associated terms such as positive aging (see Gullette, 2003, for an example that predates Coffman's article).

The successful aging perspective has obvious relevance for health-related research, and is represented in two main research groups in the field of adult music education, Bugos and colleagues, as mentioned previously, and Hallam and colleagues with the Music for Life project. The group led by Bugos generally study the health benefits of piano instruction; for example, Bugos and Wang (2022) investigated the effects of piano training on cognitive performance, psychosocial well-being, and physiological stress and immune-function, in older adults. They

had somewhat mixed results, but were able to conclude that "Piano training in a rigorous manualized program may be a beneficial cognitive intervention for adults to maintain cognitive function" (p. 1634). With her concluding comment in another study that sought to promote successful aging, Bugos (2014) strengthened the association of the successful aging concept with music participation in later life, "if older adults are to engage in music making and support music programs, they must perceive that music contributes to successful aging" (p. 33). In their Music for Life project, Hallam and Creech (2017) found well-being benefits of music participation for older people. They wrote of their work, "there is a growing interest in activities that may promote *active aging* supporting a high *quality of life*, *independence*, and competence [emphasis added]. Music making clearly has the potential to achieve this" (p. 247). A successful aging framework was also used by Kruse (2021) in his study about older people, reminiscence, and music participation. Similarly, a positive aging model was used to investigate the meaning of music in the lives of older people by Hays and Minichiello (2005). Li and Southcott (2015) also framed their study about the meaning of learning piano in the lives of older Chinese people in the context of well-being and positive aging. While the work to promote health and well-being through music participation is welcome, the views of aging that are sometimes evident in these studies can be limiting and risk promoting negative stereotypes of older people.

Zerubavel (1996) described the preference for homogeneous classifications, "we … carve social clusters in our minds by regarding all cluster members as similar and ignoring all differences among them" (p. 423). Homogeneous classifications tend to stereotype people (Bytheway, 2011). Despite the lack of evidence to support misconceptions about older adult music learners, negative stereotypes persist. Hallam et al. (2016) recommended the “need to be aware of and challenge the myths about older learners … that they comprise a homogeneous group … are characterized by decrepitude and diminishing capability, and that they become increasingly dependent on others” (p. 20). As stated earlier, negative age stereotypes can influence older peoples’ views of other older people as well as of themselves, and may therefore influence their music learning or teaching. Unfortunately, the view expressed by Hallam et al. (2016) is relatively uncommon in the adult music education literature, although this is changing. While critical perspectives of aging exist in gerontology and adult music education, they are not as prominent.

2.3.3 Nonmainstream Gerontology Perspectives in the Music Learning Literature

Nonmainstream perspectives expand views of aging to foreground the aging experiences of older people as informed by older people themselves. McQueen et al. (2013) wrote, "Normative assumptions about what constitutes good teaching and what is presumed to be the 'nature' of older learners demand a more critical approach to leading activities" (p. 375). Although critical views of aging are not dominant in gerontology, older adult music education, or piano pedagogy, they do exist. Sometimes both mainstream and nonmainstream gerontology perspectives coexist in music education and piano pedagogy research. For example, Li and Southcott (2015) discussed mainstream gerontology topics of well-being, active aging, successful aging, and positive aging; and the results of their study about piano learning for older Chinese people demonstrated the contribution of piano learning to emotional and physical well-being (along with opportunities for lifelong learning and performance). However, Li and Southcott (2015) did not focus on mainstream concepts. Instead they used a qualitative case study design to explore meaning, and how older pianists and their teachers experience music learning, and "how attitudes towards this learning are understood to impact their lives" (p. 320). Hays and Minichiello (2005) took a similar approach in their study with a focus on well-being, positive aging, and the meaning of music for older people. Likewise, Kruse (2021) used successful aging theory to frame his study about reminiscence and music participation among older people. Creech and Hallam (2015) took a notably nonmainstream approach in their article about the use of critical geragogy as a framework for leading older learners in community music. However, although their research (the Music for Life project by Hallam and colleagues) demonstrated a more critical approach to music learning in later life, like the other examples, it also reflected mainstream approaches, as referenced in the preceding section about mainstream gerontology approaches in music education literature.

In contrast to the research discussed above that takes both mainstream and nonmainstream gerontology approaches, some research takes a predominantly nonmainstream gerontology perspective. However, I found very little of this type of literature that was specific to adult piano teaching and learning, and none that focused exclusively on the experiences of older people. These studies were about adult, but not necessarily older adult piano students, and there was no mention of gerontology perspectives, other than a brief mention of ageism (although not named as such). Coutts (2019), without mentioning the age of the adult student participants in

her study, investigated transformative pedagogy and the role of the teacher in empowering student learning. She found that her lessons with her students "fostered a 'culture of inquiry' that placed students' experiences and perceived challenges at the heart of the lesson" (p. 503). Coutts countered mainstream gerontology by not discussing age; rather, her focus was on topics such as the student's experience, critical reflection about her teaching, and discussion of transformative pedagogy. Another study about the selection of repertoire by Coutts (2018) included a brief discussion of the effects of self-directed ageism and the importance of the teacher-student relationship in working through such difficulties. A study by Kang (2017) was perhaps most successful at highlighting the heterogeneity of aging with her use of narrative inquiry to present a portrait of a single adult piano student. Kang wrote, "Mr. K's story suggests that each student in a music class or lesson is an individual who has a unique story to tell—stories that can motivate their lifelong musical involvement" (p. 116). Although the articles by Coutts (2018, 2019) and Kang (2017) did not use nonmainstream gerontology perspectives, they shared some characteristics such as a focus on diversity, empowerment, experiences and meaning over the life course, and the perspectives of the adults or older adults themselves.

2.4 Chapter Summary

There is little research on older adult music education (including older adult piano pedagogy literature), and there is, to my knowledge, no literature on aging and music teachers. In addition, some of the adult piano pedagogy literature presents a view of aging that focuses on health and well-being. Consequently, the representation of older adult music students and teachers is limited, despite the value of this research. Unintended ageism in research and in the field of piano teaching and learning might benefit from nonmainstream gerontological perspectives and from knowledge about the experiences from older people themselves. The call for an interdisciplinary approach to music education and piano teaching and learning and research drawing on critical gerontology that adds to existing knowledge about aging is longstanding (Bell, 1987; Darrough & Boswell, 1992; Laes & Schmidt, 2018). Increasing knowledge about aging experiences also has practical implications. In the context of piano pedagogy, "the importance of knowing each student was recognized in the early pedagogical literature" (Stolz, 2019, p. 69), and appears to persist (Jutras, 2006). On music and aging, Kruse (2021) wrote, "Exploring the musical lives of older adults... could be one path toward gaining a better understanding of music's role in the aging process" (p. 40). My research was a reversal of Kruse's

approach—exploring aging and the musical lives of older people as a path toward gaining a better understanding of the role of aging in piano teaching and learning. Music education scholars have done much to add to our knowledge of the needs of older adult music students, to advocate for their participation in music, and for their health and well-being. I hope to add to this work, especially to the knowledge about piano students and teachers and their particular experiences of growing older and the role that aging plays in learning and teaching.

Chapter 3: Plan of Inquiry

In the previous chapter I argued for the importance of a nonmainstream, more critical gerontological perspective in the literature on older adult piano pedagogy. Although there is much valuable research about the health and well-being benefits of piano participation, the focus of such research means that the complexity and fullness of aging and later life experience is left unexamined. The purpose of my inquiry was to understand better the relationship between aging and piano teaching and learning through an exploration of age in the musical lives of older people. The following research question was inspired by Bytheway (2005), who called for "a move towards a gerontology that is located in personal experience and social relations rather than biological processes" (p. 372).

> How do older students and teachers experience aging in the context of lifelong piano learning and/or teaching?

In this chapter, I present my plan of inquiry, explaining my approach and choice of methods. I begin with my orientation to this research, including my choice of a qualitative research design and my perspective from feminist gerontology. Next, I discuss narrative inquiry and explain why this was the preferred approach for my project. I then describe the methods used to generate data, including my choice of methods. The recruitment of participants, including inclusion criteria and my relationship to participants, is discussed next. I then describe my preparation for this project, including rehearsal of methods and solicitation of feedback. Subsequently, I describe the process of data generation, including a discussion of aging and the use of technology, and the participants' experiences of one of the methods. My approach to analysis is discussed next, including various stages of analysis such as the transcribing, analyzing, and crafting of participant life stories. The chapter continues with discussion about ethical considerations and my approach to research quality, such as the issue of trustworthiness. I finish the chapter by explaining my choices regarding the presentation of my research results.

I chose a qualitative research approach in my effort to add to the research on the underdeveloped topic of adult piano teaching and learning and to understand experiences of aging in piano teaching and learning more deeply. I also wanted to highlight the experiences of older people, including their views of aging with regard to piano participation. In age studies and gerontology, qualitative research is preferable for researchers who "seek an intact, holistic view of an older person's experience as the focus" of study (Weil, 2017, p. 51). A qualitative design is

especially appropriate for under researched topics in aging where "more in-depth, first-person accounts are needed" (Weil, 2017, p. 49). Qualitative approaches are also best for "understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 6).

I viewed my interdisciplinary study on aging and piano teaching and learning through a lens of feminist gerontology, which integrates critical gerontology, feminist, and life course approaches (Hooyman et al. 2002). My focus was not on generalizations about later life, but rather on "getting the story right" (M. B. Holstein & Minkler, 2007, p. 22). I wanted to explore and privilege experiences of growing older in the context of lifelong piano participation—and I wanted to learn about these experiences, in detail, from older people themselves, in their own words. This desire led me to a narrative approach to research, which has an affinity with my perspective. James Holstein and Jaber Gubrium (2012) wrote about feminist scholars' recognition of personal storytellers as more than sources of information, but rather as "active narrative agents, exploring subjective meanings formerly silent or unrecognized, opening new windows into historical, cultural, personal, and social processes" (p. 3).

3.1 Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is "both a mode of reasoning and a mode of representation" (Richardson, 1990b, p. 2)— "both a view of the phenomena of people's experiences and a methodology for narratively inquiring into experience" allowing for "the intimate study of individuals' experiences over time and in context" (Clandinin & Caine, 2008, p. 542). Simply put, narrative inquiry is "stories lived and told" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004, p. 20). This simplified description of narrative highlights its depth—the potential for open and complex study. Narrative inquiry cannot be simply put as questions asked and answered, but "focuses on making meaning of individuals' experiences" (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995, p. 116).

Although narrative inquiry existed in other research approaches, it grew as a specific qualitative research practice in the 1990s (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). Historically, gerontology research has had a positivist perspective, reflecting its "biomedical roots" (Weil, 2017, p. 3). However, narrative inquiry has also found a place in gerontology (Atkinson, 1998; de Medeiros, 2014; Weil, 2017), beginning with the introduction of life review work by gerontologist and psychiatrist Robert Butler (1963). More specifically, Westerhof (2022) made a plea for a narrative approach to the study of subjective views of aging. In his scoping review on the topic,

Westerhof found that the narrative studies he reviewed "showed the diversity, complexity, and dynamics of the stories people tell about their lived aging experiences" (2022, p. 342). Narrative inquiry in music education began in the 1990s, but became more widely used after the publication of two books on the topic by Barrett and Stauffer (2009, 2012) (Smith & Hendricks, 2020). However, narrative studies on *adult* music education are uncommon (for examples, see Cho 2018; Chua & Welch, 2021; Rohwer, 2017; Schmidt & Smith, 2017). Additionally, some researchers do not claim narrative inquiry as their sole approach to research, but use features of narrative inquiry (Laes, 2015), a life history approach that is common in narrative (Hays & Minichiello, 2005), or a combination of approaches, such as narrative and autoethnography (Townshend, 2022). Similarly, in the literature on adult piano teaching and learning, I know of only one narrative study about a younger adult (Koops et al., 2017), and one about an older adult by Kang (2017).

Narrative researchers do not begin with hypotheses (Clandinin & Connelly, 1989; Josselson & Lieblich, 2003; Lieblich et al., 1998). Rather, they "are inclined to begin with an interest in a particular phenomenon which could be understood narratively" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1989, p. 14)—they have "only questions or interesting people to explore" (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003, p. 260). In this study, I wondered about aging and lifelong piano participation—how people make sense of their experiences (Josselson & Hammack, 2021). I also wondered what it is like to be an older piano teacher or student. I had been intrigued by literature that mentioned student experiences of aging in piano teaching and learning, but I sought a deeper portrayal of aging and piano learning—teaching too. Older piano teachers and students are under-researched groups and narrative research in the form of life stories is especially needed for these populations to "balance out the databases that have been relied on for so long in generating theory" (Atkinson, 2007, pp. 229–230). I also wanted to hear from piano students and teachers themselves, in their own time and in their own words. I borrow from the thought-provoking title of Maguire's (2005) essay, "What if You Talked to Me? I Could Be Interesting!" While I take Maguire's title out of its context of ethical considerations in research with children, the title reflects my belief that we *do* need to listen more to children (younger people), and also to older people. We need to ask ourselves, *Whose stories count?*

Following Connelly and Clandinin (1990), I use the term *narrative* to refer to the inquiry—"Narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the

patterns of inquiry for its study" (p. 2). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) illustrate the difference between *narrative* and *story*, "people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience" (p. 2). I use the terms *story* and *life story* interchangeably. To be clear, my focus was not on *life history* (an extensive record of a person's life) or *life review* (the identity work of reviewing and revising a person's life) (de Medeiros, 2014).

The temporal quality of narrative inquiry first drew me to this type of research. I knew that I wanted to explore piano teaching and learning using a life course approach, so I sought a research design that would allow me to explore experience over time. Clandinin and Connelly (2004) describe the temporality in narrative inquiry as life experienced both in the "here and now" and "as it is experienced on a continuum—people's lives, institutional lives, lives of things" (p. 19). In other words, "a narrative is a symbolic representation of a time span … a course of experienced (or imagined) time" (Horsdal, 2016, p. 251). The temporal characteristic of narrative inquiry also makes it especially suitable for aging research. Baars (2012b) wrote, "Narratives not only convey what it is to live *in the world* or in *worlds*, but also what it *means* to live *in time(s)* … the temporal dimensions of human actions and experiences find their most adequate articulation in narratives" (p. 150). I was interested in connections between experiences in the present, past, and future—a view of life as a whole.

I was also interested in telling individual stories about aging and about piano learning and teaching. Narrative is suited to research that highlights detailed stories told by individuals about their experiences (Josselson et al., 2003; Kim, 2016; Weil, 2017). With a focus on the individual, I presented "little stories"—"*a* story," not "*the* story" (Bowman, 2006, p. 9). I agree with Nichols and Brewer (2017), who wrote the following about small stories: "This is one of the unique strengths of narrative scholarship. We share *this* story about *this* person at *this* time, while knowing that this story is really about all of us, at any given time" (p. 9). The focus on the individual is the main characteristic that separates narrative from other qualitative approaches to research (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995). One of the goals of my research was to highlight the individual as a way of countering the homogeneous representation of older people.

Individual and collective stories are related (Ray, 2007). Ray (2007) wrote, "Individual life stories are motivated and inflected by social and cultural stories, and the reverse is equally true" (p. 60). Andrews (2021) underscored a strength of narrative inquiry in this regard, "Stories

always sit in relation to other stories, and personal storytelling in particular can highlight the powerful linkage between the micro and macro" (p. 356). Baddeley and Singer (2007) described the way that personal stories become part of the collective, "As their reminiscences knit together previous eras and draw on landmark events as memorial touchstones, their stories transcend their personal identities and become social records that define a given culture" (p. 197). Richardson (1988) defined the collective story as one that, "tells the experience of a sociologically constructed category of people in the context of larger sociocultural and historical forces" (p. 201). The collective story in this study is about finding meaning in life—a story that I hope will broaden and enrich knowledge about older people in general, and learning and teaching piano in particular. I hope that the individual stories and collective story offered here will provide a counter to the master narrative of aging as decline. I also wanted the stories of this project to open up the topic of older people in piano teaching and learning—to question, and to explore possibilities. Richardson (1990a) proposed, "Collective stories which deviate from standard cultural plots provide new narratives; hearing them legitimates a replotting of one's own life. New narratives offer the patterns for new lives" (p. 129).

Finally, I was drawn to narrative out of my desire to learn about my topic, and to be surprised about what I might learn—not what I think I know, but what I "regularly hear, and expect to hear in the future, that is new and different" (Squire et al., 2014, p. 114). I am an "incurably curious" inquirer who is "interested in, and fascinated by, the minutiae of others' lives, and particularly in how people make sense of their experiences and of the world around them" (Goodson & Sikes, 2016, p. 73).

3.2 Methods

I chose the *river of experience* visual elicitation tool and *life story interviews* as methods for my narrative inquiry, and generated all data in collaboration with the study participants. In using both the river of experience and life story interview methods, I hoped to enrich my data, offering differing voices and ideas (Weil, 2017).

3.2.1 River of Experience

As stated earlier, I conducted a narrative inquiry because of its suitability for a study about aging experiences in piano teaching and learning. However, I worried about the difficulty of generating data that would specifically address my research problem using only interviews. I was asking study participants to tell me about their experiences of aging in the context of their participation

in piano—a topic that requires considerable thought and reflection. The spontaneous nature of a spoken interview seemed like a potentially difficult method for answering such a demanding question. I hoped to address this research problem by adding a technique to my methods—the *river of experience*. This visual elicitation tool originated within the framework of personal construct theory, which was developed by George Kelly in 1955 as a psychotherapy method. Kelly (2003) described his theory as one of personal inquiry, "a psychology of human quest. It does not say what has been or will be found, but proposes rather how we might go about looking for it" (p. 3). In his description of personal constructs, Kelly (1977) wrote, "In this world—past, present, and future—ordered by each of us in his own way, constructs and events are interwoven so that events give definition to constructs and constructs give meaning to events" (p. 361). To aid in the process of construct elicitation, the rivers of experience tool was first developed by education researchers Denicolo and Pope (1990), who called it the *snake technique* and used it as a research tool within a biographical approach to career studies. They described its foundation and use:

> The essence of the rationale for the career snake came from our recognition that constructs evolve over time and are particularly influenced, consciously or unconsciously, by formative experiences. Further understanding and development of current constructs can be achieved by reflection on their derivation; when participants contemplate why they hold certain constructs, they are also encouraged to ponder on the possibilities of alternatives - to break free from biography. (Pope & Denicolo, 1993, p. 540)

Explaining the use of the snake technique, Pope and Denicolo (1993) wrote that they asked their participants to "visualise their lives as a winding snake (or river …) in which each 'turn' represents a personal experience or critical incident that influenced the direction their career took" (p. 540). The researchers also asked participants for brief annotations about their experiences, but did not tell participants when in their lives to begin their 'snake' (Denicolo & Pope, 1990). Over time, the technique became known as a *river of experience* and continued to be used by Denicolo, Pope, and their doctoral students, including Iantaffi (2020), who expanded the career snake as the river of experience.

The river of experience exercise is a research tool that has also been used by music education researchers (Baker, 2005; Burnard, 2012; Taylor, 2011, 2015; Townshend, 2022). In

Townshend's (2022) study on life-long musician-teacher identity, he used a "rivers of experience approach" (p. 1). Townshend used the river of experience as a concept rather than a technique in an autoethnographic narrative using artifacts. However, most researchers used the river of experience as a visual elicitation tool, as I have also done. Baker (2005) examined the 'rivers of experience' with his participants while discussing their life histories. Burnard (2012) wrote about her use of the tool, which she named *rivers of musical experience*, in teaching and learning, and also in her research on children's experiences of music creation, teacher identity, and children's and adults' musical creativity. In research on piano learning, Taylor (2011, 2015) used the rivers of musical experience as a tool to study musical experiences and identity construction in older amateur keyboard players.

As stated earlier, the river of experience tool evolved from personal construct theory. Like Iantaffi, I appreciate the reflexive aspect of personal construct theory and its potential to offer "the freedom to become our most authentic selves and to see that as a constantly evolving process of change and creativity" (Iantaffi, 2020, p. 431). I agree with Iantaffi's (2020) summary of the compatibility of the river of experience with epistemologies such as feminist gerontology, in my case. They wrote, "The singularity of the rivers and the stories" told by participants "in their own way, using their own words" helped to create a research tool that is compatible with perspectives "that value authenticity" (p. 436).

Another reason that I was attracted to the river exercise was my interest in the river as a metaphor of time and life in my thinking about aging and the life course. Because of the temporal element, the river was also particularly appropriate for research on aging and life stories. We often think of a tree as a metaphor of life, but as gerontologists Schroots and Birren (2002) pointed out "the tree is basically a spatial metaphor that only vaguely suggests temporality" (p. 53). They proposed the river metaphor instead; "the 'flowing river' may represent a more useful metaphor of life, because flowing movement suggests time as well as change" (Schroots & Birren, 2002, p. 53). Thus, the river of experience tool seemed like a harmonious addition to the interview method that I used in my narrative inquiry.

Finally, the river of experience tool provided an unconventional way for participants to reflect and document their journeys through life in piano study and/or teaching. It added another dimension, a visual aspect, to the oral data collected in the interviews. The river exercise offered an opportunity for a visual representation of participants' life stories in piano. For example, one

participant drew her river widening (using two lines) to indicate times in her life of increased music participation (see Figure 1).

> I decided to do the two lines, because at the beginning when I was actually taking lessons, say between about 7 [years old] and 15 or 16, there was a lot of music there. And then there was a period where I went into nursing. I was studying … and then coming to Canada, and there was just so much activity in my life and marriage and children. I don't know how I would have put it in. So that was it. But once I was free and then when I retired … you know that's why the river suddenly gets wider and wider and wider because I've had more time. I've been able to think about music more in my life.

Aside from variations in the contour of the river, other visual elements in the river of experience exercise included the use of textual devices such as underline, capitalization, and/or punctuation to show the importance of certain experiences (see Figures 1 and 2); the use of colour; and use of a vertical format. The rivers also were likely to include chronological markers of time such as ages and dates.

Figure 1

Research Participant River of Experience

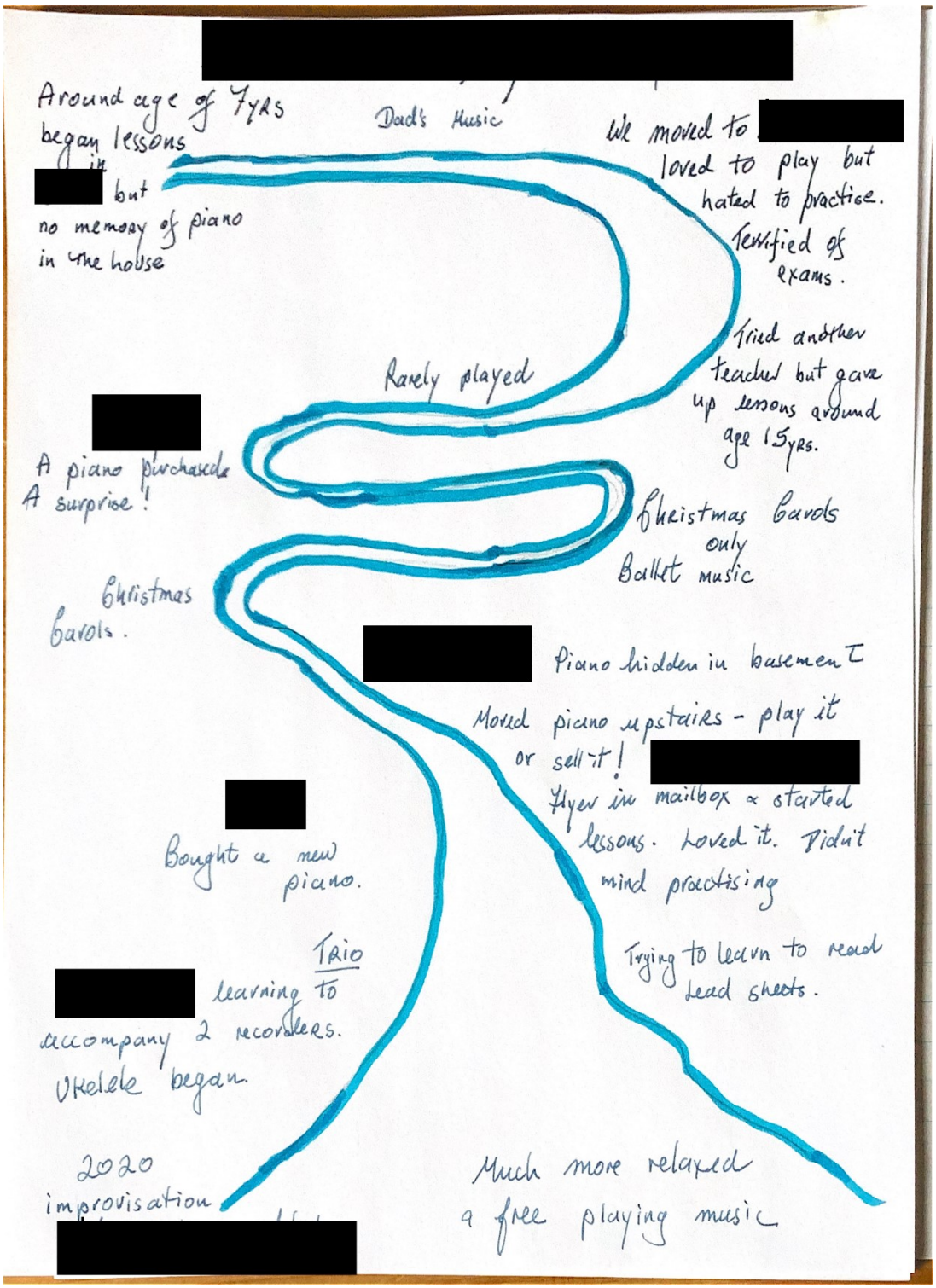
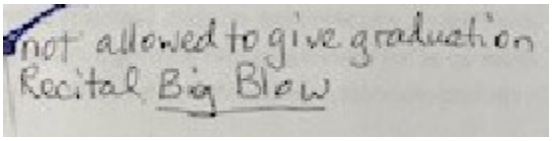


Figure 2

Example of the Use of Capitalization and Underline to Create Emphasis



3.2.2 Interview and Interview Guides

At the suggestion of Susan Chase (2003), I benefited greatly from Weiss's (1994) book *Learning From Strangers* for each step of the interview process. There are different ways of conducting narrative inquiry, but I chose a life story approach for its suitability to my research purpose and question—I wanted to understand the participants' experiences of lifelong piano learning and/or teaching in their own words. I also hoped to hear life stories "of deep and abiding interest" to the participants" (S. E. Chase, 2003, p. 274). Atkinson (1998) defined a life story as,

> The story a person chooses to tell about the life he or she has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible, what is remembered of it, and what the teller wants others to know of it, usually as a result of a guided interview by another. (p. 8)

Atkinson (1998) explained, "A life story is the essence of what has happened to a person. It can cover the time from birth to the present or before and beyond. It includes the important events, experiences, and feelings of a lifetime" (p. 8). My focus was more specific than Atkinson's description of a life story. I was asking about aging and piano teaching and learning rather than life in general. If we add the theme *age*, the life story approach I took was similar to Kim's (2016) description:

> Within the life story, there may be segments of the life that can tell us more about the individual, and there also may be specific themes or issues that relate to the larger social issues of gender, class, race, and culture. (p. 166)

I followed a semi-structured interview format with little intervention, believing that the story is within the participant (Squire, 2008). However, I did share my own experience at times. My own talking or sharing, although restrained, was a point of concern for me as I reflected on each interview. It was not until much later that I realized that researchers are advised to share their experiences (Goodson & Sikes, 2016). Atkinson (1998) wrote about the emotional depth and "interpersonal style" of the interview "The interviewer is thus much more personally invested in

this type of interview compared to many others, as it might also include some degree of mutual disclosure" (p. 40).

For each of the seven interviews, I used a general interview/listening guide and an individualized guide that I created for each participant based on my reading of their river of experience exercise (Appendix B).

The purpose of a life story interview is to give the narrator the opportunity to tell their story, "the way he or she chooses to tell it, so we can learn from their voice, their words, and their subjective meaning of their experience of life" (Atkinson, 2007, p. 8). Horsdal (2016) proposed that the narrator tells their story in response to a single question, "Please, tell me about your life from the beginning and until we are here today" (p. 261). In addition, Atkinson (2007) suggested, "The research question of a life story interview may only be, What is the story this person wants others to hear and what meaning does this story convey?" (p. 8). While I did have questions in mind for my inquiry, I also wanted to hear the stories that participants wanted to tell about their lifelong involvement with the piano. Keeping in mind that the participant would decide where to begin and end, including in the future (Horsdal, 2016), I began with a single question asking for the story of their life in music.

Susan Chase (2003) recommended the process of writing a detailed interview guide as preparation for "listening well" (p. 84). I followed Chase's (2003) suggestion (also referenced and recommended by Josselson & Lieblich, 2003) to prepare an individualized guide for each interview. Chase (2003) discussed the creation of "lengthy, detailed interview guides," to be rewritten "until there is a flow," sometimes chronological (p. 83) and that are focused on "specific, concrete life stories" (p. 84). I wrote the guides based on my understanding of the information provided in the participants' rivers. Because the rivers were written chronologically, so were my guides. As Chase suggested, writing the guides helped prepare me "to be open to a wide range of stories" and to have a general idea of what I wanted to learn about (pp. 83–84). The guides also allowed me to clarify my understanding of the rivers (i.e., the participants' musical lives). To help alleviate my anxiety about conducting interviews, I wrote the individualized guides as scripts that included the following: interview information such as date and time, reminder to begin recording, my research question, greetings, expression of gratitude, reminders to ask for permissions and consent, general interview question, individualized questions based on the river of experience exercise (for e.g., I noticed that you have a gap of

marriage and childrearing without a piano in the home. Can you tell me about that?), and general probes. Chase (2003) wrote that interviewers "should ask questions that follow from close listening to the narrator's story" (p. 83). I tried to do this also in the writing of the individualized interview guides—to *listen closely* to what was *said* in the rivers. Preparation of the guides allowed me to begin to get a sense of the participant and familiarize myself with their story, therefore allowing me to be more relaxed and able to listen better during the actual interview. As Chase wrote, the guide is created as preparation for listening during the interview. Other than asking a single question to begin the interview (i.e., the general interview guide), interview questions should follow from "close listening" (S. E. Chase, 2003, p. 83)—the individualized guide serves as a "guideline for the researcher's listening" (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003, p. 267).

3.3 Participants[2]

Narrative inquiry allows for participants to share the fullness of their experiences of piano participation extending throughout the life course. I was interested in detailed accounts of experience, and consequently fewer participants were sufficient (Goodson & Sikes, 2016; Josselson, 2010; Squire, 2008). To understand better both learning and teaching perspectives over the life course, I sought adults who had lifelong engagement in piano (learning, teaching, or both, in the case of teachers). This pattern of study is common in piano. Jutras (2006) found that close to half (43%) of his adult study participants reported taking lessons as children. Piano teachers are perhaps uniquely positioned to contribute to my research topic about aging because of their own experiences with aging, but especially because of their experiences teaching students of all ages, sometimes retaining students for many years and stages of development.

My study is partly about aging; however, I did not include an age criterion or ask for the ages of participants. The use of chronological age categories does not recognize the "heterogeneous nature of human development over time" (Bülow & Söderqvist, 2014, 145). While it is a common practice to ask about subjective age, some gerontologists have cautioned about the use of age categories in research (Bytheway, 2005; Gendron et al., 2018). One alternative suggested by Bytheway is to recruit people who think of themselves as older and who are able to talk about being older, regardless of chronological age. In this way, "it is the potential

[2] I chose the term participant because it "carries with it from feminism and other interpretivist positions certain understandings of the part played by researched and researcher. … Both researcher and the researched bring with them concepts, ideas, theories, values, experiences and multiply intersecting identities, all of which can play a part in research interaction in the qualitative interview" (Edwards & Holland, 2013, p. 5).

volunteer who decides if s/he is 'old enough' to be an 'older person'"(Bytheway, 2005, p. 371). While age categories are sometimes necessary in research, Bytheway (2005) argued "that through greater use of these alternatives, gerontological research can become less reliant upon and supportive of those open-ended age categories that underpin many ageist policies and practices" (p. 372).

Upon receipt of ethics approval from the university, I sought study participants through my affiliation with The Piano Pedagogy Research Laboratory and The School of Music at the University of Ottawa and my piano teacher colleagues. To avoid complicating ethical concerns, I did not invite people who studied piano with me. Participants were invited to contribute to my inquiry on a first-come, first-served basis, through purposive and snowball sampling. I contacted potential participants directly by email and contacted colleagues with a request to pass on my study information to their students (see Appendix C for recruitment letter). I also sent a study consent form (see Appendix D) to each potential participant. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic precautions, correspondence was conducted through the postal system or by telephone, but principally through email. Four piano students and three teachers, seven participants in total, agreed to participate in my research, one more than I had initially proposed. My familiarity with the participants was varied. I have known one participant since my childhood, but not in relation to the piano. Another, I have known for several years in the context of piano pedagogy. I met another participant a couple of times in a piano performance context. I did not know the other four participants; colleagues or teachers referred three, and a participant recruited a fourth.

While I recognize the importance of diversity in understanding aging—and the lack of attention paid to diversity in age studies (Baars et al., 2006; Westwood, 2019) and older adult music education (Laes & Creech, 2023)—study participants did not seem to form a particularly diverse group, although demographic data were not collected. All presented as White females, which also highlighted the lack of racial, ethnic, and gender diversity in piano teaching and learning. If we can assume that gender does not affect research participation, in North America most independent music teachers are female, as are most adult piano students. The percentage of female teacher respondents was 88% in one large study (1,468 respondents) by Upitis et al., (2017) on the characteristics of independent music teachers in Canada. Similarly, 72% of adult piano student participants were female in a U.S. study on the benefits of adult piano training by Jutras (2006). In a similar U.S. study about adult piano training Cooper (2001), 76% of the

respondents were female. None of the aforementioned researchers reported on racial or ethnic identity. In addition, although I found no mention of teacher race or ethnicity in the piano teaching and learning literature, there is general music education literature that confirms the fact that most music teachers are White (Austin, 2021; Hess, 2018). The participant group in my study *did* reflect the demographics of older adult music teachers in Southern Ontario, Canada. Anecdotally, most older piano teachers in Ontario are White, possibly a reflection of the majority White population of the province, although this is changing. An advantage of a relatively homogeneous group of participants is that the differences in the context of the research question were highlighted (i.e., the individual's experience of growing older as a piano student and/or teacher).

3.4 Preparation

This project has been of interest to me, in one form or another, for many years. Aside from my studies and work in gerontology, in my coursework leading up to and including my doctoral program, I explored the topic of older people and music participation whenever possible. I also had the opportunity, in coursework, to conduct practice studies, using one-on-one interviews, for example. Specifically for this project, I conducted practice interviews to help address my lack of experience with interviewing. I also sent materials for the river of experience method to several people for their feedback, and did the exercise myself.

Doing practice interviews gave me some experience and allowed me to feel more comfortable with the process. I was also able to test the online interview platform (Zoom), in particular with people who had no experience using the platform. The information that I received regarding age, affirmed my decision not to ask for participant age. However, initially I was going to ask participants, "What age do you imagine yourself? What does that mean for you?" In my practice interviews, I found these questions to be problematic. One practice participant suggested that I instead ask people how old they are when they are dreaming. When I suggested this revised question to another practice participant, she told me that she does not remember her dreams, but expressed that she sometimes feels as if she is 80 years old (more than 20 years older than her actual age). Her statement about feeling like 80 is an example of how age is a social construction as much as it is a representation of chronological time. It also highlights the problem of asking about age in a meaningful way. This made me think further about the value of asking about chronological age and its meaningfulness, especially as it pertained to my research question.

Gendron et al., (2018) suggested that such questions about age, "could actually be measuring the extent to which a respondent has internalized the effects of ageism" p. (620). I asked myself what information such questions might produce and how I would describe such data. In the end, I decided to omit such questions.

Feedback about the river of experience exercise was favourable. I had originally intended to include several templates to give participants choice of the shape of their rivers. However, based on my own experience and the feedback I received, I found that multiple templates might complicate the process unnecessarily, so I kept only one.

3.5 Generating Data

As mentioned in the previous section about preparation, the study procedures, techniques, and interview questions were designed, piloted, and revised as needed prior to formal data generation. My intention was that my choices of narrative inquiry, the river of experience tool, and in-depth life story interviews would provide sufficient time and space for the participants to communicate their unique experiences of aging and of piano learning and teaching. I recognize that I can never truly know or understand the experiences of another person—I also "lack access to another's unmediated experience" (Riessman, 2007, p. 23).

The data generating process began in March 2022 with distribution of the river of experience exercise to the first participant. Data generation was staggered according to the responses of individual participants (see Appendix E for a table of the research process and schedule of participant recruitment, consent, data generation, and feedback and approval of life stories). The rivers of experience were completed from March to August 2022, and I subsequently conducted interviews from April to September 2022.

3.5.1 Aging and Technology

Participant engagement, especially in online interviews, raises the issue of aging and technology and the stereotype of "older people as technologically incompetent laggards" (Peine & Neven, 2019, p. 19; Tsugawa, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in widespread use of communications technologies, thereby increasing familiarity and comfort with relatively new technologies such as Zoom. Whether related to the pandemic or not, none of the participants experienced difficulty using the Zoom platform. Additionally, although I did not ask about the role of technology in piano teaching and learning, the topic arose due to the pandemic and the resulting migration from in person to online piano lessons. In piano teaching, the pandemic

lockdown protections necessitated the use of technologies such as Zoom and FaceTime. A couple of teacher participants mentioned discomfort with the use of technology, either for themselves or for some students. One said,

> I found that most people … said, "No, I'll wait, because I'm already going to be doing a lot with my computer." Some of the older adults said, "Look, I don't even have a cell phone. I'm not going to do that. I'll wait." So, I said, "That's fine. No problems." Just a very small number of people decided to continue this way [online].

This example shows that the reluctance to participate in online piano lessons was seen in students of all ages. People embraced or rejected technology for reasons that are unclear, but that did not appear to be age-related. However, the successful engagement with new technologies expressed and experienced by most participants of this study counters ageist stereotypes or "digital ageism" (Gallistl et al., 2023, p. 2) against older people, and is in keeping with the findings of MacRitchie et al. (2023) that older people can successfully learn music online. The use of several technologies (file format [PDF], word processing, email, digital photography, video communications) by the participants in my study is consistent with research by Mitzner et al. (2010), who found that older people used a wide variety of technology and reported more positive than negative attitudes about technology, thereby contradicting stereotypes that "older adults are unable, unwilling, or afraid to use technology" (p. 1719).

3.5.2 River of Experience: Procedure and Participant Experience of the Research Tool

Upon contacting potential participants, I emailed the following river of experience materials that I created based on existing literature about this technique (see especially Iantaffi, 2020; Taylor, 2011). I invited participants to complete the river exercise about their experiences of aging and teaching and/or learning piano, beginning and ending anywhere in their lives, including the future (see Appendix F for overview and instructions). The exercise is a visual elicitation tool not an artistic exercise, therefore, to alleviate any apprehension about drawing abilities, I invited participants to imagine and draw their rivers using any features that seem relevant to their stories, and I offered a template of a river for participants who preferred not to draw (see Appendix G for template). I also asked participants to annotate the drawing, briefly noting experiences or events that precipitated bends in the river (see Appendix H for example). The river exercise was used as a point of departure for the interviews. Atkinson (1998) suggested similar activities to help participants think about their life stories in advance of interviews. I used the information

provided in the rivers to prepare individualized interview guides for each participant prior to our interviews, allowing me to create specific prompts and to clarify my understanding of the rivers.

Participant feedback about research methods was an unanticipated outcome of my research, specifically participants' experiences of completing the river of experience exercise. As part of my preparation for this project, I completed the river of experience exercise. My goal was only to test and experience the tool myself and not to provide a detailed account of my journey in piano learning and teaching. Consequently, I completed the river in a perfunctory way without taking much time for reflection. However, I did not think much about any of this until I received the participants' river exercises with feedback about their experiences with the method. I had thought of the exercise simply as a way of facilitating the interviews and possibly an added demand on study participants. I did not consider that it might also be enjoyable or useful to the participants. Therefore, it was an unexpected and welcome finding that the exercise was so well received by some participants, a finding also noted by Iantaffi (2020). I received positive feedback from several participants about the experience of completing the river exercise; for example, one wrote, "It has been a wonderful meander down this River of Life, and at the age of 85 and a half years, it's far from over." However, positive feedback about the river of experience exercise was not universal, a finding also noted by Taylor (2011). A couple of participants made no comments about the exercise, though one used it as an aide-mémoire during our interview, as did others. Another participant chose to write an account of her musical journey in piano instead of using the river format.

It was clear that all participants took care and considerable time and reflection to complete the exercise. One participant reported,

> It was so interesting looking back at the whole thing on one page and remembering where my head was at each point—my whole life—seeing through that particular window. I had written it up ahead of time and then really edited it down because I found myself writing a psychological exercise, how I was feeling, what was going on in those moments. So, I edited definitely.

A few participants (3) reported on the opportunity for reflection offered by the river exercise. One participant said that she had not thought about her musical journey until doing the river and found the exercise useful for reflection and evaluation, helping her to theorize about her experiences. Others found the exercise useful for the memories it prompted. One participant said,

> Oh, it was very enjoyable. It brought back so many memories of my life and music at different times. Even though they're just little succinct words like *Christmas carol*, they took me back to Christmas carols in different places. It made me think about music and the place of my life.

Another participant found the exercise meaningful, especially for thinking about a family relationship.

> Even if it was only to think about my Aunt, it's worthwhile because now I really think about her and appreciate what she did for me, not only in the music sense, but being so kind to me as a child. So, that whole experience is worth it for that.

A few participants considered the river exercise in other applications and contexts; for example, one participant mentioned that it would have been helpful for considering her career. Another participant expanded on the possibilities of the exercise:

> It's an amazing thing. I mean, you could do your art experience. You could do your teaching experience. You could do all kinds of things…. This has been creative for me too. I have some more ideas—I would like to take some of these events and maybe write a little story about this and have it for the kids.

Another participant spoke of the potential social aspect of the river exercise, saying that she enjoyed discussing it with a couple of friends.

Given the ease of administration of the river exercise and the positive participant feedback, this tool proved to be a valuable addition to my data generation methods. The river of experience also offered a way of enriching my data by allowing time for participant reflection and for both graphic and textual expression of lifelong experiences in piano participation.

3.5.3 Interview Procedure

After I received a participant's river exercise and completed the individualized interview guide, I emailed the participant to arrange an interview time at their convenience. I conducted one online interview with each participant using the Zoom communications platform, chosen for privacy, accessibility, and comfort. Participants had the option to have the camera off for interviews if that was more comfortable, and one participant chose this option. With participants' permission, I digitally recorded all interviews using the Zoom recording feature and transcribed them verbatim using Otter.ai voice-to-text transcription software. I began each interview by reviewing the

purpose and question of my inquiry and requesting oral consent to participate, including an offer to review the consent form.

The interview duration was led by the participants, and varied from 53 minutes to 1 hour and 44 minutes, providing participants adequate time to tell their stories and provide detailed descriptions of their experiences (see Table 2 for individual times). Storytelling styles varied among participants, and I was aware that "the researcher/guide is never really in control of the story actually told" (Atkinson, 2002, p. 126). Some participants told their life stories chronologically, with little input from me. With others, I worried that the interview would last only 10 minutes as they concluded their stories quickly. Thankfully, I found that a question or probe could elicit further conversation. Although I enjoyed the interviews, I was always anxious afterwards, worried that I had not learned anything relevant to my inquiry. However, with time and with the insights provided by recording my thoughts in a journal, I came to see that this was a problem of my anxiety, not reality—there was always valuable information shared with me. I found it invaluable to record my thoughts and observations in a personal journal after each interview to reflect on my experience and help inform subsequent interviews. Similar to a piano exam or performance, the interview represented a moment in time. It is possible or even likely that participants might have told their stories in different ways at another time, including the future; for example, pre-pandemic, at a different age or stage of life, or immediately following a significant event that altered their view of playing/teaching/learning piano and/or aging.

I realized only in hindsight that the river of experience exercise and both interview guides allowed me to ask a variety of questions that provoked different levels of responses. Atkinson (1998) suggested including a variety of questions to elicit different levels of responses: "open-ended descriptive, structural, and contrast questions" (p. 41). This variety of questions was achieved through the general guide (open-ended single question), river exercise (structural), and individualized guides (contrast questions). Table 2 below provides details of data generation such as interview duration, interview transcript length before and following de-identification, and interview content summary length. All documents listed in the table were single-spaced and the content summaries were written as point form notes.

Table 2

Details of Interview Data Generation

	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 7	Participant 8
Interview Duration	1:44:34	53:55	1:27:39	53:32	1:20:17	1:18:30	1:20:49
Interview Transcript Length	24 pages	15 pages	24 pages	15 pages	21 pages	19 pages	17 pages
De-identified Transcript Length	10 pages	9 pages	12 pages	9 pages	11 pages	12 pages	9 pages
Interview Content Summary Length	2 pages	2 pages	2 pages	2 pages	2 pages	3 pages	n/a

Note. Participant 6 was invited to participate and was sent the consent form, but did not proceed

3.6 Approach to Analysis

I began the analysis process by reading the river of experience exercises in the preparation of the individualized interview guides, thereby conducting analysis "*along with* (not after) data collection" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 297). My approach to analysis was guided especially by Atkinson (1998, 2002, 2007); Brown et al. (1991), S. E. Chase (2003), Josselson and Hammack (2021); Lieblich et al. (1998), Riessman (2007); Seidman (2006); and Weiss (1994). Within the literature on the types of narrative analysis that guided me, there are various descriptors pointing to different aspects of this type of content focused narrative analysis: transcribing and interpreting the life story interview (Atkinson, 1998, 2002, 2007); a relational method for reading and interpreting narratives (Brown et al., 1991); interpreting narrator's stories (S. E. Chase, 2003); a holistic, person-centered approach (Josselson & Hammack, 2021); reading a life-story from a holistic-content perspective (Lieblich et al., 1998); and thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2007). In a narrative approach to analysis, the researcher tries "to keep the 'story' intact for interpretive purposes … to preserve sequence and the wealth of detail contained in long

sequences" (Riessman, 2007, p. 74). My goal was, as Josselson (2011) wrote, "to illuminate human experience as it is presented in textual form in order to reveal layered meanings that people assign to aspects of their lives" (p. 240). The following steps helped me achieve this goal: 1) transforming the oral interview data to written form through *transcription*, 2) *analyzing* and interpreting the transcripts, and 3) *crafting* the life stories.

3.6.1 Transcribing

Transcription is an essential piece of the analysis process (Forbat & Henderson, 2005; Lapadat, 2000; Sandelowski, 1994). The transcripts are "themselves products of a particular social interaction (the research interview), and of a particular rendering and reduction of personal experience into words (narrative construction)" (Sandelowski, 1994, p. 312). In working on the participant transcripts, I watched and listened to the interview recordings to get closer to their meanings (Atkinson, 2002). Using the recordings, I first wrote verbatim transcripts, checking the accuracy of the Otter.ai transcription (see Table 2 for transcript lengths). I recognize that my textual choices "influence the nature and direction of analysis" (Sandelowski, 1994, p. 312), and I tried to be as thoughtful and faithful as possible in decisions about punctuation, for example. I recognize that, verbatim or not, transcripts are not the same as the interview, or the recording of the interview. As Sandelowski (1994) wrote, "Like the photograph, the transcript captures something, but not everything, 'out there.' It also alters that something" (p. 312).

I then edited the transcripts, eliminating unnecessary material and spaces while also de-identifying them to protect the anonymity of the participants as much as possible (see Table 2 for de-identified transcript lengths). I tried to be as careful as possible in the process of privacy protection, sometimes forfeiting significant amounts of data; for example, stories that involved other people who might be recognizable. To check my reading of the material and to ensure that the transcripts correctly represented the story that the participants wanted to convey in the interview, the *de-identified interview transcripts*[3] were emailed for participant feedback prior to further analysis. This step also offered the opportunity for each participant to withdraw material and/or participation from the research project. In addition, it gave me the chance to follow up with participants on issues of clarity.

[3] I sent some original transcripts at first, but also sent the de-identified transcripts after realizing that these versions were more appropriate and would better demonstrate to the participants my handling of privacy concerns.

3.6.2 Analyzing[4]

My time-intensive approach to this aspect of analysis involved a type of coding or reading of the data that MacLure (2013) defined as "looking for pattern or order in a body of data – such as interview transcripts or field notes – by identifying recurring themes, categories or concepts" (p. 164). It is this type of analysis, a 'cross-story' analysis (Murray, 2009) that produced the results that are presented in Chapter 5. Sikes and Goodson (2016) referred to "marks of difference" that researchers look for, "They are seeking … patterns … which are taken as indicators of whatever it is they are suggesting marks out, or is characteristic of, their participants" (p. 66). MacLure (2013) described the process as one that "involves poring over the data, annotating, describing, linking, bringing theory to bear, recalling what others have written, and seeing things from different angles" (p. 174).

After receiving feedback on the de-identified transcripts (there were no suggested edits, and all were approved for my use), I continued with multiple readings of the data (Brown et al., 1991; Josselson & Hammack, 2021; Josselson & Lieblich, 2003; Lieblich et al., 1998). Lieblich offered guidance about initial readings, "Read the material several times until a pattern emerges, usually in the form of foci of the entire story.… Believe in your ability to detect the meaning of the text" (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 62). To help get an overview of the interview material, I wrote *content summaries* of the transcripts (S. E. Chase, 2003). Six content summaries were written as point form notes (see Table 2). To save time, I did not write a content summary for one participant because the interview was delayed and I had by then realized that although writing summaries was beneficial, it was not essential. I then reread the transcripts highlighting significant words, phrases, and stories that were pertinent to aging and piano teaching and learning. Weiss (1994) wrote, "some coding categories we bring to our studies before ever knowing what the interviews will produce" (p. 155). Nevertheless, Weiss suggested trying to "capture the interview material" asking, "what I am seeing instances of, what I am learning about, and what questions the material raises" (p. 155). It was with this approach that I identified the connection to the piano as an object, a topic that seemed significant but also somewhat confusing regarding its place in my inquiry. Although this topic took considerable time and research to understand it better and connect it to meaning and piano teaching and learning, it was

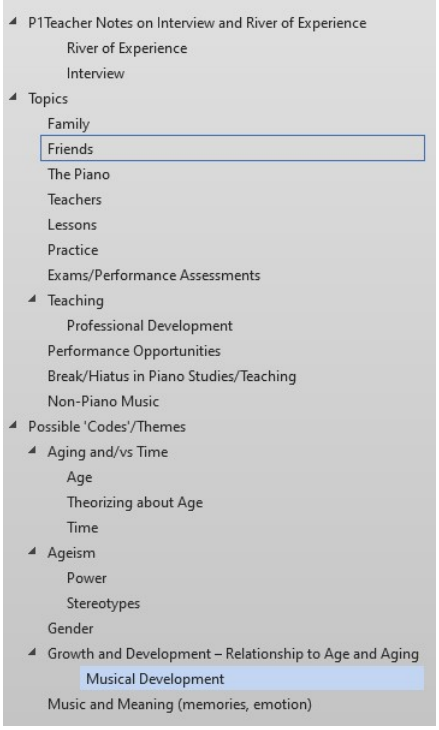
[4] I use the term *analyzing* in the traditional sense, remaining mindful that the *transcribing* and *crafting* processes are also forms of analysis.

a significant finding. With each reading, I looked for different topics related to my purpose and research question (Brown et al., 1991). For example, I looked for talk about age in one reading and gender in a separate reading of the transcripts.

Next, to create an alternative order for my thinking with the life stories, I created documents for each of the transcripts in which I restructured the life stories, sorting them into *topics* and possible *themes,* such as talk about meaning, aging, teachers, the piano, etc. (see Figure 3 below for an example of the data structured by topics/themes).

Figure 3

Headings for Notes on Data Structured by Topics/Themes

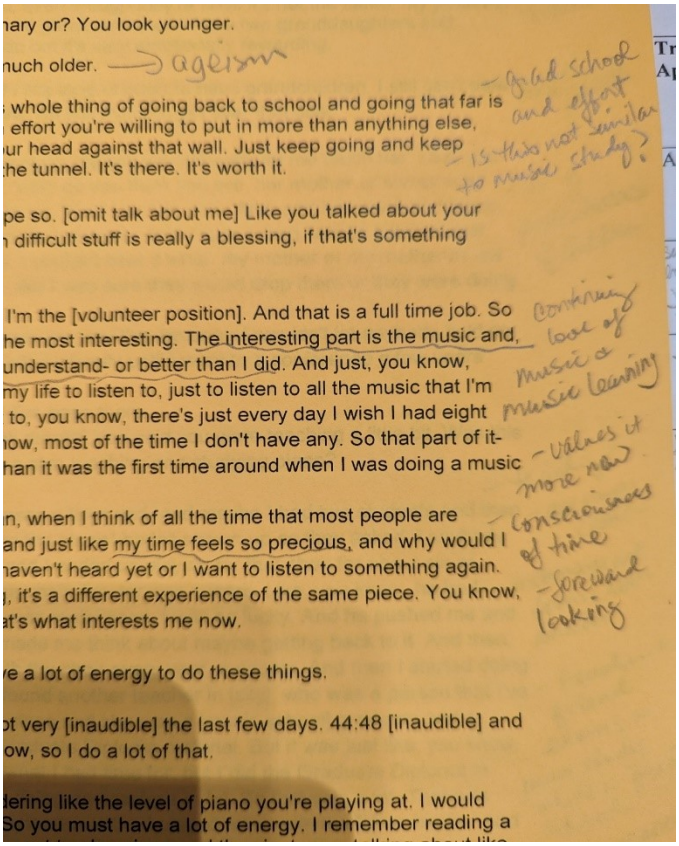


MacLure (2013) wrote about the evolution of reading the data, "During the process of coding, some things gradually grow, or glow, into greater significance than others, and become the preoccupations around which thought and writing cluster" (p. 175). The topics that I noted (coded) related mostly to piano teaching and learning (e.g. the piano, lessons, exams), and the potential themes that I eventually developed from the topics involved concepts about aging, growth, and meaning; for example, aging and wisdom; musical development; and memories and connectedness. In these documents (except for the concept map), I retained quoted material as

much as possible, noting page numbers from the transcript to help me retain the life story structure (S. E. Chase, 2003; Weiss, 1994). The topics/themes documents also gave me a different way to notice patterns because I kept the same order of topics and themes across all participant stories. Next, I printed the topics and themes documents and reread them making analysis memos on the page margins (see Figure 4 below for an example of analysis memos).

Figure 4

Analysis Memos

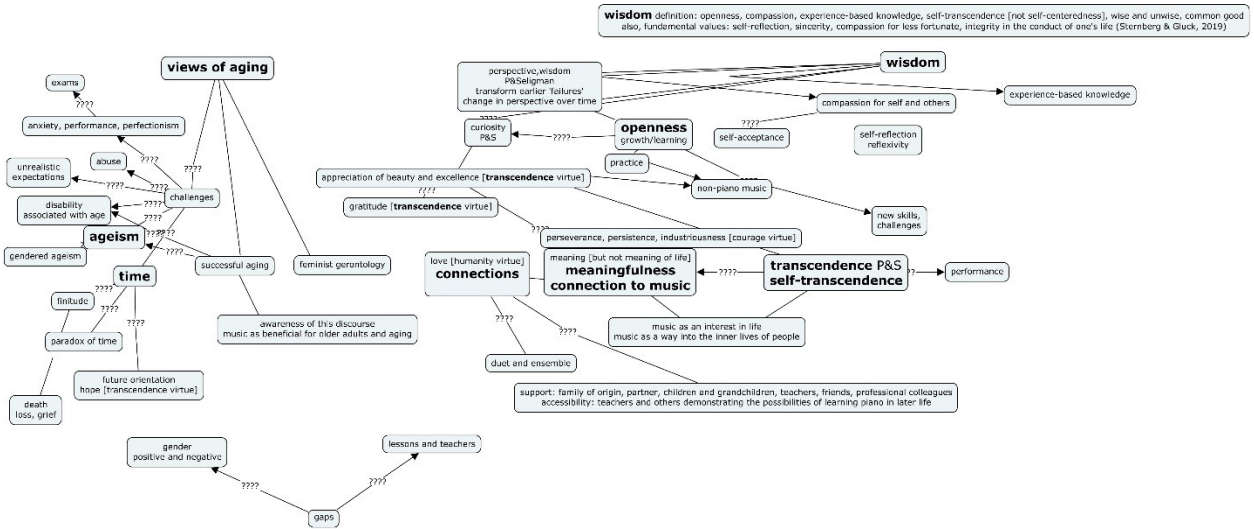


I then used coloured sticky notes to mark themes in the hard copies of the transcripts (i.e. green for learning/growth; blue for aging; lavender for meaning; pink for support such as family, friends, teachers, etc.). Although the documents had already been structured according to topics and themes, the sticky notes allowed me to visualize the main themes at a glance and mark overlapping topics or themes (see Appendix I Analysis: Sticky Notes). I also made a list of topics and themes and a table of all participants and topics/themes to make it easier for me to see participant similarities and differences at a glance. Sometimes, I also used a poster size pad of paper to draw different ideas about the patterns and connections between possible themes. I

engaged in different ways of 'reading' my data. I used both whole life and segmented stories in the form of both PDF and hard copy transcripts, marked with coloured highlights and sticky notes, mapped onto poster size drawing paper and in concept maps to allow me to perceive the data differently and make different connections—to play around with the data. See, for example, Figure 5 below for an example of a concept map created early in the analysis process when I was considering wisdom theory as a framework.

Figure 5

Concept Map of Aging and Piano Participation



I continued the process of memo writing in the transcripts and in my personal journal as I reread the data, theory, and literature in the field in an "open-ended and ongoing practice of *making* sense" (MacLure, 2013, p. 181).

Although researchers differ on the importance of theory, they agree that theory must be supported by the data (Weiss, 1994). Atkinson (1998) cautioned, "the researcher's role in considering applying a theoretical perspective to a life story would be to move back and forth from the part to the whole to discover the meaning that is in the whole" (p. 67). In other words, "Even when there is a theoretical analysis undertaken, the primary purpose in interpreting the story is to try to find the point of view of the person who has lived the story being told" (Atkinson, 1998, p. 68). Accordingly, the theorizing part of my analysis came later and was eventually informed by ideas about meaning from gerontology (especially Edmondson, 2015). I followed hunches about what I was reading in the participants' life stories. I used Edmondson's (2015) meaning framework in my analysis to understand better aging over the life course,

specifically in piano teaching and learning. I wondered how the women in my study felt and thought about growing older as piano students and/or teachers. How did age affect (if it did) their musical development? What do aging and piano teaching and learning have to do with meaning? In other words, my study did not address aging and meaning *of* life in general, but rather I examined aging and meaning *in* life, that is, piano teaching and learning. Above all, I followed the stories and the focus of my inquiry—what did the participants tell me about aging and piano teaching and learning?

In the analysis process, it was important to me to keep an open attitude as much as possible—to read the rivers of experience exercises and interview transcripts "carefully, empathically, and with an open mind" (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 62), and to "stay open to complexities, contradictions, and enigmas" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2019, p. 258). I was also mindful of "silences in the data," that is "absences and gaps in the narratives and texts being analyzed" (Weil, 2017, p. 273). However, I was also aware of my limitations, "What is left out can be as significant as what is included—provided that researchers are able to discover omissions, which is by no means always possible" (Sikes & Goodson, 2016, p. 64). For example, no participants mentioned ageism by name nor issues of gender, in keeping with Richardson's (1990a) observation, "Most people do not articulate how the sociological categories of race, gender, class, and ethnicity have shaped their lives or how the larger historical processes such as the demographic transition, service economies, and the Women's Movement have affected them" (p. 130). I tried to recognize "the potential for wonder" in my analysis, therefore allowing, "some temporary point of indecision on the threshold of knowing, from which something unexpected might issue" (MacLure, 2013, p. 181). Finally, I tried to maintain an awareness of the whole—the form of the life story, "There are aspects of the life story to which you might wish to pay special attention, but their significance depends on the entire story and its context (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 62). This is one reason that the life stories are first presented in their entirety in Chapter 4. They are then followed, in Chapter 5, by a further analysis that examines aspects of the life stories.

3.6.3 Crafting[5]

Atkinson (1998) described a life story as "a fairly complete narrating of one's entire experience of life as a whole, highlighting the most important aspects" (Atkinson, 1998, p. 8). Atkinson

[5] The term *crafting* is borrowed from Seidman (2006).

(2007) also noted, "the storyteller is the first interpreter of the story they tell" (p. 232). However, because stories "do not speak for themselves or have unanalysed merit" (Riessman 2005, p. 2), the researcher must also be an interpreter (Blauner, 1987; Reissman, 2005; Seidman, 2006). I have crafted the participants' life stories as a way of making sense of the data and of sharing what I learned. I also use the term *crafting* for this stage of analysis to acknowledge the art and science of life story inquiry (Atkinson, 1998, 2007 (used the term *transcribing*); Blauner, 1987; Bruner, 1999; Sandelowski, 1995; Weiss, 1994). Atkinson (2002) wrote, "the life story interview can be *approached* scientifically, but it is best *carried out* as an art…. Because life story interviewing itself is primarily an artful endeavor, the resulting interviews should be *interpreted* as an art form"(p. 131). In crafting the participant life stories, I had to manage what Blauner (1987) described as "several conflicting goals. We want to make our accounts economical, clear, and interesting (even compelling) to the reader, faithful to the original interview, and useful for illuminating particular substantive concerns" (p. 52). Blauner considered as analysis the crafting process, which he called first-person study, defined as any inquiry in which "the findings are presented predominantly directly through the narratives or accounts of interview subjects, rather than distilled through the summaries or analyses of the writer" (p. 47). Crafting involves considerable editing, similar to Atkinson's (1998) description of telling life stories for research purposes—the process "consists essentially of leaving out your questions, using standard spelling, creating sentence and paragraph structure, leaving out extra things, adding missing things, and possibly reorganizing certain sections to keep common subject matter together" (p. 56). In keeping with Blauner's (1987) notion of first-person study, I wanted readers of the life stories to feel the essence of the participants as much as possible. My goal for this part of the analysis was as Wolcott (1983) wrote, "Ideally … informants tell their stories almost entirely in their own words.… There should be a high ratio of information to explanation in a life story; sometimes there is no explanation or explicit interpretation at all" (pp. 7–8). I chose to write the life stories in the first-person to enliven and privilege the voice of the participant—and to try to avoid placing my voice as "the authoritative one, a voice that stands *above* the text" (Richardson, 1988, p. 204). To that end, I worked from the de-identified transcripts and not the content summaries or topic/theme documents, in which my *voice* was more prevalent. However, I recognize that although the participants decided what is told and what is left out of their stories (Atkinson, 2002; Horsdal, 2016), I as the researcher, decided "what constitutes data" (Sikes &

Goodson, 2016, p. 61). While I tried to keep as close as possible to the words, structure, meaning, and tone of the participants' voice, my voice is 'heard' in the choice to foreground the topics that pertain to my research purpose and question, that is, aging and piano teaching and learning. For example, largely, I took decisions about the content to be included (or not); the structure (I generally maintained the structure of the original transcript); subtitles; emphasis (by the amount of text included in the story), etc. I edited for clarity, omitting filler words at the beginning of sentences, repeated words that were not intended as emphasis, false starts, etc. I also made editorial changes for clarity and to redress any perceived disparity between researcher and participant, that is, the formal tone of the academic writing versus the more casual tone of conversational speech. For example, I removed most contractions. Finally, and most importantly, I tried to the best of my ability to maintain the meaning and character of each life story. As I did with the interview transcripts, I returned the life stories to participants for their feedback and I edited the stories accordingly. We worked through the story editing process either by email or by telephone, and I always deferred to their judgment in recognition that their stories were never mine. I also note that returning work (my transcripts or writing) to participants for feedback and consent is an ethical concern, not a way to establish "validity" (Riessman, 2007, p. 198).

With regard to privacy, my intention in crafting the life stories aligned with Weiss's (1994) desire to make the respondents "not recognizable to others" nor to themselves, although Weiss acknowledged that the latter was not always possible (p. 198). Unfortunately, I found that, despite my best efforts, recognisability remained an issue. For example, one participant mentioned that she was identifiable and we worked together to find an editing solution that made this reality more acceptable. Sometimes I lost relevant information because of privacy concerns (see more on this issue in the section on ethical considerations). However, I have tried to present stories that are faithful to their tellers, despite the limitations caused by privacy concerns. The analysis process resulted in what Atkinson (2002) described as the timeless essences of life stories —"settings and circumstances change, but motifs and the meanings they represent remain constant across lives and time" (p. 137). The life stories provided by the participants and crafted in analysis for this inquiry are presented in the following chapter (Chapter 4).

3.7 Ethical Considerations

I do not believe that my inquiry into aging and piano teaching and learning gave voice to the participants. Rather, they "gave their voices to the research" (Squire et al., 2014, p. 20). This

belief guided my decisions throughout my work. In addition to requiring approval from the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board, I appreciate that, as much as possible, participants must know and understand what was asked of them (and of me as researcher) during the research process, and that they were under no obligation to participate and could withdraw from the research at any time (Blair, 2016). My research involved minimal risk and did not include payment to the participants, deception, or incomplete disclosure. For my inquiry, I selected only material from the participant life stories that was relevant to my research question and that did not violate ethical principles such as protection of participant identity. In compliance with ethics guidelines, data were stored securely in a password-protected desktop computer or locked cabinet for the duration of the project and will eventually be destroyed appropriately. I informed the participants of all research procedures, possible means of data presentation (e.g., thesis, article, conference presentation), confidentiality and privacy issues, voluntary consent form protocol, including their ability to withdraw (Blair, 2016).

Confidentiality and identity protection for all participants were overriding concerns, although I appreciate the challenges of maintaining participant privacy in narrative inquiry. Especially in issues related to identity protection and anonymizing data, I was guided by Saunders et al. (2015) and Weiss (1994). As discussed previously, the issue of recognisability and anonymity is problematic in qualitative research. The consent form states that privacy will be protected "as much as possible," however, Saunders et al. (2015) cautioned that it is "an idealised view of anonymity" to imagine "that a person will never be traceable from the data presented about them" (p. 617). Saunders et al. (2015) wrote about internal and external identity protection—anyone connected to the environment related to the research will likely recognise "participants and places" (p. 618). This problem of recognition is increased with the use of snowball sampling. While I was aware of this issue, I also wanted to respect the generosity and assistance offered by participants in suggesting other possible participants. Saunders et al. (2015) describe another problem, "Our participants might be identified by some members of the intended *audience* for our research findings" (p. 620). I discussed such an instance in the previous section. The participant's recognition of the consequences of her participation recalls Sandelowski's (2011) statement that several academics have "proposed that the greatest risk of harm to participants in qualitative research studies lies in the dissemination phase of those studies when participants' lives are re-presented in research reports as the findings of

researchers" (p. 348). As discussed, I tried to protect participants to the best of my ability. For example, I did not refer to any connections participants had to each other or to me, nor did I retain identifying material. At the risk of losing information, I took this approach to protect the identity of the participants. I also used pseudonyms for all participants, and other persons are referred to using a noun indicating their role, for example, teacher, husband, etc. I thought a lot about pseudonyms and considered not naming the participants or using numbers rather than names. However, aside from the practical difficulties this approach would have posed with issues of clarity, it was not suitable for the personal nature of life stories. I also considered issues such the importance of names, the choice of names, etc. After much consideration, for reasons of efficacy, I elected to choose the pseudonyms myself. I experienced no opposition to the names, although I did not specifically ask. Despite my intentions, as Saunders et al. (2015) noted, "It also needs to be recognised that although researchers have professional duties and training in relation to anonymity, research participants may not" and may "disrupt anonymity" (p. 629). For example, participants may reference the research in social media (Saunders et al., 2015).

Finally, with regard to ownership, I agree with Atkinson (2007), "The person telling his or her story should always have the last word in how his or her story is presented in written form before it gets passed on to others or is published" (p. 11). My intention for life stories presented in this project was expressed by Horsdal (2016), who wanted the participants "to be—if not proud of their stories—at least, at ease with the event and the result of the telling" (p. 260).

3.8 Approach to Research Quality

The problem of assessing quality in narrative research is addressed by Andrews (2021), who wrote that assessment is complicated partly because "narrative research is notoriously a murky field" (p. 353). "Unlike many qualitative frameworks, narrative research offers no automatic starting or finishing points" (Andrews et al., 2013, p. 1). Narrative research "offers no overall rules about suitable materials or modes of investigation, or the best level at which to study stories" (Andrews et al., 2013, p. 1). In addition, as Atkinson (1998) noted, the life story interview and its research, like works of art, should be assessed by their own standards of judgment "based primarily on subjectivity, flexibility, and inevitable human variables" (p. 21). I organized my approach to quality using Andrews's (2021) checklist of 10 indicators of quality in narrative research: *truthfulness*, *trustworthiness*, *critical reflexivity*, *scholarship and accessibility*, *ethical sensitivity* (especially the negotiation of power at all stages of the research),

co-construction of meaning (by the participant, researcher, and reader), *attention to the untold* (what is said and left unsaid), *awareness of temporal fluidity* ("narrative research is built upon shifting ground"), *multilayered stories* ("stories always exist in relation to other stories"), and *contextualisation of the research* (stories are produced in a specific context, at a particular moment, for an audience, and with a purpose) (pp. 363–364). The list is not meant to be exhaustive, but does include "important aspects of narrative scholarship" (Andrews, 2021, p. 363). I have discussed the first three indicators below. Regarding the fourth indicator, scholarship and accessibility, of necessity, the main purpose of my research and thesis is scholarly, as partial fulfillment of the requirements for a graduate degree. Concerning accessibility, some participants have asked me about reading the dissertation and I will make it available to them. I do not believe that there are issues with accessibility—participants will be able "to understand what is being written about them" (Andrews, 2021, p. 364). Andrews's (2021) other indicators of quality have been addressed throughout this chapter.

With regard to the "'truth' of the stories people tell," Andrews (2021) cautioned, "what is it precisely that one hopes to learn when listening to the tales of others" (p. 354)? Atkinson (1998) provided a response, "You are really seeking the insider's viewpoint on the life being lived. The storyteller should be considered both the expert and the authority on his or her own life" (p. 59). In addition, Josselson and Hammack (2021) argued that, "Narrative truth involves a constructed account of experience," with a focus on "how events are remembered, connected to one another, and understood in relation to a person’s life course and position in society, culture, and time" (p. 7). Other questions are related to truthfulness, "What truth?" and "Whose truth?" It depends on what people "are able and willing to take in" and on who is telling the story, "Any two people observing the same phenomenon will offer different accounts of their experience" (Squire et al. 2014, p. 109). I was interested in learning about the experiences of participants and in telling their stories with faithfulness to their meaning and to my understanding of their meaning.

I have tried to foster trustworthiness in my project by informing myself of the relevant issues and considering the following guidelines. Riessman (2007) cautioned that students must argue "to persuade audiences about the trustworthiness of their data and interpretations—they didn't simply make up the stories they claim to have collected, and they followed a methodical path, guided by ethical considerations and theory, to story their findings" (p. 186).

Trustworthiness is sought on two levels "the story told by a research participant and the … story told by the researcher" (p. 184). In addition, Riessman (2007) advised researchers to include supporting evidence from participants, including contradictory evidence, and to consider alternative interpretations.

Researcher reflexivity is important for research of any type. Finlay (2002) stressed the importance of researcher reflexivity as one way (but no guarantee) of evaluating how intersubjective elements influence the trustworthiness and quality of research, "indeed, to avoid reflexive analysis might even compromise the research itself" (p. 543). However, Finlay (2003) also noted the importance of critical reflection: "Introspection and intersubjective reflection without critical self-analysis is surely of limited value and open to the charge of self-indulgence" (p. 17). To encourage reflexivity, I maintained a journal writing practice throughout my studies in the Faculty of Education, including the duration of my research project, (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Riessman, 2007). Keeping a journal was also helpful for the writing of research, "jogging memory and encouraging truthfulness" (Riessman, 2007, p. 192).

Critical reflexivity is also needed to answer questions about the researcher's position and perspective. I have tried to be transparent about my place in my research throughout my project. Most relevant to this study is my position as a white, female, older graduate student and piano teacher, although I recognize that there are other aspects of both privilege and oppression in my positioning (Morgan, 1996). I also recognize the need for an awareness that the research participants have their own perspectives and positions. In addition, my own age, not compared to participants (although that is also important), but as something that affects my perspective is relevant to this project. I could not have done this work in my 20s—at least not in the same way. I would also do it differently 20 years from now. My own age and corresponding experiences have an effect on my understanding of aging. Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) asked researchers to consider how their subjectivity has "been both a producer and a product" of their work (p. 964).

In summary, on improving quality in narrative inquiry, Reissman (2007) wrote, "Following a methodical path, documenting claims, and practicing reflexivity strengthens the case for validity" (p. 193). Despite the difficulties of assessing narrative research, I have prioritized issues related to quality throughout the process of conducting and writing my narrative inquiry.

3.9 Approach to the Presentation of the Study Results

In the two chapters that follow this one, I present the outcome of my narrative inquiry about aging and piano teaching and learning. At the risk of over-simplifying, the first results chapter is about the particular (individual life stories), and the second is more about the general (abstraction and theorizing the collective story). Returning to the concept of individual and collective stories as discussed earlier in this chapter, the first of these chapters (Chapter 4) is a presentation of the participants' musical life stories that were crafted from my data. I wrote first-person accounts of the study participants, maintaining, where possible, the words of each individual. I did not use all of my data in the stories, but I *did* endeavour to retain all data that were relevant to my research topic while also protecting the identities of the participants and avoiding repetition of material. I also chose stories and descriptions that I felt best illustrated the overall life story, always having the participant in mind as the owner. Clandinin and Connelly (1989) wrote,

> Researchers want to share their narrative inquiries in ways that help readers question their own stories, raise their own questions about practices and see in the narrative accounts stories of their own stories. As people read narrative accounts, the intent is to foster reflection, storying and restorying for them. (p. 16)

The above quote from Clandinin and Connelly clarifies one of my intentions in presenting the study participants' stories. I wanted to highlight the experiences of older people who learn, play, and teach piano. I hope that these stories serve to broaden and enrich prevailing narratives about older people in general and older piano students and teachers in particular. I also present the following narratives to show the "stories I have used to think with" (Bateson, 1989, pp. 33–34). My aim was to foreground the words, meaning, and spirit of each participant's musical life story. My voice was intentionally in the background as the crafter of the participants' stories.

The second of the results chapters (Chapter 5) is a further analysis of the life stories as presented in the first results chapter. In this chapter, my voice is more prominent as I used theoretical frameworks and various literatures to try to make sense of the participants' musical life stories as a collective story of aging, meaning, and piano teaching and learning. In this setting, the participants' words were kept as written in the life stories, but were separated from their teller and story. Specifically, the participant quotations that I use in Chapter 5 were taken verbatim from Chapter 4. The purpose of using participant quotations in second results chapter was not to prove my interpretation, but rather to be "illustrative" and bring my "theoretical

claims to life" (Thorne, 2020, p. 5). The significant aspect of the quotations was their content, not their attribution or abundance. I used quotations directly from the participant life stories in Chapter 4 for reasons of suitability and ethical concerns. The quotations were exemplars and the life stories, and by extension, the quotations had been approved for use in my study by the participants. I also tried to use quotations equally from all participants. In the two chapters (Chapters 4 and 5) where I present and discuss my results, I tried to find a balance among my ethical concerns, desire to faithfully represent my data, and need for trustworthiness.

3.10 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have tried to engender trust in my project by outlining and providing justification for my research design decisions and process, including ethical considerations. In my narrative inquiry, I used a visual elicitation tool (river of experience) and interview approach to ask seven older female study participants about their experiences of growing older in piano learning and/or teaching. My analysis involved crafting life stories for each participant and further making sense of these stories drawing on theoretical frameworks about meaning and serious leisure, as well as the literature on adult music, and especially piano, teaching and learning.

Chapter 4 Results: Participant Life Stories

"Do you remember your piano lessons? Most people do."

(Tunstall, 2008, p. 2)

The purpose of my research was to understand better the relationship between aging and piano teaching and learning through an exploration of age in the musical lives of older people. I wondered about the experience of aging for piano students and teachers, "What does it mean to grow older?" I also wondered what piano students' and teachers' experiences and views of aging might suggest regarding piano learning and teaching. This chapter provides the beginning of a response to my questioning.

The following first-person life stories were crafted from the narratives of the study participants: four piano students and three piano teachers. Specifically, the focus was their experiences of aging in the context of their lifelong participation in piano learning, teaching, or both. I wrote these life stories thanks to the information provided in the River of Experience exercises, interview transcripts, and participant feedback. A few notes on presentation: Firstly, the life stories appear in alphabetical order by pseudonym. Secondly, although I call the participants either *teachers* or *students* according to their main area of piano experience, I recognize the limitations of these labels. All piano *teachers* have also been, or may still be *students*, and all participants are *musicians*. I could have also used the term *amateur*, especially for the students. Third, participant discussion of piano grades refers to a curriculum and exam system set by a music conservatory, usually The Royal Conservatory of Music. Finally, I have used italics for my own words.

Anne: Piano Teacher

In our interview, Anne set forth three elements that she saw as important in characterizing later life: connections, curiosity, and companionship. She began with a preview of her thoughts about aging.

Old age creeps up on us all so quickly. All of a sudden, you are older and some of the things that you thought you would be doing for a long, long time are not quite as possible. At the age of 76 or 78, I still thought life was interesting and exciting. I wonder if my second husband had not come into my life, would I … I think I still would have loved life at that age, because I had a *curiosity* about everything.

Childhood Piano Lessons

I first started taking piano lessons when I was a very little girl. I was living with my aunt and uncle at the time. My cousin was a brilliant pianist. She was the youngest pianist in Ontario to get her ARCT[6] at 11 years old. I used to sit on the chesterfield at night while she was practicing and hope my aunt wouldn't find me and send me up to bed. I just loved it. I had her teacher at first, and he was a wonderful teacher.

When I came back to my hometown, I took piano lessons in school using a cardboard keyboard. Then I went to a religious school, and I took piano lessons with an absolutely hideous witch of a teacher. I thought if I were ever to teach, I'd never be like her. We didn't have a piano at that time, so after I left the religious school I had no piano. When I was 11, my mother and father bought a piano for me. I was in heaven. My dad knew, I won't mention any names, a chap who was very instrumental in music in my hometown. He signed me up for lessons with this gentleman. "Gentleman," I use the word loosely. I was 11 years old.

During Anne's second lesson, the teacher molested her. She quit lessons without telling her parents what had happened.

So I quit and my parents felt, "Here we got you your piano, and we got your lessons, and you quit." But, I wouldn't go back to it.

I stated that the event must have been a burden for her to carry.

It was a burden, but it was also stupid. Too bad that I did not speak up because I'm sure there were other kids that he molested in that way. He was very well-known, and he worked teaching kids and in other capacities. God knows how many kids he abused like that. I wish – now that's the guilt I carry – that I did say something so that other kids would not have … anyway. I didn't have piano lessons from then on. I taught myself just from what I knew at that point, which was limited. It was sort of sad, because Mum was working full time. Music was a real balm for me – I would come home from school and I could go to the piano and play. It was my companion and my friend during that period.

Although Anne's piano participation ended, she continued to learn music.

I went to high school, and we had a magnificent music program. For five years I played the clarinet and learned so much theory that I would never have learned elsewhere. I had a basic

[6] ARCT is an initialization denoting the Associate Diploma, the highest academic standing awarded by The Royal Conservatory of Music

knowledge of theory from piano, but I learned a lot from clarinet playing. I played in the orchestra. I've also always been a singer and a dancer. Music was always part of my life in some way.

The Passage to Piano Teaching

When I got married, my mother wanted to send my piano down to us, but it would have cost $50 and we were in an apartment. We didn't have any place to put it, so I still didn't have a piano. I bought a guitar, and taught myself how to play. When we moved for my first husband's job I told him, "I'll go on one condition – that we get a piano." So, we got a piano. I had my piano. I loved it. Unfortunately, my husband picked it out, and it was really almost a spinet, just a little guy. But, it was wonderful to have a piano again. I was just so happy. I got a teacher for our sons because they were all at an age where they could take piano lessons. A university student came to the house to teach the boys. I was just doodling away on the piano one day when she came. When I opened the door, she asked who was playing the piano. I told her my history, and said, "I don't have any background at all." She said, "You play really well. You could be teaching." She gave me the name of a piano teacher, a lady who was about 75 or 76 years old. She was the most wonderful teacher you could imagine. Her mother had been a piano teacher as well. This teacher had such a vast background of experience. I think she was 96 when she finished teaching. I took over some of her students. We all adored her, and I was asked to do her eulogy. I think she was my mentor, not only in music, but also in life. She couldn't drive, so I would take her to a dress shop that she liked and she would try on clothes. She loved to look nice. She took joy out of life and found happiness in everything around her. She was a great example for me, and I was really sad when she died.

At the same time, I had another teacher. He had been the director of a European opera company. His family had escaped from the Russian invasion after the Second World War. He was a wonderful fellow with a totally different style of teaching. He was also in his late 70s, early 80s. He was magical. I didn't learn anything about music from him except from following his scores as he played his music, or a recording of his music. My teachers were two people who lived until they died. They didn't sit back and feel sorry for themselves for any reason. My teacher could have felt very sorry for herself for not having married, but she didn't. I think I got some clues there. I learned a tremendous amount from these two people. They both gave me such a lesson in how to live my life.

So I continued with my teaching and I had large numbers of students. At first, I was teaching only up to Grade 6 or 7, and eventually Grade 8. A little story about my teacher though first. When I went to see her, I had to audition to take lessons with her. I played something and I assumed that she would take me on at maybe a Grade 3 or Grade 4 level, but she took me at Grade 6. I did a Grade 6 exam that year, a 7 the next year, 8 the next, and 9 the next, which I passed with honors. The following year, or maybe two years later, I was to take my Grade 10. My close relative passed away and my pet died. I had tendonitis in both arms from all the work I had been doing preparing for the exam. I took my exam. A well-known teacher-pianist was the examiner, and I knew who he was. So, when I saw him I thought, "Oh, shoot, I'm dead in the water." I did the best I could. It was not good – I have to admit it wasn't. I had many good qualities, but I had a lot of trouble with the technical stuff. So afterwards, I give him credit for this, he sent me a letter. He wrote, "I didn't give you a mark. I know you're a very musical person, and there was a lot of quality in your work, but you just weren't ready for this exam." I appreciated that he did that. That's where I ended, as far as taking exams. I didn't go on to my ARCT because I was well into my 50s and I thought, "What do I need it for? I really don't need this."

Teaching and Later Life

I will honestly say that my last 20 plus years of life have been the greatest time of growth (particularly in music).

The more than 20 years to which Anne referred above, were spent teaching piano and educating music students.

I continued with my teaching, and I loved it. I think what it does for an older person – it keeps you young. You're hearing about what your students are doing in their lives. It's refreshing, brightening, and broadening for you. Otherwise, if you are not exposed to that kind of thing, your mind begins to close in on you, and your thoughts are only about what affects you. Some people have grandchildren around and they get that interaction, but many people don't. I see my grandkids as much as we possibly can. I think that teaching was a wonderful thing for me. I was able to keep in touch my students, and that enhanced my life. Even though I was on my own after my first husband died, I never felt myself truly lonely. I always had something going on with my students, or as part of the music teachers' community.

I asked her whether she taught adults.

My oldest student was 83. Now there was a wonderful example of a man who had never stopped. He had been the principal of a private boys' school. He would go to California for the wintertime. He had a music teacher in California and one in Canada. He was just so full of energy and life, and it was just lovely to teach him. He was a remarkable man. He died, which saddened me greatly. I had many adult students as well as a very full schedule of kids, from beginners right up to ARCT level. I stopped teaching beginners towards the end. I loved the kids. I really enjoyed the more developed pianists and working with them. I loved working with adults, whether they were kids or … "kids," whether they were beginners or whether they had taken piano before. I am still in touch with many of my adult students, along with many young people. A lot of them are Facebook friends. One of my sweetest kids is getting married in three months – he's 34. I have students who now have five or six kids. It's really lovely to have that connection with them. Yes, *connection* is such an important word, you know, *connection*, and *curiosity – C*s. Let's find another *C*.

You know, we all can't be gifted with great health. My health is good, but I have pains and aches. I think if I wasn't interested in things outside, I could very easily sit in a corner. I'm going to be 86. I just feel that life is an exciting thing. Despite the horrible condition the world is in – you can't be swallowed up by that. I think it's important for anybody who is growing older to have an interest in life – music is wonderful because it covers so many fields. Music is universal, and it doesn't matter what type it is. We have friends who are punk rockers, and country and western lovers. One of our best friend couples are fortepiano players. Well, you don't see too many fortepiano duos around. They're in their mid to late 70s, and still going strong. They are still enjoying life. *Connections* may be an important part of life, because the more you keep connected with people and interests, the younger you feel, the younger you are, and the more you are able to contribute. When I worked in a nursing home, we had many really older people. I think a lot of the reason they lived so long was because they had activity around them. Loneliness is a big part of deterioration. But, I'm torn, because my mother would say, "They're old people in there. I don't want to go to an old people's home." I'm fine with my own company. But, I wonder how long you last in certain conditions as an adult by yourself, especially if you can't make social arrangements for yourself.

I think I've come up with three things … *connections, curiosity*, and *companionship* that are so important for growing older – I mean, they're important to me.

Barbara: Piano Student

Before she began her story, Barbara shared some thoughts and observations regarding music and cognition. In her work as a nurse, she had noticed that people with dementia maintained a good memory for music.

They know it by heart. They may know all of the words. They may even be able to play it on the piano. To me that is such an amazing way into somebody's brain. People who have a stroke, who have aphasia, can often speak by singing songs they know. Somehow, the rhythm of the music allows them to form the words again. Music is such an interesting passage into people's lives.

Childhood Music and Piano Lessons

Neither of my parents played musical instruments, but both loved to dance. They met during the war. There was so much dancing and music during the war, and my dad always sang those songs. I don't really remember when the piano arrived at the house, but I have this feeling that I took some lessons. I have no memory of a piano being in the house at that time, but when we moved north, the piano was definitely there. I took lessons, but I was terrified of taking any kind of exam. My music teacher was pretty good. She gave me all kinds of music – honky-tonk songs, and formal classical music. She put up with me never practicing, or practicing an hour before my lesson. I loved the music. I loved playing, but I was not a practicer. I also loved ballet and ballet music, and I was very fortunate because the Royal Opera House Ballet toured, and we went every year. Even during those years when I was a teenager and I wasn't taking lessons, I went to the ballet. There were always so many years when the piano just tootled around – I didn't play it except at Christmas to play some carols.

The Pull of the Piano

Barbara's life became busy with marriage, children, and a demanding career. However, music and the piano remained meaningful for her. She began with the story of her husband buying her a piano.

We were in northern Canada, where I worked as a nurse. I went to the little store to do some shopping and when I got home, a piano was being installed in the house. My husband had bought a piano for me. It was beautiful. I started to play old pieces on and off – no lessons. Life was busy, but the piano was there, and it was part of the household again. There were times when I really felt pulled towards it.

Barbara sometimes played from a piano book that had a variety of pieces, ranging from slow and relaxing works to pieces that were loud and "created a lot of noise."

The mood of the music was often how I felt. If I was really uptight, I remember sitting down and banging it out thinking, "Okay, I've just had enough of this." Playing piano is a wonderful way of expressing emotion and getting rid of any fiery emotions that you might have. If you want to slow down fiery emotions, play something that you have to play lightly and slowly.

We moved, and we put the piano downstairs, and of course it wasn't played very much. I did not want to get rid of it – to part with it. I decided that I was either going to play, or it was going to leave. I would just say goodbye to the piano and I would not think about it again. I called the piano moving company, and they moved it upstairs. I started to play it, I don't remember how soon after that, but probably several years because I got a job and I got busy.

Piano Lessons and Later Life

Barbara has been studying with her current teacher for almost 20 years, sporadically for the last several.

My piano teacher put a flyer in my mailbox saying that she specialized in older adults. I thought that was a good signal. One, the piano was upstairs, and two, there was a teacher saying, "Why don't you try me." She has been the most wonderful person. No exams, very little theory, but she gives me a wide range of music, and she seems to know what I would like. Some of it turned out to be music from my dad's time, so it has come full circle. The practicing doesn't bother me so much, and I practice more efficiently.

At some point, a friend started to play the recorder, got another friend to play, and then said to me, "Why don't you come and play the piano?" I had never played with anybody before – never accompanied. The music had to be simple and not very fast to start with. We did Christmas carols and general music, playing songs and some hymns together once a week. Then my friend thought that we should learn to play the ukulele. We went for a few lessons and we took an online course. We alternated recorder, ukulele, and piano; and my accompaniment skills increased. Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit. … We moved to online lessons. They are okay, not the best, but ok. That's when improvisation came up. My friend had started with another teacher, so I thought I would do improvisation with my friend's teacher, and a little more serious music with my longtime teacher. Improvisation is just amazing – to use the notes in the way that you want them to sound. My husband plays the piano by ear, never had any formal training, but

he will pick out a tune. I can't do that; I'm a note person. Improvisation opened my mind. The exercise that got me started used only the black keys. All of a sudden, there was melody, there was harmony, and I could hear. I did that for a year, and then various things have slowed that down.

I just enjoy playing the piano now – just sitting down and playing anything I fancy. I play quite a bit of jazz with my longtime teacher, and some blues, as well as some Grade 8 and Grade 9 pieces. Sometimes I hear a piece that I think I'd like, and my teacher finds it for me. In the last couple of years, I have found it more difficult to play chords with four, and sometimes three notes, so I have to adapt. I find it a real nuisance that I just can't reach the notes that I used to be able to reach. I arpeggiate or drop a note because I've learned that I can adapt like that, whereas in the beginning, I just played what was written. Another thing that I learned in the last few years is that sometimes you can play only the melody, or play the melody an octave higher for more interest. I find that my teacher is very open – she will say, "Go listen to a couple of people play that, sing that. See which one you like and you want to play like." The other thing that she has us do – I was terrified, and some of the others were too – she has the adult students play for one another. Over time, I was still scared, but I somehow engaged with it. I learned from her, "Don't worry if you make mistakes. Just keep going." All these things have made me more relaxed – "keep on going, enjoy the music, enjoy playing." I guess that's my story.

I ask what she thinks about being an older piano student.

I think that my teacher's advertisement stating that she specialized in teaching older adults certainly made the idea comfortable. I did not want to be treated as I had as a child. That was a freeing part. As an older adult, if I was given a piece of music that I didn't like, I didn't play it, and there was no issue. I've done that. Or, if I've been battling away at something and said, "I'm just really fed up with this one," my teacher has happily said, "Let's put it away for a while." Sometimes it came back. Sometimes it never did. I think that is the benefit of being an older person. You desperately need a teacher who is going to work with you, rather than you working with her – to find music not only that you like, but that your hands, your eyes, and your brain will work with. You have to have a sensitive person on the other side. That gives you inspiration, and that will help you to delight in touching that piano.

Once my adult children were not around as much, I had so much more time to play. It became a bigger part of my life because there was this time and space that could be given more

to me than to other people. I think for many years, it was career, earning money, and looking after the house that took up the time. I also bought a new piano – what a beautiful one. It's a lovely upright. It has the most beautiful tone, and it makes a lot of noise. It really increased my pleasure. My husband is from Scotland and he's into fiddle, piano, accordion music, and a lot of dance reels. So, this can be quite a noisy musical household with me bashing away at the piano, or him with his reels. I think that my journey has not finished. The pleasure that I have is in knowing that I'm going to get back to doing some more improvisation, working with my teacher again, and moving into music in different ways.

Carol: Piano Teacher

The Passage to Piano Teaching

I grew up in a small community. In our home, the piano was the music instrument and we all played. That was expected. It was not my first love – I loved to sing. That's what I really wanted to do, but there was no singing teacher in the community. There was a piano, so that's what I did. I did all the exams and I have to say, my practice habits were not good at all because I just didn't seem to be inclined. I could do things at the last minute and get by.

That was the beginning. In high school, I joined glee club and everything musical. Someone told me about this special music class at teachers' college. I looked into it, and thought I would like it, but I had no idea what I was getting into. It was very intense with classes five days a week and one teacher for six students. What I learned there has taken me through my whole career. I was also expected to take private piano lessons, which I did. I worked at making up for the years of school when I hadn't worked very hard.

Carol married, had children, and taught school music for three years, but frequent moves made it too difficult to continue teaching.

Music teaching was kind of there with me, but I wasn't actively involved, and I didn't have a piano. It was 15 or 16 years without a piano in the home. I decided to give up on teaching in schools and started to take piano lessons. That got me back to the piano. So from then on, it was work, work, work, get my skills up, get my grades up, and work at my ARCT, because I was not willing to teach without the qualifications that I wanted to have. I have to describe what my mentor at university meant to me – she saved my piano life really. I had been studying again for four or five years and I was at a very down period. I just questioned everything about myself musically. My friend and I decided to try this teacher. That saved my life – my musical life. I

went up the stairs to her studio feeling down, down, down and I left as if I was walking on air because she told me how musical I was and that she would be happy to teach me. That got me going, and it affected my own teaching. I worked very, very hard with her and I finished up feeling that "yes I can do this." So, away I went – at least 45 years teaching, which tells my age.

In my musical life, I have had two mentors. The first was the music education teacher at teachers college. She was absolutely wonderful, and if it hadn't been for her I don't know how I would have gotten through all the school stuff and teaching. The second was my professor at university who took me through my development in piano. I have been very lucky in that regard. My piano teacher in teachers' college was very, very tough, and I left the studio every week in tears. It was very hard on me. In the end, it just made me angry. I had to show him that I could do it, which I did. I completed my exam with distinction. His method worked with me, but it would not be a method that I would adopt. I'm just not that kind of person. It was interesting, what I went through that year. I worked, and worked, and worked and so I guess it was all fine. He was very good teacher too, and I was learning many things that I needed to learn. So anyway, it wasn't all easy.

Teaching and Playing Piano in Later Life

My adult students and I have a wonderful relationship. We get along really well. I have had a couple of students for 15 years or more. We are friends really. We have a studio club[7], and the students always want me to play. It feels like I'm putting myself out there when I'm playing for my students, but it's good for me. My adult students take lessons for their own accomplishment and enjoyment, but they're willing to work very hard. They are very serious and open to any suggestions I give them. Whatever I ask of them, they try very hard to do. It is rewarding for all of us. I find that teaching keeps me going – it's there in my mind. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we didn't do the Zoom thing. They didn't think that we needed to do that. When we were able to get back together, I used my digital piano so that I could teach and demonstrate at a distance. That worked really well.

I suggest that not all teachers enjoy teaching adult students.

Many of the teachers I know thoroughly enjoy their adult students. I don't really accept beginner adults. It does not interest me anymore to introduce the basics. I like to have students who have some experience, and who are at a certain level – I guess that's selfish of me in a way. I taught

[7] An informal gathering offered by the teacher that provides students the opportunity to play piano for one another.

young child beginners for many years, and I was very interested in starting them, watching them progress, and taking them along. Teaching beginner adults – it is difficult. There are things that get in the way of their learning. As much as I try to encourage them, they expect way too much of themselves and don't see their progress. I think many adults have the impression that you can sit down at the piano and learn to play in a short time. As you know, it just is not so. They have put in this agonizing time to learn, and the rewards should be there, and they will be eventually, but it's hard to see sometimes. Some adults just pack it in because it is too hard. One adult beginner I had was not a success; he was just too nervous about it. If you are very bright and you start to learn an instrument, you feel like you're back in kindergarten. It's very hard. I get that. All of my adult students, except for one, have had piano experience. They know what to expect, and they want to get back to it, to progress, and learn for their own enjoyment.

I ask about student exams.

The students I have now are not interested in exams. We still follow the curriculum and work on pieces for the studio club, but the pressure of preparing for an exam is totally different. I took them through some exams. We came to the realization, "Let's just enjoy learning the pieces, playing the piano, and our time together, rather than these terrible exams." Adults, more than younger students, find exams very stressful. Younger students take them in stride a bit more, but for adults it is quite a trauma. One student did her Grade 8 and 9 with me, and we are working at the Grade 10 level, but she doesn't feel the need to attempt a Grade 10 exam. Exams serve a wonderful purpose, but they can also cut you down a bit. If you don't do well on the particular day of the exam, it can really affect you. I think exams are a two-edged sword. Students who are doing their exams are struggling. Their focus is learning those pieces and then they put them aside, never look at them again, and go on to the next piece. I remember someone saying, "I never have anything to play because the things I'm working on aren't ready, and I haven't kept up the things that I have learned." It's a shame. Exams just scare me to death. I don't recall agonizing very much when I was younger. I did exams and I prepared, but once I got into the more advanced grades and got older, it was torture doing the exams. My ARCT exam was beyond torture. Thank heavens for my second mentor who got me through it.

I ask Carol if she thinks about age with regard to her students and teaching.

I didn't think about age when I was teaching younger children or high school students, but now that I teach only adults, I think of aging and we talk about how piano is good for our body and

mind. I also say to my students, "We're at an age where we should be doing what we like, what we want to be doing, not what we think we should be doing, or what somebody expects us to be doing." I give them a piece to learn, and if they don't like it, we put it aside. We find something else. It doesn't happen often because I know what I think they would enjoy. For the time a student spends learning a piece of music at the Grade 9–10 level, they better be enjoying it and feel that they are accomplishing something.

I ask for her thoughts about her own aging and piano playing.

My attitude towards piano has changed a lot since I have become older. I found it hard when I was teaching 30 students, but now that I have retired mostly, I have time, and I am really enjoying piano. I have seen its benefits in so many ways. It fills hours, and works your mind and fingers. Piano requires such concentration that other concerns fade – it's only you and the instrument. I think it is about the only thing that got me through COVID-19. Piano was my solace. I could go to the piano every day and fill a couple of hours, and figure out what I wanted to do with this or that piece.

Another important thing that has been good for me is dueting. It is important at any age, but especially in later life. I have almost always had a duet partner, meeting once a week. Dueting is good on many levels; there is the social aspect, plus the element of playing music together and learning things from each other. It is a very good exercise in listening. Piano can be a bit lonely. You are playing and practicing by yourself, so it's really good to have friends who are doing the same thing.

I have always studied classical piano, but I've started playing a bit of jazz. I was encouraged by my piano duet partner and by one of my students who loves jazz. I'm not very good at it, and I'm not very seriously into it, but it's just a different way of playing and I'm quite enjoying it. I think it's good for me. It's pushing me beyond my comfort level, and I can see that I'm getting better at it. It wasn't instinctive, so I do have to count the music out, know what the rhythms are telling me, and so on.

I do find that trying to memorize a piece is a slower process as compared to when I was doing exams. I don't recall working very hard on memorization; it came much faster and easier. Now I really have to study the music and repeat it over, and over, and over. That is a little frustrating. I have always been quite critical of myself. Some days I sit down to practice and I think that nothing is working for me. Other days I sit down and everything is just wonderful. So I

don't know if that has to do with age or not, but it is lovely when everything is going well. I think perfectionism gets worse as you get older. Sometimes the piano is a great big black beast to me – there is this big black beast waiting to put me down. Other times it is my best friend. With age, I have come to realize my own capabilities. The same is true for my students. I just played the first and second movements of a classical sonata for my students, but I will never tackle the third movement. I know that is beyond me now. I just know, pretty much, what I can and cannot do, and I am content with that. I know that I don't have to do these really technically difficult things. I don't think about that. There is an acceptance that this is okay. Finally you're at an age where this is okay. It's a stage in life.

Danielle: Piano Student

Childhood and Piano Lessons

My aunt was just the most marvelous pianist. My mother died during childbirth, so I was raised by my grandmother, and there were two aunts at home. One aunt was about 15 years older than I was. This was wartime, from when I was about 3 to 6 years old, and my aunt would play all these wartime songs for her friends, and they'd sing around the piano. All of this music laid the foundation for me. When I was 12, my aunt married, and we moved. After that, somehow, she wasn't close to the family. I know that when she got married she never played the piano again. I am grateful for my aunt because she was wonderful to me. I wouldn't say that she got me started in piano, but I think she did something interior to me that gave me music in my life. I used to wonder how she played, because she never played without music, but it never sounded like she was playing exactly what was written. She would improvise in her lesson. At a certain point, I could read music enough to know that she wasn't playing the music exactly as written.

My aunt never taught me though. That was my teacher. She was just a fantastic person. She had a lovely old house up the street from the school, and I had my lesson after school.
I loved my teacher, but I hated practicing. When I look back, I did terrible things. We had this little book, and we were supposed to write down how many minutes we practiced every day. One of my aunts lived between the school and teacher's house. I remember one day when I was about seven, knocking on my aunt's door and asking her for a pencil. I sat down on the doorstep and wrote – lying about how many different times I had practiced. I've picked up piano in spite of not practicing. My teacher was an amazing lady who played the organ at Church, led the choir, and

looked after her father. In those days, a child often did that, never married because they looked after someone.

When I was 12 or 13, we moved. My grandmother, I called her mother, enrolled me in the convent. The nuns also taught piano, so Ma enrolled me in piano. I lasted about a month. For one thing, according to the nuns, everything my childhood teacher taught me was incorrect. For another, if you were enrolled in the piano classes, you had to practice at school, so I could not lie about it as I had with my teacher. Everybody practiced at once in this long corridor with eight pianos lined up. It was horrible. You couldn't hear yourself think and I hated it. I don't think I lasted more than a month or two and I said to Ma, "I don't want to do this anymore." So, I stopped. Ma sold the piano or gave it away to a priest friend. I don't think she did it maliciously. I guess those pianos took up a lot of room, and we didn't have that much space. So anyway, we didn't have a piano anymore.

Around that time, I had an interesting conversation with a young piano student, our landlord's daughter. I didn't speak French very well and she didn't speak English, but we had this conversation about music lessons and she showed me her book – it was a book of lead sheets. I asked, "What about the left hand?" She said, "You see the chord above? You just play the chord with your left hand." That conversation always stuck in my mind. I thought, "You can play a decent piece just with the right hand." So, for years, I started filling in the chord with my left hand, which made piano playing a lot easier for me. I mean, I play for pleasure. I don't play to pass exams in the conservatory of music again. I play for pleasure. When I'm ordering music, I often buy lead sheets, because I find it quite easy to fill in with my left hand. I've seen this discussed online, and people offer lessons doing this, there's *The Piano Guy*. I don't know why they don't teach little ones this way, it'd be so much easier.

Music and Piano in Adulthood

I got married when I was 20, taught school, and I might have played piano a little. There was always a piano in each school, and I used the piano for my own pleasure. I didn't take lessons, but I seem to have acquired enough from my teacher to read music easily. I never had trouble reading music; I could always work my way through it. During my time teaching, 27 years or so, I had a piano in the classroom. I loved it. My second husband and I traveled to work together, and he dropped me off at school quite early and picked me up at 5:30 in the evening. I had the same grade for the last 10 years that I taught in that school, so I was familiar with the program

and had my class preparation done. I loved teaching and I loved the kids, and it was so much fun. That was the time I really started playing the piano, before everybody came to school. There were two hours a day that I put in, so that was where I got more at ease with music.

At some point after I was married, we bought a square grand piano, which was beautiful. This was back in the 1970s. We saw this ad, and we went across to the States – we lived right on the border. This guy had an old square grand in the barn and we bought it for some silly amount. I think we paid about $1,200 to have it restored. I had it until I retired and we sold everything and traveled for three years. I gave the piano to my godson. He played beautifully. I remember calling my girlfriend, his mother, to tell her. She asked, "How can you do that?" I said, "It's precious to me because I love it so much. I don't want it sold to a stranger." And you know, he still has it. His mom kept it, and then when she sold her farm, he came up and got the piano.

After my husband and I got sick of traveling, we settled, and I bought an old piano for 100 bucks or something. I played for a while, and then when I moved I just left it; there was no way I was dragging a piano with me. After a while, I don't know what possessed me, I thought I'd like to have a piano. I bought the piano I have now, but I didn't play it as much as I thought I would because it was a toy, and you know how toys are. I started playing with a girlfriend. She said to me, "You know, I found my son's recorder downstairs. I always wanted to play music. My father always told me that I had no ear for music." I mean, this woman was probably in her 60s. One of those things. So, I picked up my recorder and we got together with a close friend of mine. The three of us gathered in my apartment every Monday morning, and one friend played the piano and my other friend and I played recorders. I eventually learned to play alto recorder too. We did that for several years. We had a Christmas concert in my apartment, invited the neighbors, and had a lot of fun with it.

Then COVID-19 hit. My friend has grandchildren who couldn't be vaccinated right away, so she didn't want to mingle at all. I saw an ad on Facebook for online lessons in improvisation with a local piano teacher, and I started working on that. We followed an improvisation method book for the first year, but then we moved on to other things and it worked out great. I pick a couple of pieces that I want to work on, and my teacher is great because she lets me do what I want, and gives me suggestions here and there. I take lessons because it makes me practice, or at least I work much more than I did when I was a 7, 8, or 9 year-old. She is fantastic because she's so patient and kind, and everything's good. As I said, paying for lessons motivates me to a daily

routine. I love playing the piano now. I love the daily practice of the piano, and I'll often spend a couple of hours, not doing my lesson piece but, just playing other pieces. It has been something to do over COVID-19. I have great family in town. I have good kids; my son did my shopping for me through the pandemic. I am in touch with two or three of my kids just about every day on Facebook or FaceTime. I also have a few art projects and things, so I have not found the pandemic very onerous because my life did not change a great deal. I was able to go over to my friend's place at least once a week, not so much the first year, but the second year.

I asked how she thought about age with regard to piano.

I am going to celebrate my 85th birthday soon. Fortunately, I have good health and my mind is still sharp, although God knows it's slipping. I have the time now to do the stuff I really want to do. I can choose. One of the reasons I chose piano lessons and learning how to play the recorder, alto recorder, and ukulele, is that I know that it is important to keep my mind active, and to try new things. I think music is one of the main things for keeping your mind sharp. It's not the only reason, but it's one of the reasons that I'm more dedicated to music, knowing that it's helping me keep my mind sharp. But, it gives me a great deal of pleasure. Music is the one thing that I can kind of zone out in, I really zone out. I have been a meditator now for almost 20 years. I can't zone out meditating like I can with music. I sometimes lose myself playing piano.

When I turned 80, I started thinking about age and the idea that I was not going to last forever. I know I'm not immortal. I don't want to leave a mess for my children when I'm gone, so I have done a lot of preparation. That's the only time that age comes into it. It's not a morbid thing. I would also say that I am a religious person. I've always had a certain amount of faith, so this doesn't bother me. I also volunteered at a hospice for several years, so that took away any morbid thoughts I had. So age is there. It's a part of my being, but it's sort of like anything else – like my yearly doctor visits, my monthly bone pill, and stuff like that.

Once more, I told Danielle about my desire to hear people's stories and thanked her for sharing hers. She replied,

I love listening to stories. I think that everybody has such interesting things to tell you about their lives, and I've had a great life. I have had an interesting life, and it continues …

Elizabeth: Piano Student

I began by telling Elizabeth about my research project and motivation, mentioning that I have an interest in gerontology and had worked in a home for the aged. She described the following incident:

Having watched my mother go through all this and getting to that point myself, I once went to a seniors' residence and offered to give piano lessons. The administration looked at me and said, "These are old people. Why would you want to give them piano lessons?" So, I got booted out the front door …

She began her story with her thoughts about aging and her life as a musician.

Aging is not something I think about. I don't think about wellness. I don't think about looking for meaningful things. I'm following what gives me meaning without thinking about it. By following my interests, it feels like the world is continuing to open up as I get older. I just don't have time for everything. I am very grateful that I have this time. I'm grateful for everything. My life now somehow evolved from a huge failure. I thought I was going to be a professional musician. I did not succeed, I hit a wall, and it was the major disaster of my life. I have had one or two worse disasters, but not becoming a musician was a big blow. My whole identity was in that – so, starting from scratch.

A Developing Pianist

At the beginning, I was getting so much positive feedback. Much of my motivation came from outside myself. I loved playing, I loved music, and I loved listening to my parents' LPs, but when I got to a professional music school, many kids were really talented and more focused than I was. I enjoyed piano, and I was proud of being able to play well, but I was not focused that way. I was not as interested as they were. My focus on music study came from outside – playing piano was a confidence booster, and I felt special because I was being told that I was special. Much later, I had to start from scratch and work back into it. It feels a lot healthier now that it comes from a real interest. I also listen to music in a different way now. When I hear performances now, I hear nuances that never occurred to me when I was in music school. I also don't have the pressure of having to be a professional anymore – not the same kind of performance anxiety and all of that stuff.

Looking back, I think I had some depression because my whole identity had been taken away, and I had nothing. That was after my university and conservatory studies. A professor

became angry with me because I hadn't taken piano seriously enough for him. I guess he had hopes for me. I was a university student and not focused. I was not enjoying music school, and I was going to drop out. I told him that I would quit unless I could condense my studies, so we organized a three-year program. In the end, he was so unhappy with my playing that he wouldn't let me do my graduation recital. Around the same time, I was invited by a famous pianist to study in Europe, a huge honour. I applied for a grant in my final year. I put everything on getting that grant, and I did not get it.

I returned to the conservatory and the teacher there. I met him at an organization that promotes the development of young musicians, and he was a genius – he could play anything. He was also abusive, and was sleeping with all the girl students – not all of them – not me. It was a nightmare scenario there, and I lasted two years. He would scream and yell, and that was when I stopped playing. It was just horrible. I met some of his former students years later and discovered that they too had stopped playing after a couple of years of study with him. Nasty stuff going on. I had one friend, we are still friends, and she had what we called a nervous breakdown. She dropped everything and went abroad, took a BA, and stopped playing completely. She was a brilliant player. She is playing again now, but she ended up teaching music in nursery school. She should have had a career, like an Angela Hewitt type of career. I think there are many stories like that. I don't know why some music teachers think it is okay to brutalize their students; yet many more teachers are just wonderful – the worst and the best. It was a completely traumatic experience. Now, when I meet people and they say, "I heard you were a concert pianist," it makes me feel special, even though I know I'm not. It still carries a lot of energy, but I see it differently now. So maybe we do get a little wiser as we get older.

Starting Over

I played around with music with both my kids. They are musical, and learned a little bit by rote but they wouldn't practice. I tried lessons with both of them, and they weren't interested. Now, they are interested in music. My granddaughter is musical too, and plays by ear. She just loves music, and we are constantly playing duets. There is a lot of music in the family, but nothing serious. It's nice to have music with the kids and grandkids.

Elizabeth returned to university, taking advanced degrees in a field unrelated to music while also continuing her music studies.

It was a long slog through an undergraduate degree and advanced degrees. I was lucky that my husband was able to support us. I began when our two sons started nursery school. This was after I had a BMUS from my youth. I was looking for something to do, and I knew that music wasn't going to do it anymore. I had no idea, so I took courses in various disciplines. I took this one course, I distinctly remember sitting in the big lecture hall and the professor began to talk about the subject matter, and I started to cry. It was wonderfully fascinating. At the end of the first year, I was in my professor's office and he said, "You have a real talent for this." I had never heard the word *talent* used in relation to me except with music. A whole different and new world opened up. I had to work hard because I didn't have any background, and it was very difficult at the beginning. I just plowed through it. It was like beating my head against a brick wall until I was well into my bachelor's, and then a master's. The PhD was difficult, and I didn't love it, but by then I knew I had to get through it, and I did. It was a huge effort. But, I immediately found work that I greatly enjoyed, and I continued in that field until my retirement. So the PhD opened that door. Sometimes I think going back to school and going that far is almost more a question of how much effort you're willing to put in more than anything else, you know. How much you can bang your head against that wall. Just keep going, and going, and see that light at the end of the tunnel. It's there. It's worth it.

One day, I went with a friend to sing in a choir and the pianist hadn't arrived. I volunteered, and ended up accompanying that choir for six or seven years. The choir director was superb. I was so lucky. He pushed me, he was very complimentary, and he made me think about getting back to performance. There were a couple of concerts with the choir every year, and I started doing a little more accompanying. I also found another teacher, a fantastic musician who remains a very close friend. With her, I gradually followed the curriculum and completed the graduate diploma in performance while I was doing my master's. That was a lot. That was hard. I played concertos, and increasingly a little chamber music. I also met a lovely person who was looking for a piano duo partner. We played so many concerts together, and he opened up that whole literature of piano four hands, which is superb. I started playing a lot more chamber music, and there were many performance opportunities in the city. So, inch by inch, a little more confidence, a terrific teacher, and then my current teacher. I think his playing is extraordinary, and he is an astonishing teacher. I decided that he would not be interested in teaching me unless I presented something each week. I made up my mind to have everything memorized. It has made

me work really hard, which is great. It has been good for me to have that pressure on myself. I think memorization is a good brain exercise, and I think that I play better.

For about 15 years, I have written and performed illustrated lectures on musical topics. I find it enjoyable to prepare them. This type of performance takes the pressure off having to play perfectly. It doesn't feel the same. I generally memorize everything, but it's not the same pressure. It's fun for me, and when you do the same performance five or six times in a row, you get relaxed. I enjoy that a lot, and I plan to keep doing that forever – as long as I possibly can.

I ask how she thinks about aging.

My second husband was older than me, so most of his friends were quite a bit older than me too, except for their younger wives. So I was hanging out with older people feeling like a spring chicken. And now I'm in a condo with people that are mostly older than me too. So again, I feel like spring chicken. I've always been sort of athletic, walking and bike riding. I don't think about my age, really. Except that, every minute counts. I am very aware of that. Life is short, and I'm not expecting to be reincarnated. I want to learn as much as I can with this time, and learn from people. It's a gift.

I volunteer, and that is a full time job. That is part of my crazy life, but it's not the most interesting. The interesting part is the music, and learning, and knowing that I understand better. There will not be enough time in my life to listen to all the music that I haven't yet heard, or that I want to hear again. Every day I wish I had eight hours just to listen to music, but mostly I don't have any time. So that part of it is so much more valuable to me than it was the first time around when I did a music degree. My time feels so precious. Every time you listen to something, it's a different experience of the piece, and you hear different things. That is what interests me now.

Frances: Piano Teacher

Drawn to the Piano

We lived out in the country on a farm. Sundays, I went to church to see and listen to the Sunday school teacher play the piano. I started asking for a piano. I remember sometimes having songs playing in my head. We had a big kitchen table at our farm, and I used to sit and play on the tabletop. My parents would ask what I was doing, and I would say, "I'm playing my piano." I was just drawn to the piano. I was asking, and asking, and then one year for Christmas my parents bought me a toy piano. At the time, I didn't appreciate that it was actually a beautiful

little piece of furniture – a tiny white baby grand piano with keys. I think I disappointed my parents because I still wanted a real piano. I carried on and on, kept asking and asking.

My uncle was very interested in music, and I remember when they bought a stereo console. They invited us to visit, and I recall that my parents and my aunt were in the little dining room having snacks and drinks, and my uncle invited me into the room to see the stereo. The first thing he put on was Glenn Gould playing some beautiful Bach. Then he played Ray Charles. I jumped up from the couch, and I remember laying over by the stereo with my ear to it. I had never heard music like Ray Charles before. That was amazing. My uncle realized that I was interested in music. His son gave up playing piano and no longer wanted lessons, so their piano sat at the cottage for a couple of years. When my uncle eventually offered the piano to us, we took it and I played it all the time. I realized – the whole household realized that I had no talent for playing by ear. I'd pick out some little tune and I thought I could play whatever I felt like with the left hand, and I never got past that. I'm sure it was something terrible, but I just wanted to keep on playing.

The piano was in the living room, and I remember one morning I could hear my father as I stopped making my horrible music. As he was going out the door to work he said to my mother, "You better find that girl a teacher to show her how to play that thing because she's getting nowhere by herself, and I can't take this noise any longer." My mother spent hours on the phone with the local church, the Sunday school teacher, and the teachers at the school. She finally found me a teacher who was one of the examiners at the Conservatory. I remember my mother talking to her for quite a long time when she finally got hold of her. The teacher told my mother that she didn't accept beginners. But this lady was no match for my mother, because mother would not take "no" for an answer. So, the teacher agreed that I could have lessons for a month, and if I was not practicing enough, and I wasn't really getting it, I had to stop without argument. My mother agreed, and after the month, the teacher said, "She's learning to read music well. She really likes it, so I will keep her." I remember those first piano lessons being just so much fun. It was really exciting.

Piano Teaching

After taking music and education courses, Frances began teaching piano in her 20s, taking a break for several years to work with her husband. On her return to teaching, she maintained a

full piano studio, and continued teaching online during the COVID-19 pandemic, although she had fewer students.

Back in those days, as I started teaching piano in my 20s, the students were all children and teenagers. I remember a real curiosity one year when the mother of a student told me that she would like to take lessons. She was the only adult. She did really well, and she enjoyed it, but back then, piano didn't tend to be something that adults took, at least that was not my experience. As time went on, I found more and more that many adults started thinking about trying something different. People in their 50s and 60s, even 70s and 80s were starting to take the piano up again. I think many adults are now saying, "I need something to be relaxing, different from my work and raising a family, a project where I'm learning something new." I once had a student who must have been in her late 60s. She started piano – one of those typical stories – she took lessons when she was in high school, did a Grade 8 or Grade 9 exam, attended university, and had not played since. She came to her first lesson with some of her old books. I said, "Put your hands on the keys and see if something comes back to you." She started playing arpeggios, and she stopped and looked at me and said, "I have no idea what I'm playing. I don't remember. I remember there was a name for it, but I don't know what I'm playing." Then she started playing some scales, and then "Für Elise," everybody plays that. She started playing, she didn't get all the way through, and she said, "I haven't done this for 40 years. How is it coming back to me?"

Very often, adults who seek me are nearing retirement and looking for hobbies. Sometimes a person will be starting right from scratch – "Where's middle C?" Other times, people wonder if they can still learn. I find that the young person, say the nine year old, will be quicker at memory work, they don't have as many distractions in their lives, and their coordination may be better. The older adult makes up for those little things by being focused and spending more time sitting on the piano bench. So generally, adults do very, very well. I also think that many people are looking to try things that are a bit like a meditation. Some adults have a lot of stress, so having music to turn to gives them a time when they are focused only on that. If you are learning a piece, all of your stressful thoughts have to be put aside and you have to concentrate on the score. So, it clears your mind while you're playing. If you're playing a piece by ear, you've got the song playing in your head, you're memorizing the words to bring out the melody, so it's relaxing because you have to concentrate. You can't let your mind wander.

I asked how she thinks about age with regard to her teaching.

I can't say that I've really thought about age. I am not sure that parents of an 8-year-old who wants piano lessons are thinking about the teacher's age. I don't know how they feel. I have never had it come up. A nice thing about piano teaching is that you can keep working without having to retire completely. Often when you get to retirement age, everyone you know is the same age as you. But, in my teaching, I have a couple of people who are around my age, a couple of teenagers, and a couple of people who are about 10 years old. You have to try to keep up to date and be able to relate to people of different ages. One of the things that I really find fun about teaching is that in every lesson you have a different student. You start your lessons with an 8-year-old beginner. Next is a teenage person, 14 and starting to lose interest. You are trying to find ways to encourage them. Then you have a retired person, followed by a 9-year-old. Every lesson is something different. You have to adapt and try to motivate that next person, and not every person is going to be motivated in the same way. You have to change yourself every lesson. That is the job for teachers – to help students to be motivated and enjoy the work that they're doing. You have to find ways to keep each person interested and developing the skills that they would like to have. If you are not trying to inspire students, then you shouldn't be teaching.

Music and Learning

There is always another piece to learn. I was always inclined to play written music and arrangements, and that's great. In the past few years, I thought, "Well, that's all fine, but I have no talent for playing by ear." So, I started with a teacher, and we work on chord charts and playing by ear. I am never going to be a great jazz player. I know that. Teacher knows that. It's all okay. It's something completely new, and I'm enjoying it. It's like starting over for me. Learning gives you more patience for people who are having trouble with something. It teaches you that learning is a process and is not always easy. You sympathize more with people when they struggle with something that you find easy.

When I take lessons, I'm pretty sure that I don't learn as quickly as the teacher's younger people would, but it's a matter of each person enjoying what they're doing. I am working on something now, and I've just memorized the first three verses. I want to get the last verse memorized tonight. If I'm slower at it, so I'm slower. It's okay. I know that sometimes when I was younger, I had to memorize pieces for exams. I never found memorizing easy, but I had to practice, and I had to do it. As you memorize, you get better at it. It's, like a muscle. I don't find

it as easy to memorize as I did back then, but I think it's a good exercise because we don't have to memorize anymore. By memorizing music, you're working on your memory. It may not come as quickly, so maybe you'll just sit at the piano a little longer, that's all.

It has been very helpful to have music during stressful times. For a while through the pandemic, I was watching the news at nighttime, and it became kind of addictive. You watch, you watch a little longer, then another half hour, and then you go to bed and it all starts churning in your head. So, leave the television off. You can at least go and practice some scales, something easy – play a couple of easy pieces that you like. Do that before your bedtime routine and you don't wake up with anxiety so much. Music is very helpful to people. I can see why there was so much great popular music written from the early 1900s – 1950s. People like Jerome Kern, Oscar Hammerstein, Hoagy Carmichael – great, cheerful music that helped people in difficult times.

I was traveling with a friend who had a driving playlist. The music started in the 1950s with people like Fats Domino and Chubby Checker. That was the music of my young days, and I love that music. Chubby Checker came on and it made me remember the twist. Then we got talking about each of the eras. When we heard reggae music, my friend talked about her trip to Jamaica. There were memories coming back through these songs. We learned things about each other that we would never have known otherwise. Some music that I am interested in playing now is that music from the 1920s and 1930s. Current events are making us feel like this is the 1930s again. That music, how cheerful and hopeful it was.

If I had my time back, I wish I had studied music therapy. I find it so interesting, and it really helps people. It would have been a great job, but a bit late now. I think music therapists have such interesting work. I watched a video of an older man sitting in a wheelchair. His daughters and family were speaking to him, but he was like a blank cloth – no expression. He did not acknowledge or speak to them. There was just no one there. The music therapist made a playlist of music that made him happy in his younger days. I couldn't believe what happened when the therapist put headphones on him. All of a sudden, this man who was completely unresponsive started smiling, speaking, and singing the words to the songs. I was impressed by something the music therapist said, "The front door is locked. Nothing can go in the front door. But music has a way of going in through the side door."

Grace: Piano Student

Childhood Piano Lessons

My mother was one of two piano teachers in our small town. There were pianos in many homes, and music played a big role, particularly in my life. This was in the 1930s, and there was little else to distract us. It was a main activity for many people to take piano lessons or to play an instrument. I remember a time when music would be coming out of the open windows of almost every house. That does not happen these days. My mother had me singing in concerts at 3 years old. As for piano, my mother tried to teach me until I was probably at the Grade 4 or 5 level, but I never took an exam. I was what my mother called a "willful child." Like many kids, I really did not want to practice. My mother was able to teach me a certain amount because she was so encouraging.

When I was 13 or 14, mom sent me off to the other music teacher, who had an ARCT, which was rather rare in those days. My mother had Grade 10 piano and was a member of the registered music teachers' association. In fact, I have a silver tray that was given to her after 50 years of being a member. However, my teacher had an ARCT and she had an ebony grand piano. I did practice a lot more for her, but not as much as she would have liked. I just had other things to do. It wasn't even that so much. I don't think I had the patience or the rigour. I had to learn that rather late in my life. I took and passed the Grade 7 Toronto Conservatory[8] exam, played in local music festivals, and pressed on to higher grades. Unfortunately, having done well with Grade 7, my teacher decided I could do Grades 8 and 9 in one year. Over my mother's objections, who said Grade 8 should never be skipped, I took the Grade 9 exam and failed – something that haunts me to this day. I finished high school and went off to university, so my relationship with piano studies came to an abrupt halt.

Throughout my time at home, I had a particularly close friend who, unlike me, practiced piano. During our school years we fooled around at the piano – she would play and I would dance, and then she would sing while I struggled to accompany her. She went on to take diplomas in piano and in voice and studied at the Julliard. We have remained friends to this day and often remark on how lucky we were to have been raised in a small town where music was a natural part of everyday life.

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[8] The Toronto Conservatory of Music, founded in 1886, became The Royal Conservatory of Music in 1947. The Conservatory has a graded curriculum and exam system.

When I visited my childhood home, I played the piano, hammering out pieces I have always loved. The good news was that I clearly still wanted to play the piano, but the bad news was that I developed some very bad habits, including splitting and inattention to time signatures. I also began playing recorder duets with my husband, mostly Renaissance tunes. A musician friend of ours joined us from time to time. We had a wonderful time with that music.

Pianos and a Return to Lessons

When my parents died, my brothers shipped our family piano, an upright Sherlock-Manning, to my place. I would play on weekends and I began to play more serious music. My husband played a bit and could read music well. His big piece was "Für Elise," like everybody who plays the piano. We developed a repertoire of two ragtime piano duets, which we would play for anyone who would sit still and listen.

I began lessons with a registered music teacher. He lived near my work, and I had a weekly lesson at 8:00 a.m. on my way to the office. He lived in a very small house with two grand pianos and a silent keyboard in the living room. He did exercises for his technique on the silent board every day. He had me doing many exercises and we tackled some big pieces over the next two or three years, but no exams. In hindsight, I think some of the pieces were beyond me. I think my technique wasn't up to it. I should have been started with some modest repertoire. At any rate, I would have stayed with him because he was a serious teacher and a very good pianist. In fact, he used to spend half of my lessons playing for me, which, in hindsight, I'm not sure was great.

It was during this time that I bought the grand piano that I have – a 6'4" 1915 Heintzman. I bought it from my teacher, who had restored it with a prominent piano technician colleague of his. It is a very nice, friendly piano. Everybody loves playing my piano because it doesn't have a bass that you have to work to control, and the treble doesn't whine at you. It just has a lovely, even sound throughout the keyboard. When people come here to play – like one of my little piano groups – they love playing this piano because it is extremely friendly. So, that time gave me piano lessons and a very, very nice piano. Unhappily, my work became so demanding that I started missing lessons and eventually simply quit. I just could not do it.

I retired, but continued to work on international development projects. I also continued to be keen on the piano, and I was still playing. Early in my retirement, I had a guest at my house several times who had an ARCT and was studying at university for a further degree. He was a

wonderful pianist and also older, which inspired me to think that it was not too late to take lessons again.

Enter my current teacher. Her teaching and encouragement have truly enriched my life. The day I met her for a preliminary interview/audition, I played a piece by Schumann. I did the best I could, and she did not remark on my technique but said, “I can tell you are musical.” Who better to make this comment for she is surely one of the most musical players and people I have known. I started at the Grade 6 level and have taken Grades 8 and 9 exams. I did very well with Grade 8, and although I passed Grade 9, the result was somewhat disappointing. We continued with Grade 9 review for a time before moving on to Grade 10 work. More recently, as my hands have stiffened up somewhat and I am less inclined to spend the amount of time each piece requires, we are doing Grade 9 work, fewer technical exercises, and adding selections by composers such as Gershwin, for whom I have a special liking. Highlights in my time with her have been her studio performance group and an introduction to a local adult performance group, both of which meet about twice a year. We are all adult players, childishly nervous but anxious to play for one another. We have fun with music.

I think if I were to count, I have been with this teacher nearly 20 years. In fact, many of her adult students have stayed with her a long time. She is not only a serious teacher, she is a good teacher. She's thorough. At our get-togethers for her performance group, she always plays for us. Many teachers do not do that. They may hold small recitals, but they don't play for their students. She does. She just kind of gets me and I get her, so we've done very well together. She started me where I should be – Grade 6. Wasn't that smart? We all want to play these big pieces, but that's really not the point. It's how beautifully can you play a piece of music – not how advanced it is. That takes a long time to sink in. I've been very regular. I'm still not the best person in the world to practice, but certainly for the exams, I've gotten down to it – practiced hours and hours every day.

I asked about age and playing piano in later life.

You know people have no idea how difficult playing piano is – all that you have to call on physically, mentally, and emotionally. It just calls on everything. I'd rather give a speech to a couple of hundred people than play in front of six, in terms of nerves. You have so much more control. The examiners use this phrase, "On this day." They say, "On this day, you did this." I just think that's so astute. In performance, unlike the visual arts, you get one chance.

I didn't think too much about age actually until about a year and a half ago – part of the COVID-19 pandemic. They kept telling us that we were old and vulnerable. It's like advertising – if you repeat it often enough, people begin to believe it. So this, "old and vulnerable, old and vulnerable" message got through to people of my age. I also discovered that, much to my surprise because I'm pretty active, I have a heart problem and also have developed arthritis in my hands. I was learning a piece by Schubert that I really wanted to learn, and I did learn. At the beginning and end of the piece, you go up and down the keyboard. I did thumb turning, thumb turning, thumb turning. My teacher actually said at one point, "I think maybe you should stop that piece." I was so near to getting it to performance level that I didn't want to stop. My thumb started to get to me. That caught my attention, and that was four or five years ago. I really have not thought about age because it's never prevented me from doing anything, until more recently. There's nothing like being told you have a heart problem to get your attention and feel that you're older.

Another interesting thing is the nervousness that older people possess when they play for other people. Do you find that at all? You're only 62; that's practically a child.

I told her that I've always been nervous playing.

It is interesting how nervous we all get. I only play with these few people, all of whom are piano students themselves. There is a woman who's 80. She started learning the piano from scratch as an adult. We're all as nervous as cats and yet everyone is so tolerant. You couldn't play for a more accepting audience. I think anxiety does increase somewhat with age. You begin to wonder what you're going to be doing in the future. The golden age is an absolute myth. I think the piano helps. There is performance anxiety. The most famous pianists in the world are nervous. They deal with it – it almost goes with the territory. You have to have a certain amount of tension, desire, and hunger to make performance work. I don't want to overplay this because I don't have debilitating anxiety. It's just that I know that I do feel more anxious now than I did in the last couple of years. However, I think the piano helps when people are getting older. Why would it not? It's one of those things you do all by yourself. I like solitude. And, the piano sounds good. The demands it makes on you intellectually to play pieces, to coordinate your thoughts and your brain in order to take it in, and, if you do any memory work at all, it can't help but be an asset to aging. That's proven, is it not?

I started my story when I was a young child, and now I am 89. There were periods when I was involved with piano, sometimes seriously, sometimes not seriously, to this day when I am still taking piano lessons. And the beat goes on.

Chapter Summary

The stories presented above provide various descriptions of "what it means to grow older" for the piano teachers and students who participated in my study. Each story is unique and reflects the individual teller, but all share the participants' love of music and learning in their lifelong piano participation. The participants' life stories presented in this chapter are models of lifelong piano participation—representations of possibility. They offer specific examples of aging and serve to broaden our understanding of aging in the context of piano teaching and learning. In addition to demonstrating various courses of lifelong engagement with piano, these stories may also help to mitigate ageism by showing the heterogeneity of older people. A strength of life stories is the detail and individuality.

In the introduction to this thesis, I mentioned the importance of the stories that my own piano teachers and mentors shared with me. The representation of older people in piano teaching and learning matters, and it is meaningful to hear the experiences of an older person returning to piano or of a teacher inviting older students to study piano. These women's stories were particularly meaningful for me—I can relate to many of their experiences because we share parts of our identities such as age, gender, and cultural background. However, not everyone will see themselves in these narratives. It is for this reason that we need more stories—we need diverse narratives told by people with a variety of life experiences of aging and lifelong piano or music participation.

In the following chapter, I outline several themes identified in my analysis and discuss these in relation to *meaning* and to the relevant literatures, such as the research about adult piano teaching and learning.

Chapter 5 Results and Discussion

Time spent at the piano can be an insightful journey inward, the pleasure deepening with the years. (M. P. Chase, 1974, p. 5)

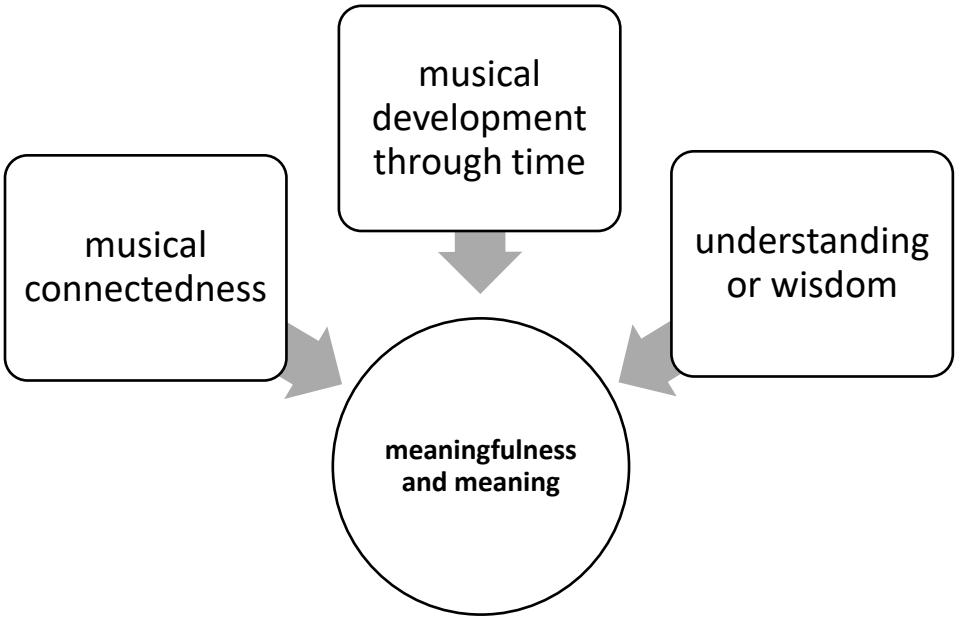
In the previous chapter (4), I presented each participant's life story. The main reason for doing so was to highlight the *particular* experiences of older people who learn and teach piano. Additionally, Chapter 4 contains the material upon which I based my interpretation of it as presented in this chapter. In other words, this chapter is the result of my attempt to make sense of the life stories provided by the participants in this study, that is, to understand how these women experience aging in the context of piano teaching and learning. I also consider how their experiences can inform piano teaching and learning. I do all this in discussion with literature from various disciplines such as gerontology, leisure, music education, and piano teaching and learning. I framed my interpretation using two theoretical structures; specifically, I drew from Stebbins's (2013, 2017, 2020b) serious leisure perspective and especially from three of Edmondson's (2015) approaches to meaning to discuss the ways in which the women in this study found meaning in piano participation throughout the course of their lives, but particularly in later life.

In this chapter, I suggest how the seven participants of this study find meaning in lifelong piano learning and/or teaching. As discussed previously (Chapter 2), I modified Edmondson's (2015) approaches to meaning for my research as demonstrated in Figure 6 below. This approach to meaning provides a framework for the following discussion about meaning and aging with regard to piano teaching and learning. Edmondson's three approaches (connectedness, life course development, and wisdom and insight) are fluid and overlapping, which fit with the overlapping nature of several of the topics that I identified in my analysis. For example, although I discuss the participants' love of learning in the section on musical development, the topic might just as easily belong in the section about musical connectedness. The first approach to meaning refers to meaningfulness (significance and purpose [Martela & Steger, 2016]) in musical connectedness: to music, the piano, and the community. Edmondson's second approach to meaning is the meaningfulness of musical development through time. This type of meaning is about lifelong development as a pianist, including themes of perseverance and a love of learning and growth. The third type of meaning involves understanding and wisdom. This type is about older peoples' existence as a source of insight for others (this is a purpose of Chapter 4). This third type of

meaning involves finding meaning (coherence [Martela & Steger, 2016]) and developing insights or wisdom about aging, ageism, and time in relation to lifelong piano participation. At the most basic level, I view my adaptation of Edmondson's (2015) three meanings of meaning as love, growth, and understanding.

Figure 6

Adaptation of Edmondson's Triad of Approaches to Meaning



In addition to Edmondson's meanings of meaning, I used Stebbins's (2013, 2017, 2020b) concept and terminology of serious pursuits: serious leisure and devotee work as an organizing structure to frame my discussion about aging and *meaning* for the piano student and teacher participants in this study. In the context of my inquiry, serious leisure refers to the student or amateur participants and devotee work refers to teacher participants. However, there is some overlap; one of the student participants is also a performer, which is considered devotee work. Stebbins identified six qualities of serious leisure and devotee work: the need to persevere, the opportunity to follow a leisure career, the need for "significant personal effort," benefits, a unique ethos, and a distinctive identity (Elkington & Stebbins, 2014, pp. 17–18), and I allude to these qualities throughout this chapter. Regarding the sixth quality, identity, musical identity was not the focus of my study and was not a prominent topic of discussions with participants.

However, in keeping with the serious leisure perspective, all participants identified with music study and/or teaching to some degree.

I begin this chapter with a discussion about what I learned from the collective story of the study participants in relation to Edmondson's (2015) first meaning of meaning, pointful connectedness. As mentioned, I adapted Edmondson's connectedness to musical and social connectedness. After connectedness, I examine meaningfulness and musical development through time in a section that includes discussions about perseverance and the serious leisure career as levels of involvement in piano learning and teaching. Edmondson's third meaning of meaning is discussed in the final section about meaning and understanding aging. In this section, I examine the participants' experiences of and thoughts about age and aging in relation to piano playing and teaching. The section is about perceptions of remaining time in life and identity regarding age, including issues of ageism. I then reflect on questions about the significance of chronological age in piano teaching and learning. The chapter ends with a brief summary of the meaningfulness and meaning of aging in piano participation.

5.1 Connectedness

Edmondson (2015) described her first approach to meaning as *connectedness*—"vivacious engagement with life or 'pointfulness' " (p. 102). Participants in my study told stories about their emotional involvement and commitment to piano learning and/or teaching over their lives. This meaningful engagement in piano participation involved both connectedness to music and to people. This section begins with a discussion of two aspects of musical connectedness: the love of music, and the connection to the musical instrument, in this case, the piano. The second part of the section addresses social connectedness in piano participation, including teachers, students, and colleagues.

5.1.1 Musical Connectedness

Not limited to gerontology, meaningfulness and connection are also topics of music education inquiry. In their study about the meaning of music in the lives of older people, Hays and Minichiello (2005) wrote about the ways that music allowed people to feel connected, "These included *self* and emotions … being in touch with one's personal history and life experiences, and to others" (p. 442). The participants in my study also told stories about the ways that they found meaning and connection in and through music. In a theory article, Silverman (2020) examined the nature of meaning and meaningfulness in the context of instrumental music

education. She wrote, "Sense-making and meaningfulness take on new perspectives when we consider the ways in which activities, persons, and, yes, even instruments matter—to both our sense of personhood and as ways we engage with/in/through projects of love with the world." (Silverman, 2020, p. 8).

5.1.1.1 Love of Music

All participants talked about their love of music, a sentiment also found by other researchers of adult piano study (Cooper, 2001; Jutras, 2006; Li & Southcott, 2015; Taylor, 2011; Taylor & Hallam, 2008). One participant said, "I love playing the piano now. I love the daily practice of the piano, and I'll often spend a couple of hours, not doing my lesson piece but, just playing other pieces." In her study of adults' perceptions of piano study, Cooper (2001) found that the study participants who continued to play piano did so because of "personal pleasure and satisfaction" (p. 167). Cooper also found that most participants also played other instruments or sang, which was also true for my participants (5 of 7). Similarly, Taylor (2010a) found that most of her participants had "engaged with other musical participation and learning in the past as adults" (p. 355). With regard to age, Li and Southcott (2015) found, "Often participants' comments link their enjoyment to their age…. 'playing keyboard gives me a way to enjoy my later life'" (p. 324). In contrast, the participants in my study did not explicitly link their enjoyment of playing piano to their age. An explanation for the discrepancy may be that the people who participated in Li and Southcott's study began piano in later life, while the people I spoke to had lifelong experience with piano playing.

Related to a love of music is *flow*, "the experience of complete absorption in the present moment" (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009, p. 195). Stebbins (2020b) drew on flow theory to describe the rewards and motivations that are involved in his theory of serious leisure, which synthesizes the activities of amateurs, hobbyists, and their professional counterparts (Stebbins, 2020b). Especially relevant to three participants in my study were the following components of the flow experience: the requirement of concentration; sense of deep, focused involvement in the activity; and the loss of self-consciousness during the activity (Stebbins, 2020b, p. 30). Two participants, who talked about flow, mentioned concentration, whether on the score or on the instrument. One said, "If you are learning a piece, all of your stressful thoughts have to be put aside and you have to concentrate on the score. So, it clears your mind while you're playing."

The other echoed, "Piano requires such concentration that other concerns fade – it's only you and the instrument."

Another participant compared her experience playing the piano to meditation:

> Music is the one thing that I can kind of zone out in … I have been a meditator now for almost 20 years. I can't zone out meditating like I can with music. I sometimes lose myself playing piano.

Flow was also mentioned by Taylor and Hallam (2008) in their study to understand the experience of music learning for older people. "For most of the participants, practising by themselves appeared to be a major source of satisfaction, and as they engaged with their music privately at home in a state of flow" (p. 301).

Music can also be a means of emotional regulation (Cook et al., 2019; Henry et al., 2021). Three participants in this study felt a connection to music that brought them comfort, and they described piano playing as a "balm" or as "solace." A fourth participant talked about using music for emotional expression. She said, "Playing piano is a wonderful way of expressing emotion and getting rid of any fiery emotions that you might have." This finding of a connection between music and emotions is supported by adult music learning research. Cooper (2001) found that playing piano provided an opportunity for self-expression for more than half of her respondents. Hays and Minichiello (2005) wrote, "Through music, the participants were made more aware of their emotions and were able to explore these to greater depths. Music helped people to make sense of feelings and emotions that they experienced" (p. 442).

5.1.1.2 Connection to the Piano

The gerontologist William Randall and English professor Matte Robinson (2023) edited a recent book, *Things That Matter: Special Objects in Our Stories as We Age*. The study on which the book is based was "aimed at understanding the nature of resilience in later life" as a contribution to narrative gerontology (p. vii). However, the book took a turn when the scholars involved in the study found that "the older people who had been interviewed made reference, if only in passing, to particular objects that for one reason or another held particular importance for them, whether or not they themselves had consciously reflected on why this was so" (p. vii). This was similar to my research experience. Unexpectedly, some of the most detailed stories that the participants in my study told were about the meaningfulness of their pianos, a topic referenced previously by Silverman (2020). Specifically, this topic is about "the relationship between the

musician and the specific instrument they play, not merely the category," such as keyboard instruments (Sternberg et al., 2023, p. 430). Sternberg et al. (2023) asked, "What does it mean to 'love' a musical instrument?" (p. 430) and suggested Sternberg's triangular theory of love: "intimacy, passion, and commitment" (Sternberg et al., 2023, p. 431), which describes the experience of several of the participants in my study.

The piano has been an important musical instrument in Canada since the late 18th century (Orford & Pratt, 2013). Almost all participants (6 of 7) told stories about the desire for, acquisition, and loss of their pianos, and these stories spanned the life course. One told of her childhood desire for a piano,

> I was just drawn to the piano. I was asking, and asking, and then one year for Christmas my parents bought me a toy piano. At the time, I didn't appreciate that it was actually a beautiful little piece of furniture – a tiny white baby grand piano with keys. I think I disappointed my parents because I still wanted a real piano.

Her passion for a "real piano" was unfulfilled until she later received her cousin's piano and began lessons. This story illustrates the idea that "the instrument is an integral part of one's life. It may even be something one feels one 'needs'" (Sternberg et al., 2023, p. 431). Most participants spoke of the connection to their pianos. The piano was often considered a musical instrument of innate value and beauty, as opposed to merely a tool of music making. Two participants spoke about the place of the family piano in history, a time when pianos were common in households. This is no longer the case, which raises the question of whether piano playing will continue to be a popular serious leisure activity. Perhaps a hopeful sign is the story told by another participant about the purchase of a new piano, demonstrating her love for her piano as well as the continuation of piano participation in later life and future possibilities.

Finally, the connection to one's piano sometimes involves anthropomorphization, which was also mentioned by Davie (2022). Two participants talked about the intimate relationship with their pianos. One described the complex relationship, "Sometimes the piano is a great big black beast to me, there is this big black beast waiting to put me down. Other times it is my best friend." Another spoke about a more benevolent relationship, "I would come home from school, and I could go to the piano and play. It was my companion and my friend during that period." Davie (2022) wrote, "The inner connections people make with musical instruments are widely known. Indeed, pianos can seem like members of a family to some" Davie illustrated his point

with a story about the search for a 'home' for a woman's beloved piano. A participant in my study told a similar story about her efforts to find a home for her piano, gifting it to her godson when she was no longer able to keep it. When asked about it by the boy's mother, she said, "It's precious to me because I love it so much. I don't want it sold to a stranger." This relatively new area of research on the love for one's musical instrument is described as "love of an individual for a thing in their life that seems to be much more than just a 'thing,' and indeed, perhaps not a 'thing' at all" (Sternberg et al., 2023, p. 441).

5.1.2 Social Connectedness

Serious leisure (or *serious pursuits*) is the label for the activities of amateurs, hobbyists, and career volunteers, who are linked with professional counterparts (or *devotee work*) (Stebbins, 2020b). An element of Stebbins (2020b) serious leisure perspective is the social world and its *unique ethos*.

> An ethos is the spirit of the community of serious leisure/devotee work participants, as manifested in shared context of attitudes, practices, values, beliefs, goals, and so on. The social world of the participants is the organizational milieu in which the associated ethos … is expressed (as attitudes, beliefs, values) or realized (as practices, goals). (Stebbins, 2020b, p. 26)

The social world of piano participation can include close relationships with teachers, students, and colleagues.

"Music is the only field of study that requires regular and extended one-on-one interaction between student and teacher" (Wilson, 2016). The student-teacher relationship of a private music studio can foster close connections. Davidson and Jordan (2007) proposed that an ability to communicate and make social connections is essential for successful teaching, and that the student-teacher relationship was fundamental to the development of a student's musical identity. Similarly, Leahy and Smith (2021) found that communication and the quality of the teacher-adult music student relationship was important for a successful partnership. Central was "the degree of liking, support and encouragement shown by the teacher to the student" (Davidson & Jordan, 2007, p. 732). Almost all participants (6 of 7) in my study talked about connection with at least one of their piano teachers. One said that she "loved" her childhood teacher—"She was just a fantastic person." The one participant who did not specifically mention any teachers recalled their first piano lessons with enthusiasm. She said, "I remember those first piano lessons

being just so much fun. It was really exciting." Student-teacher relationships were often described as close and long lasting. One student participant described her teacher,

> My piano teacher put a flyer in my mailbox saying that she specialized in older adults…. She has been the most wonderful person. No exams, very little theory, but she gives me a wide range of music, and she seems to know what I would like.

Although many teachers were beloved, not all were. One participant's story demonstrated the variety of experiences with teachers throughout her life: in childhood—the first "was a wonderful teacher," the second "an absolutely hideous witch of a teacher," the third was an abusive teacher; in adulthood—her teacher "was the most wonderful teacher you could imagine…. We all adored her." A special connection between students and teachers was that of mentorship. Two teacher participants spoke about certain teachers from adulthood as mentors. One talked about her teacher as a mentor "not only in music, but also in life." She even delivered her teacher's eulogy. The other told a story of one of her teachers,

> I have to describe what my mentor … meant to me – she saved my piano life really. I had been studying again for four or five years and I was at a very down period. I just questioned everything about myself musically. My friend and I decided to try this teacher. That saved my life – my musical life.

Participants did not talk about their connection to all teachers, and while some teachers were beloved, others were disliked, even abusive, as discussed later in this chapter. Davidson and Jordan (2007) noted that students who left music lessons often did so "because they hated their teachers" (p. 732) and this was the experience of a few participants. Over the life course however, negative experiences with teachers did not prevent the participants of this study from pursuing piano playing, though the experiences may have caused an interruption in their musical development.

With regard to the piano teacher relationship with their students, two of the three teacher participants spoke about a connection with their students. One talked about love for her students and her continued connection with them over many years, even after they were no longer her students. She said,

> I am still in touch with many of my adult students, along with many young people. A lot of them are Facebook friends. One of my sweetest kids is getting married in three

> months. He is 34. I have students who now have five or six kids. It's really lovely to have that connection with them.

Another, who now teaches only adults, said, "My adult students and I have a wonderful relationship. We get along really well. I have had a couple of students for 15 years or more. We are friends really." A close connection with piano students is not necessarily universal. Although two teachers described the relationship with students in detail, the other equally compassionate and caring teacher did not discuss student connections, although they may exist.

All participants shared experiences involving musical colleagues, whether participation in duets and/or ensembles, sometimes with family members, and sometimes with friends or colleagues. The relationships were often close and sometimes extended over many years. One student participant told of her experience with friends in ensembles.

> At some point, a friend started to play the recorder, got another friend to play, and then said to me, "Why don't you come and play the piano?" I had never played with anybody before – never accompanied. The music had to be simple and not very fast to start with. We did Christmas carols and general music, playing songs and some hymns together once a week. Then my friend thought that we should learn to play the ukulele. We went for a few lessons and we took an online course. We alternated recorder, ukulele, and piano; and my accompaniment skills increased.

A teacher participant talked about social connectedness in the context of dueting in later life:

> Another important thing that has been good for me is dueting. It is important at any age, but especially in later life. I have almost always had a duet partner, meeting once a week. Dueting is good on many levels; there is the social aspect, plus the element of playing music together and learning things from each other. It is a very good exercise in listening. Piano can be a bit lonely. You are playing and practicing by yourself, so it's really good to have friends who are doing the same thing.

The observations of the participant quoted above are supported by research. In their study on the impact of undergraduate and postgraduate music students' active engagement in music making, Kokotsaki and Hallam (2007) found "considerable perceived social benefits," including a sense of belonging, working with like-minded people, making friends, and meeting interesting people (p. 106). Additionally, both examples demonstrate the learning potential of ensemble and duet playing.

In summary, all of the women in this study demonstrated a lifelong love of music and piano playing through their life stories. They provided many examples of connectedness in the stories they shared about their involvement with the piano and music from the time of childhood through later life. Their love of music included talk about flow and emotional regulation. Most participants also talked about desiring, possessing, and losing their own pianos and some spoke about love for their piano as more than a "thing."

Participants in this study were also connected to the social world of piano and its ethos. Almost all participants told stories of connection with at least one of their teachers. A couple of women told stories about their teachers as mentors, such were the close connections. Many, but not all, of the participants' piano teachers were beloved. With regard to the relationship with students, two of three teacher participants talked about their close and lengthy connections to their students. Finally, most women in this study told of close relationships with colleagues, especially in the context of duet and ensemble participation. The participants' connectedness to music, and especially to piano, was, and continues to be, meaningful in their lives.

5.2 Musical Development through Time

Edmondson (2015) proposed a second meaning of meaning in life that was associated with "the development of the lifecourse through time" (p. 106). This type of meaning might include issues connected with personal development, identity, and learning from life (Edmondson, 2015). I adapted Edmondson's concept of meaning narrowly into the context of musical development. The participant life stories in this study are as much growth stories as they are stories about aging. "Growth stories are personal life narratives that showcase, either in an overt or subtle manner, one's development" (Rudd et al., 2019, p. 692). One goal of my research was to explore the meaning of aging and piano teaching and learning over the life course, not only in later life. This goal was one reason for my use of the musical river of experience technique and life story research methods. I agree with Flowers and Murphy (2001) on the interconnectedness of ages and stages in music teaching and learning. They wrote, "While often studied as different populations, these age groups represent stages of life that are experienced by all who grow into older adulthood and, as such, cannot be viewed as independent from one another" (Flowers & Murphy, 2001, p. 26). In order to learn about the lifelong experience of piano participation, all participants in this study studied piano in childhood and in adulthood—and all but one discussed taking piano lessons in later life. One way to think of my adaptation of Edmondson's concept of

meaning as musical development through time, is to use aspects the serious leisure perspective to frame my discussion. The focus of this section is on meaning and musical development through time, therefore the first two qualities of serious leisure and devotee work, *perseverance* and *career,* are featured. I end with a brief discussion of learning.

5.2.1 Perseverance

On perseverance, Stebbins (2020b) wrote that leisure participants "who want to continue experiencing the same level of fulfillment in the activity must meet certain challenges from time to time" (pp. 25–26). The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines perseverance as "continued effort to do or achieve something despite difficulties, failure, or opposition: the action or condition or an instance of persevering: steadfastness" (Merriam-Webster, n.d, perseverance). In her description of personal development and challenges, Edmondson (2015) wrote,

> Such challenges might be practical, personal, psychological or developmental, social or political, featuring crises or choices in which we set our personal priorities, or in which these become clear, and in which we either expand or limit our personal capacities. (p. 106)

Serious pursuits such as serious leisure and devotee work involve perseverance and what Stebbins called *costs*, "a distinctive combination of tensions, dislikes and disappointments – which each participant confronts in his or her special way" (Elkington & Stebbins, 2014, p. 20). Stebbins (2020b) viewed serious leisure as "a mix of rewards offsetting costs as experienced in the central activity" (p. 30). Elkington and Stebbins (2014) stated that every serious leisure career is motivated by the continuous search for rewards, such as self-fulfillment—"a search that takes months, and in some fields years, before a participant consistently finds deep satisfaction" in their amateur or devotee interest (p. 35). With regard to perseverance in this study, I identified seven costs, which are discussed next. This does not mean that there are no other costs in serious piano participation, such as the financial expense of piano lessons, but rather that these were the costs that were discussed by the participants of this study.

5.2.1.1 Evaluative Performance

An evaluative performance is "a musical event which exists for the purpose of providing opportunity for students to receive a mark, rank, or other kind of feedback from an expert adjudicator as an indication of their competence as performers" (Mitchell, 2017, p. 516). A major type of evaluative performance is the piano examination, which is ubiquitous in the private piano

teaching context (Davidson & Jordan, 2007). Examinations were a topic of discussion for almost all participants—only one did not mention them. While evaluative performance is often accepted as a necessary cost of piano study, its benefits are unclear (Mitchell, 2017), and this was true for the participants in my study. Examinations were often viewed as mostly negative experiences, a cost of playing piano. Of her childhood examinations, one participant said that she was "terrified of taking any kind of exam." However, another found childhood examinations easier than those taken later in life,

> Exams just scare me to death. I don't recall agonizing very much when I was younger. I did exams and I prepared, but once I got into the more advanced grades and got older, it was torture doing the exams.

Two participants provided detailed stories of particularly negative advanced level examination experiences taken when one was an adolescent and the other an adult. Even when evaluative performance was an apparently positive experience, it could have unintended negative consequences. One participant told of her experiences with extrinsic motivation and identity as a young person—experiences that she eventually reframed.

> At the beginning, I was getting so much positive feedback. Much of my motivation came from outside myself…. My focus on music study came from outside – playing piano was a confidence booster, and I felt special because I was being told that I was special. Much later, I had to start from scratch and work back into it. It feels a lot healthier now that it comes from a real interest.

All but one participant talked about negative aspects of evaluative performance experiences, and two of these participants managed the perceived harmful effects of examinations by not participating in them in adulthood. One said, "I play for pleasure. I don't play to pass exams in the conservatory of music again. I play for pleasure." A teacher participant, who currently accepts only adult students, discussed examination participation at length, summarizing what some other participants said.

> The students I have now are not interested in exams. We still follow the curriculum and work on pieces for the studio club [performance], but the pressure of preparing for an exam is totally different. I took them through some exams. We came to the realization, "Let's just enjoy learning the pieces, playing the piano, and our time together, rather than these terrible exams." Adults, more than younger students, find exams very stressful.

> Younger students take them in stride a bit more, but for adults it is quite a trauma.… Exams serve a wonderful purpose, but they can also cut you down a bit. If you don't do well on the particular day of the exam, it can really affect you. I think exams are a two-edged sword.

As discussed by study participants, the experience of examinations could be negative, a finding also reported by Mitchell (2017), although her focus was on beginning and intermediate child piano students. Mitchell encouraged reflection by teachers, parents, and students on the benefits and risks of evaluative performance prior to participation, as echoed by the teacher participant quoted above. She concluded, "Students whose understandings, values, and goals align with the requirements for the evaluation, who are confident performers, and who have supportive parents and teachers are more likely to find satisfaction in participating in festivals and exams" (Mitchell, 2017, p. 523).

5.2.1.2 Hiatus

All participants experienced hiatuses in piano participation, although it was sometimes unclear to what extent. For example, one participant stopped teaching for a time, but it was unclear whether she stopped playing piano. Another left her conservatory studies, but it was unclear whether she stopped playing piano. Most serious leisure activities are pursued in free time (Elkington & Stebbins, 2014) so it follows that when free time was limited, piano participation was restricted or paused. Participant hiatuses were largely caused by limited free time due to career and family responsibilities. However, there were other reasons for a hiatus from piano, and for most (5 of 7) there were multiple reasons for hiatuses. Two breaks were precipitated by teacher misconduct. Others (4 of 7) were caused by a lack of a piano, although one instance of lack of a piano was prompted by a dislike of lessons, causing the participant to stop and the piano to be given away. Nevertheless, the lack of piano prevented further piano playing. The participant told the story of her childhood lessons at a convent,

> I lasted about a month. For one thing, according to the nuns, everything my childhood teacher taught me was incorrect. For another, if you were enrolled in the piano classes, you had to practice at school, so I could not lie about it as I had with my teacher. Everybody practiced at once in this long corridor with eight pianos lined up. It was horrible. You couldn't hear yourself think and I hated it.

Another mentioned an extended hiatus of about 15 years when she had no piano, and other participants had similar experiences of extended hiatuses. Although breaks were mostly due to other commitments such as career and family responsibilities, one participant found that the circumstances of her career setting (a piano in her classroom) offered an opportunity for piano study,

> During my time teaching, 27 years or so, I had a piano in the classroom. I loved it…. That was the time I really started playing the piano, before everybody came to school. There were two hours a day that I put in, so that was where I got more at ease with music.

The finding that most participants had time away from music making was also reported about adult members of a community choir who also played a keyboard instrument (Kruse, 2021) and adult piano students (Taylor, 2011). A final note about gender: the fact that hiatuses were sometimes due to family responsibilities was gender-related (Elkington & Stebbins, 2014). Although participants did not mention gender in data generation, some hiatuses were related to gender, such as breaking from music teaching and piano participation due to spousal work relocation. However, it is also the case that traditional gender roles offered some women opportunities in piano participation, especially teaching. This has also been my own experience. It is also the case that hiatuses for men, especially as gender roles become more flexible, might involve family responsibilities.

5.2.1.3 Memorization

Music (score) memorization is a convention of piano performance. Four participants mentioned memorization. Two viewed memorization as more difficult in later life, but differed in their perception of the difficulty. Perseverance played a more prominent role for one participant.

> I do find that trying to memorize a piece is a slower process as compared to when I was doing exams. I don't recall working very hard on memorization; it came much faster and easier. Now I really have to study the music and repeat it over, and over, and over. That is a little frustrating.

For the other, memorization was perceived as a stimulating and beneficial task.

> I don't find it as easy to memorize as I did back then, but I think it's a good exercise … you're working on your memory. It may not come as quickly, so maybe you'll just sit at the piano a little longer, that's all.

Two other participants, who did not relate age with memorization, also perceived the process as a challenge with cognitive benefits. The participants' association of age, or not, with memorization is in keeping with the related literature. Mishra's (2010) review of pedagogical writing on music memorization noted that seven of the 185 writings mentioned age, which was cited as "a reason for forgetting" (p. 16). Mishra also found, "Of those who discussed age, some argued that memorizing when young was easier and the memories more stable while others argued that age had no effect on memory" (p. 16). Also in keeping with the literature were the study participants' views about memorization. Roulston et al. (2015) found that although adult music students accepted their limits in music memorization, "many expressed frustration at the limitations" (p. 329).

5.2.1.4 Music Performance Anxiety

Most participants (5 of 7) mentioned experiencing performance anxiety at times.

> *Music performance anxiety* is the experience of marked and persistent anxious apprehension related to musical performance that has arisen through specific anxiety-conditioning experiences. It is manifested through combinations of affective, cognitive, somatic and behavioural symptoms and may occur in a range of performance settings, but is usually more severe in settings involving high ego investment and evaluative threat. It may be focal (i.e. focused only on music performance), or occur comorbidly with other anxiety disorders, in particular social phobia. It affects musicians across the lifespan and is at least partially independent of years of training, practice, and level of musical accomplishment. It may or may not impair the quality of the musical performance. (Kenny, 2012, p. 433)

With regard to age and music performance anxiety, one teacher mentioned anxiety as an issue for younger students, but two participants focused on later life, and one participant mentioned anxiety in childhood and adulthood. In addition, rather than age, one participant's anxiety was associated with "high ego investment and evaluative threat" (Kenny, 2012, p. 433). The participant said, "I also don't have the pressure of having to be a professional anymore – not the same kind of performance anxiety and all of that stuff." Two participants thought that music performance anxiety increased with age, one adding that an increased level of difficulty in evaluative performance also affected her anxiety. Another participant talked about lifelong music performance anxiety, mentioning that she was afraid of taking piano exams in childhood. She

described her teacher's support in adulthood and her own perseverance despite the anxiety of playing in the teacher's studio.

> I was terrified, and some of the others were too – she has the adult students play for one another. Over time, I was still scared, but I somehow engaged with it. I learned from her, "Don't worry if you make mistakes. Just keep going." All these things have made me more relaxed.

Cooper (2001) found that "nervousness, a sense of embarrassment, and a lack of skill were the most frequently cited reasons for not enjoying piano playing" (p. 161). However, despite the negative experience of music performance anxiety, the participants in this study persevered in piano playing. Similarly, Bugos's (2014) study exploring beginner adult piano and percussion students' perceptions of group lessons found that a small percentage of the older adult participants experienced nervousness as a limitation and yet most expressed interest in continuing lessons. These results are echoed by Barbeau and Mantie (2019), who reported that all 35 of older adult participants (members of community bands) in their study agreed that the benefits of music making outweighed any negative effects of anxiety. However, I only spoke to people who continued to play piano despite anxiety, and it would be instructive to interview people who discontinued piano participation due to music performance anxiety.

5.2.1.5 Physical Ability

Most participants (5 of 7) mentioned health issues and physical abilities with regard to piano playing, but only the experiences of two women were associated with age-related limitations and perseverance. One said,

> In the last couple of years, I have found it more difficult to play chords with four, and sometimes three notes, so I have to adapt. I find it a real nuisance that I just can't reach the notes that I used to be able to reach. I arpeggiate or drop a note because I've learned that I can adapt like that.

The mixed feelings that were expressed by these two participants are supported by Roulston et al. (2015), who reported that older adult music students experienced decreased physical and technical ability compared to childhood, and were both accepting of and frustrated by their perceived limitations. Yet, the participants who experienced these types of limitations were able to adapt their playing to avoid technical problems and injury, issues that affect musicians of *all ages* (Ackermann, 2021). However, the overall lack of participant discussion about physical

limitations is in agreement with Wristen (2006), who found that most adult piano students in their study reported no physical difficulties that might interfere with piano participation. Such was the experience of two participants in my study who expressed gratitude for good health (i.e., no physical limitations). Another two participants made no mention physical abilities. A fifth participant mentioned physical issues, but did not associated them negatively with piano playing.

5.2.1.6 Practice

Much of the time commitment in learning and maintaining piano skills is spent in practice, an activity that is not always enjoyed (Cheng & Southcott, 2023). Three participants mentioned piano practice only in passing, but the others discussed their thoughts about practice, sometimes making distinction between playing and practicing the piano. For example, one participant said of their childhood experience, "I loved the music. I loved playing, but I was not a practicer." The four study participants who talked about practice distinguished between practice in childhood versus adulthood; three participants noted that they disliked practice in childhood but are more accepting of it in adulthood. Of practice in later life, one said, "The practicing doesn't bother me so much, and I practice more efficiently." Only one student participant stated that practice remains a challenge, "I'm still not the best person in the world to practice, but certainly for the exams, I've gotten down to it – practiced hours and hours every day." Fortunately, for the participants in my study and the many children who do not enjoy practicing, "childhood willingness to practice" and "consistency in practicing" has little connection to playing piano in adulthood (Lawrence & Dachinger, 1967, p. 30). Finding the time to practice piano is challenging for some adults, despite the commitment to piano learning (Cooper, 2001; Kang, 2017; Li & Southcott, 2015; Tahara, 2015). Kang's (2017) study of the experience of an adult piano student showed two different perspectives on practice time. Her participant thought a lot about "time management and efficiency" and he sacrificed time spent on other leisure activities such as golf (p. 110). His wife however, found it more difficult to prioritize her own piano practice over her other responsibilities, saying, "you have to make time for yourself" (p.110). Similarly, the participants in my study sometimes sacrificed other activities to pursue piano, and at other times took a break from piano to focus on other responsibilities.

5.2.1.7 Teacher Misconduct

An emergent finding in my research was the experience of teacher misconduct, which is power-based and sometimes ageist. Juvenile ageism has a role in misconduct that is experienced by

children or youth (Westman, 2019). I use the term *misconduct* in agreement with Wickström (2023) who defined misconduct "beyond sexual misconduct to discuss power-based misconduct more broadly, and to include non-sexualized verbal abuse such as belittling students and saying that they are worthless" (p. 56). Although I did not ask, two of the seven study participants mentioned teacher misconduct and a third participant implied misconduct, although she did not provide details. The misconduct described by participants varied from non-sexualized verbal abuse to molestation, and sexual misconduct. One participant was a child at the time of her experience of molestation and the others were young adults. The teachers were male and in positions of power relative to their students. The experience caused two participants to stop playing piano for a time. One participant described her experience,

> I returned to the conservatory and the teacher there…. he was a genius … He was also abusive, and was sleeping with all the girl students – not all of them – not me. It was a nightmare scenario there, and I lasted two years. He would scream and yell, and that was when I stopped playing. It was just horrible. I met some of his former students years later and discovered that they too had stopped playing after a couple of years of study with him.… I had one friend … and she had what we called a nervous breakdown. She dropped everything … and stopped playing completely. She was a brilliant player…. She should have had a career, like an Angela Hewitt type of career. I think there are many stories like that.

As revealed by some participants in my study, music teacher misconduct is a longstanding hidden problem that is ongoing and is attracting more attention in news media and among researchers, although there is a need for more research in this area of study given its prevalence (Henschel & Grant, 2019). Allegations have been made against several prominent music schools, including The Julliard School. Recently, London's Royal College of Music's suspended their Head of Strings prompting the cellist Julian Lloyd Webber to call for classical academies and conservatoires to end one-to-one music teaching, a solution also discussed in music education research (Henschel & Grant, 2019; Wickström, 2023). This solution would help to address the access problem described by Henschel and Grant (2019), "Research indicates that teachers whose jobs include one-on-one time with students (e.g., music teachers and coaches) are more likely to engage in sexual abuse and misconduct behaviors with students" (p. 28). Solutions such as alternatives to one-to-one music teaching might help to lessen misconduct, a problem with

harmful consequences such as "lost opportunities, self-blame, feelings of worthlessness and powerlessness, and trauma" (Coppola, 2023, p. 307).

Although participants of my project were caused significant harm by teacher misconduct, two even paused their piano study, they eventually persevered with their journey in piano playing. Alexandra Lamont (2011) noted, “many adults can and do overcome early negative experiences and hurtful criticism to continue to be musically active in adult life” (p 372). The quality of perseverance was noted in the research about older adult participants of music and piano (Flowers & Murphy, 2001; Kang, 2017; A. Lamont, 2011; Taylor, 2011; called struggle by Taylor & Hallam, 2008). Kang (2017) reported that the participant in her study realized a long-held dream in learning to play piano and overcame obstacles such as "stiff fingers, his memory loss, his lack of time" (p. 109). All participants in my study demonstrated perseverance to varying degrees, although not all participants experienced all costs. As one participant said about perseverance with regard to piano practicing, "it just takes enormous patience … an ongoing endeavour on my part."

5.2.2 The Serious Leisure Career and the Course of Musical Development

The serious leisure perspective is used here to focus on enduring musical development—the experience of serious leisure. The second quality of serious leisure and devotee work is the opportunity to follow a career. *Career*, in this context, refers to a continuum of stages of involvement in piano participation, not to a profession, although it can also have this meaning in the case of devotee work. A serious leisure career is "shaped by its own special contingencies, turning points, and stages of achievement and involvement" (Elkington & Stebbins, 2014, p. 18). For some followers of serious leisure pursuits, their level of involvement increases "with the length of their leisure careers," however, for others, there is no relationship between the level of involvement and length of career (Stebbins, 2020b, p. 73). I adapted Stebbins's involvement scale for my context of music development. The level of involvement in piano playing may begin with the dabbler on the piano (casual leisure) to the beginner piano student (casual leisure and/or beginning of serious leisure) to the amateur[9] (late beginner, intermediate, advanced levels; returning student, serious leisure) and possibly to the piano teacher and/or performer (devotee work, expert). A serious leisure career in piano may or may not include all levels of involvement. In piano, levels of involvement include varying levels of achievement. For example, true

[9] The term *amateur* is used here in the sense of participation in piano as serious leisure but not as a profession.

beginners do not know how to read music, but returning students probably have learned to read music, although the skill may be largely forgotten. However, some returning students may be highly accomplished players with much experience—indeed sometimes they are teachers. Devotee work in piano usually includes a focus towards either teaching or performing. For example, music conservatories and post-secondary institutions usually award diplomas or other certification in either pedagogy or performance. The participants in my study were categorized as either students or teachers. In piano, the line between student and expert is often undefined. For example, one participant in this study is a performer (i.e., an expert) but contributed to the study as a student. The discussion that follows (especially the amateur and teacher sections), although framed around a serious leisure career, is mainly about later life piano involvement because this was a focus of my inquiry.

5.2.2.1 Dabbler

Stebbins (2020b) conceived of dabbling as a kind of play and classified it as a type of casual leisure (p. 75). In the music context, Stebbins (2013) wrote, "Many a child and no small number of adults dabble on one or more musical instruments" (p. 141). Stebbins (2020b) noted that although not all serious leisure careers begin with dabbling, "for those that do playfulness is, ironically, the attitude that precedes deep commitment to the serious pursuit" (p. 75). Only one participant mentioned dabbling. A teacher participant talked about asking for a piano as a child and pretending to play piano on the kitchen tabletop. She continued to dabble once she had access to a piano, and eventually was given lessons. Although her father did not appreciate her dabbling, her parents supported her interest and her mother found her a teacher after much effort.

All participants mentioned support in their pursuit of piano playing. Stebbins (2013) proposed that dabbling in music has two contextual components: "social and accessibility" (p. 148). Dabblers must have access to an instrument. Regarding the social component, Stebbins (2013) wrote, "In music the dabbler has seen or heard, if not both, someone else either dabble with or more or less properly play an instrument" (p. 148). Family and friends often provide these contextual social and access components. Although only one participant talked about dabbling, all participants mentioned support in childhood and throughout their lives in the pursuit of piano learning. While Stebbins's focus was on the child, the participants in my study mentioned support at all stages of their musical development, beginning with members of their families of origin in childhood to spouses and colleagues in adulthood. This experience of

lifelong support is reinforced by music education literature (Nielsen & Johansen, 2021; Zdzinski, 2021). One participant spoke at length about the love and gratitude she had for her aunt, who, although not her piano teacher, inspired her interest in piano and modeled improvisational techniques in her piano playing in the family home. Family support is also mentioned in adult piano teaching and learning literature (Cooper, 2001; Li & Southcott, 2015).

5.2.2.2 Beginner

According to the SLP, the next level of involvement in musical development is the neophyte or beginning piano student. Stebbins (2013) wrote,

> The neophyte stage is characterized by, among other qualities, that of uncertainty. In music, participants struggle with, for example, learning the rudiments of playing their chosen instrument, developing an ear and a sense of time, and, in many cases, learning how to read music. For this to occur most effectively, regular practice and lessons are essential. These participants are no longer dabblers, if indeed they ever were. (p. 147)

With regard to age, all participants took piano lessons in childhood—this was a criterion for inclusion in the study. However, beginner piano students may also be adults. Two teacher participants talked about beginning adult students, especially in comparison to child beginners. One teacher described differences between child and adult beginners,

> Very often, adults who seek me are nearing retirement and looking for hobbies. Sometimes a person will be starting right from scratch – "Where's middle C?" Other times, people wonder if they can still learn. I find that the young person, say the nine year old, will be quicker at memory work, they don't have as many distractions in their lives, and their coordination may be better. The older adult makes up for those little things by being focused and spending more time sitting on the piano bench. So generally, adults do very, very well.

Another teacher had a slightly different perception of adult and child beginners, noting the difficulties that beginner adult students sometimes encounter,

> I taught young child beginners for many years, and I was very interested in starting them, watching them progress, and taking them along. Teaching beginner adults—it is difficult. There are things that get in the way of their learning. As much as I try to encourage them, they expect way too much of themselves and don't see their progress. I think many adults have the impression that you can sit down at the piano and learn to play in a short time.

> As you know, it just is not so…. Some adults just pack it in because it is too hard. One adult beginner I had was not a success; he was just too nervous about it. If you are very bright and you start to learn an instrument, you feel like you are back in kindergarten. It is very hard. I get that.

Although all participants in this study began piano lessons in childhood, not all continued, thereby deferring the beginner stage. Two participants left childhood beginner lessons due either to dislike of the teacher/lessons or to teacher misconduct. However, both participants returned to lessons in adulthood as beginners or amateurs (described in the following section). One eventually became a piano teacher and the other is largely self-taught, but returned to lessons in later life.

5.2.2.3 Amateur

The term, *amateur* is used here to include late beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels of continuing and returning piano students. Although amateur pianists are traditionally younger people (children and adolescents), the focus in my conversations with participants was on later life. One teacher participant talked about the increase of returning adult students in her practice and their desire to challenge themselves with learning something new.

> Back in those days, as I started teaching piano in my 20s, the students were all children and teenagers…. back then, piano didn't tend to be something that adults took, at least that was not my experience. As time went on, I found more and more that many adults started thinking about trying something different. People in their 50s and 60s, even 70s and 80s were starting to take the piano up again.

A student participant spoke of the importance of the student/teacher relationship in later life.

> I think that is the benefit of being an older person. You desperately need a teacher who is going to work with you, rather than you working with her – to find music not only that you like, but also that your hands, your eyes, and your brain will work with. You have to have a sensitive person on the other side. That gives you inspiration, and that will help you to delight in touching that piano.

One might argue that this relationship is as important in early life as it is in later life. Other participants discussed the meaningfulness of a serious leisure pursuit. One said,

> You know, we all can't be gifted with great health. My health is good, but I have pains and aches. I think if I wasn't interested in things outside, I could very easily sit in a

> corner. I'm going to be 86. I just feel that life is an exciting thing.… I think it's important for anybody who is growing older to have an interest in life – music is wonderful because it covers so many fields.

The challenges and insights that such a pursuit can offer were described by a teacher participant,

> In the past few years, I thought, "Well, that's all fine, but I have no talent for playing by ear." So, I started with a teacher, and we work on chord charts and playing by ear. I am never going to be a great jazz player. I know that. Teacher knows that. It's all okay. It's something completely new, and I'm enjoying it. It's like starting over for me. Learning gives you more patience for people who are having trouble with something. It teaches you that learning is a process and is not always easy. You sympathize more with people when they struggle with something that you find easy.

Throughout this chapter, the study participants' talk about the amateur stage of their musical development shows the diversity of this stage: from returning adult beginner students to a teacher returning to lessons to learn new skills. Participants discussed aspects of meaningfulness such as novelty, agency, challenge, and growth.

5.2.2.4 Teacher

The teacher represents a type of devotee work, the final stage of involvement and achievement in the serious leisure career. As previously stated, devotee work "is activity in which participants feel a powerful devotion, or strong, positive attachment, to a form of self-enhancing work" (Elkington & Stebbins, 2014, p. 4). The teacher participants in this study returned to piano as amateurs with an eventual goal of teaching, a progression also noted by Taylor (2010a). Stebbins (2020b) wrote about six criteria for devotee work. The work must be profound and require "substantial skill, knowledge, or experience"; require variety; offer "opportunity for creative or innovative work," offer "control over the amount and disposition of time" be suited to the aptitude and taste of the devotee; and offer an environment that is conducive to pursue the work (pp. 24–25). The three teacher participants in my study touched upon several of Stebbins's criteria in their stories, especially regarding knowledge and creativity required in teaching and the variety of activities involved in teaching people of a wide range of ages and levels of achievement. Two teacher participants also alluded to their control of time in devotee work, especially in later life. One remarked on retirement, "A nice thing about piano teaching is that you can keep working without having to retire completely." The other spoke about the freedom

of partial retirement, "My attitude towards piano has changed a lot since I have become older. I found it hard when I was teaching 30 students, but now that I have retired mostly, I have time, and I am really enjoying piano." In addition to Stebbins's criteria, another teacher talked about the social aspect of teaching in later life.

> I continued with my teaching, and I loved it…. You're hearing about what your students are doing in their lives. It's refreshing, brightening, and broadening for you. Otherwise, if you are not exposed to that kind of thing, your mind begins to close in on you, and your thoughts are only about what affects you…. I think that teaching was a wonderful thing for me. I was able to keep in touch my students, and that enhanced my life.… I always had something going on with my students, or as part of the music teachers' community.

Social and creative aspects of teaching piano were noted by participants. In addition, the value of experience and control of time in piano teaching (flexible retirement age and work hours) are aspects of teaching that are particularly conducive to later life work, allowing for the pursuit of piano playing and continuing development for these teachers.

5.2.3 Learning

A feature of musical development is ongoing learning. As stated previously, it is unexceptional for piano teachers (i.e., experts in their field) to continue learning through professional development opportunities or piano lessons, for example. Whether teachers or students, all participants in my study demonstrated a love of learning in later life, a result that was also noted by Li and Southcott (2015). One of the participants in my study used the term *curiosity* to describe the love of learning that she saw as an important component of later life. *Curiosity* is named in the wisdom literature to describe the interest and openness to experience that is part of wisdom and knowledge (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). All participants reported that they continued to learn and grow in later life, challenging themselves to learn new skills such as improvisation, playing by ear, or playing lead sheets, and learning new styles of music and new repertoire. Despite the fact that not all participants took piano lessons throughout their lives, continued piano learning was important for all. One student participant in particular exemplified a largely self-taught approach to learning. She began to learn about improvisation and chording from observing her aunt's piano lessons.

> I am grateful for my aunt because she was wonderful to me. I wouldn't say that she got me started in piano, but I think she did something interior to me that gave me music in

> my life. I used to wonder how she played, because she never played without music, but it never sounded like she was playing exactly what was written. She would improvise in her lesson. At a certain point, I could read music enough to know that she wasn't playing the music exactly as written.

This participant took lessons for several years in childhood with a beloved teacher, "I loved my teacher, but I hated practicing.… I've picked up piano in spite of not practicing." Unfortunately, she disliked lessons with her subsequent teacher and quit, but found a new approach to playing.

> Around that time, I had an interesting conversation with a young piano student, our landlord's daughter. I didn't speak French very well and she didn't speak English, but we had this conversation about music lessons and she showed me her book – it was a book of lead sheets. I asked, "What about the left hand?" She said, "You see the chord above? You just play the chord with your left hand." That conversation always stuck in my mind. I thought, "You can play a decent piece just with the right hand." So, for years, I started filling in the chord with my left hand, which made piano playing a lot easier for me. I mean, I play for pleasure. I don't play to pass exams in the conservatory of music again.… I don't know why they don't teach little ones this way, it'd be so much easier.

In adulthood, the participant taught school and had access to a piano, although she did not take lessons. Because she had learned to read music with her first teacher and could read easily, she was able to continue playing. She eventually began to play other instruments and formed an ensemble with friends. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when she could no longer meet with her ensemble, she began online piano lessons learning improvisation.

The story of this participant demonstrates her love and dedication to music study. It also raises a couple of issues about lifelong music study, one of which she raised about piano teaching. She had talent, but she also had an idea of improvisation, learned to read music, and had taught herself to read lead sheets. These skills helped her to continue playing piano for life. Lawrence and Dachinger (1967) wrote about the acquisition of skills such as sight-reading, improvising, and playing by ear as important factors in the continuation of music training into adulthood. They also found that self-taught musicians were much more likely to continue playing into adulthood, as were those who played other instruments in addition to piano. With regard to piano teaching, the authors concluded that "it was important to keep the student at the piano until

he mastered sightreading and other neglected skills, such as improvising, at least to a workable degree" (Lawrence & Dachinger, 1967, p. 31).

To summarize, the participants of this study found meaning in their musical growth and learning, regardless of their level of involvement. Their perseverance and dedication carried them through lifelong piano participation. Although all the women took lessons in childhood and adulthood as part of the study criteria, they also had hiatuses from lessons and piano participation. What makes the serious pursuit of piano meaningful? Is it purely a love of music and the piano, or is it also the benefits, such as self-fulfillment, that come with serious leisure pursuits?

5.3 Understanding and Wisdom

Edmondson's (2015) third approach to meaning involves sense-making—"interpretations of 'meaning' in relation to ageing and whatever insights it might bring, all connected in various ways with the attainment of some form of understanding or wisdom." (p. 110). One goal of my research was to highlight the experience of aging. Bytheway (2011) wrote, "although age may be defined in terms of time, it is more than just a way of measuring time: age is about the experience of growing older" (p. 6). I agree with Edmondson's (2015) assertions about the value of sharing the experiences of older people, "Older people's very existence can be a source of insight for others" (p. 20). "Older people themselves carry sociocultural messages for other generations … perhaps particularly vividly when they are seen in terms both of other people's 'journeys' and their own." (Edmondson, 2015, p. 110). Similarly, Baars (2012a) proposed, "that the traditional connection between aging and wisdom implies that aging people may acquire insights that are also valuable for younger persons" (p. 221). Specifically, Baars (2012b) argued for the "obvious importance of narratives for articulating, interpreting and sharing experiences, including experiences of aging" (p. 154). In addition, there is a "lack of perspectives that embrace and explore aging's potential for meaning beyond decline narratives and age-defying narratives" (Baars, 2017, p. 970).

The life stories I presented in the previous chapter represent the experiences of the older people who took part in my study, and may therefore serve as a source of insight for others. In the piano teaching and learning literature, Kang's (2017) narrative inquiry about a beginning adult piano student served a similar purpose. With regard to a lifelong approach to music learning, Flowers and Murphy (2001) noted, "older adults can serve as resources, not so much in

offering specific advice, but in their broad perspective about the function of music throughout life and its implications for music goals and curricula in the schools" (p. 32). Similarly, Kruse (2021) wrote,

> Younger listeners could learn from the reminiscences of older adults and apply pertinent lessons to ordering their own lives.… As music researchers and practitioners continue to identify adults' personal, social, and musical needs, this type of reflection could be essential in tying past musical experiences to current motivations. (p. 55)

The participant life stories of Chapter 4 served as models of what is possible in piano teaching and learning in later life and throughout life.

In this chapter, I look in a more abstract way at insights about aging as shared by piano teacher and student participants—insights about meaning and aging. In the foreword to Edmondson's (2015) book about aging, the gerontologist H. R. Moody wrote, "Ageing is the great repressed element of our contemporary life and so its meaning eludes us" (Edmondson, 2015, p. xi). This chapter is my attempt to understand better meaning in age and aging. A main goal of this project is to help bring aging into consciousness in the context of piano teaching and learning. Meaning in aging is understood here in terms of *time* and individual *identity* (Bytheway, 2011, p. 6).

5.3.1 Aging and the Perception of Time

"Living through time, and in time, means something."

(Andrews, 2012, p. 390)

Aging, the meaning of time, and meaning in life are connected (Baars, 2012a, 2017; Edmondson, 2015; Hendricks, 2001; Moody & Cole, 1986; Rudd et al., 2019). Baars (2012a) proposed two aspects of time: its function "as a general tool to measure the durations of processes and to locate them on a time scale" and its embeddedness in narratives "in which all that is vitally important manifests itself and goes by, including the lives of unique human beings" (p. 13). Baars also suggested, as have others (Hendricks, 2001; Sánchez-Mira & Bernardi, 2021) that chronometric time has been the focus of much research on aging at the expense of a relative perspective of time. Sánchez-Mira and Bernardi (2021) called for a more inclusive conceptualisation of time in life course research that includes relative time, which "depends on the position and disposition of the observer" (p. 20). They wrote, "Under a relative perspective, time is not merely an external reference to events, an external structure within which lives unfold, but is subjectively defined

and context-dependent" (p. 20). Put another way, "the ways in which the passing of time is experienced is independent of the regularity of the ticking clock" (Baars, 2015, p. 399). My focus was on the experience of aging and relative time, however the influence of chronometric time must be acknowledged. For example, the river of experience exercise, which likely set the temporal 'tone' for the participant interviews, implies chronometric time (i.e., the unidirectional arrow of time) and many people, myself included, reported events in chronological time, often including time markers such as ages and dates. Given the significance of time and its close connection between aging, and meaning, more of my commentary in this chapter could have been framed around time. For example, the connectedness that some participants had with music discussed earlier in the chapter as flow or mindfulness, might also have been viewed in relation to time. Rudd et al. (2019) referred to this connection as the ability of people to "derive meaning in the moment" or "to construe their time at a momentary level" (p. 689). Much age-related discussion during interviews was framed around time rather than age. I agree with Grenier, (2015) who wrote, "It is possible that time, rather than age, may represent an organizing feature of older people's lives" (p. 408). Our sense of growing older may be perceived as more or less time.

Psychology research on time has suggested that time is perceived to pass more quickly with age (Sánchez-Mira & Bernardi, 2021). While this is a preoccupation of mine, the participants did not mention it. Rather than talk about the pace of time or focus on age, participants spoke about quantity of time and the perception of more or less time left in life. Rudd et al., (2019) wrote about time as a resource that is connected to meaningfulness, "On one hand, time is endless and pervasive, constantly flowing and serving as the medium in which all of the moments that comprise every life occur" (p. 681). On the other hand, time is also scarce and finite (Rudd et al., 2019). All participants expressed an awareness of this apparently paradoxical perception of time. One participant said, "I am going to celebrate my 85th birthday soon…. I have the time now to do the stuff I really want to do. I can choose." This example shows both the recognition of the finitude of life and the perception of more time and freedom to choose meaningful activities—the understanding of different levels of time: limitations of the human lifetime together with the perception of expanded momentary time (Rudd et al., 2019). The mention of time and meaningful ways of spending time is related to the perception of more time in the above quote. Another participant also provided a nuanced consideration of time and

repertoire choice, saying that semi-retirement allowed her more time for enjoying piano, learning new repertoire, and accepting new challenges. However, she recognized limitations, for herself and her older students, noting, "life is too short" to play music that is unrewarding, unenjoyable, too difficult, or too physically demanding. Although she perceived more time in her life for enjoying the piano, she also recognized the time commitment of learning advanced repertoire and the importance of enjoyment and a sense of accomplishment for her students and for herself. The importance of suitable repertoire for adult piano students has also been addressed by researchers (Coutts, 2018; Haddon, 2017; Jutras, 2006; Pike, 2011, 2022). Coutts (2018) wrote, "I learned … that it is more important to align repertoire selection with the benefits students seek, rather than the external performative and prescriptive musical skills by which I was accustomed to measuring student learning" (p. 11). Here, Coutts also addressed the importance of working collaboratively with adult students in the choice of repertoire, a view echoed by participants in my study. The same approach would be welcome with all students, as repertoire choice is important for students of any age (Cheng & Southcott, 2023; Gerelus et al., 2020).

Rudd et al. (2019) suggested that, in a US context, there is a general sense of "scarcity of objective and subjective time" (Rudd et al., 2019). Despite this proposed sense of time scarcity, to greater or lesser extents, all participants in my study talked about having more time, either present or future time, or both. One participant noted, "Music became a bigger part of my life because there was this time and space that could be given more to me than to other people." The sense of having more time that was expressed by some participants in my study could be age-related, that is, some older people perceive more time in the present. Alternatively, it might indicate the existence of contrary perceptions of time (both more and less), as discussed above. It may also signify thinking of time as *leisure*—a synonym of *time* (Merriam-Webster, n.d., time), or as one of the "essential elements" of leisure (Elkington & Stebbins, 2014). For example, one teacher participant spoke about her experience with inquiries from potential students who were nearing retirement and were seeking piano lessons as a relaxing alternative to work and family responsibilities—but also as an opportunity for "learning something new." The serious leisure perspective, especially the search for rewards such as self-fulfillment, self-gratification, and re-creation (Stebbins, 2020b), may explain this attraction to piano in later life. However, the desire to acquire new knowledge later in life is at odds with Carstensen's (2021) socioemotional selectivity theory, as discussed later in this section.

While all participants were aware of both more and less time, one participant spoke only about *more* time in later life, including time in the future. She talked about having more time for piano and music once she was mostly free of family and career responsibilities—she even bought a new piano, referencing *future time*, indicating that her "journey has not finished."

Related to the perception of *more* time is talk about *future* time. Rudd et al. (2019) suggested that increased meaning in life "can occur when individuals create a future-focused narrative" (p. 693). One participant evaluated her life and ongoing engagement, "I have had a great life. I have had an interesting life, and it continues…" The perception of time affects meaningful activities like piano playing. Sánchez-Mira and Bernardi (2021) wrote about multidirectional time, "the remembered past and anticipated future are integrated into present decision making and that some actions will be more or less oriented towards the past, the present or the future" (p. 27). For example, buying a piano in later life and taking lessons is an action that is *future* oriented. Research on aging tends to focus on time in the past. Baars (2012b) wrote, "It is apparently beyond many people's scope that older persons also live in the present, that *these* days are also *their* days, and that they might even be interested in the future" (p. 153). Indeed, all participants referenced future time, sometimes as a coda.

Around middle and later life, older people are more likely to perceive the limits of time (Dittmann-Kohli, 2006; Baars 2012a; Giasson et al., 2019). One participant expressed this realization, "All of a sudden, you are older and some of the things that you thought you would be doing for a long, long time are not quite as possible." Baars (2017) wrote, "Finitude is a permanent condition of life and is deeply connected with the uniqueness of situations and human lives" (p. 975). Socioemotional selectivity theory, "is a life span development theory proposing that "time horizons shape the relative priority placed on emotionally meaningful and knowledge-seeking goals" (Giasson et al., 2019, p. 85). Carstensen (2021) proposed that the perception of more time (typically in earlier life) causes people to prioritize and value "knowledge building and exploration, even when such efforts are emotionally challenging" (p. 1190). Conversely, when people perceive less time left in life (typically in later life) "emotional goals are prioritized over exploration" (p. 1190). As examples of knowledge-seeking and emotionally meaningful goals, Carstensen suggested, "taking a course in inorganic chemistry (for most people)" versus "spending time with a close friend" (p. 1190). On the one hand, a theory such as socioemotional selectivity theory might help to explain the challenges faced by true beginner adult piano

students and their teachers. As quoted earlier in this chapter, one teacher participant noted the student effort and time required to learn piano. "They have put in this agonizing time to learn, and the rewards should be there, and they will be eventually, but it is hard to see sometimes." Carstensen's theory might also help to explain the problem of older adults playing advanced repertoire that is too demanding, as mentioned earlier in this section. On the other hand, the finding that every participant talked in various ways about their love of learning in later life (as discussed in the *Learning* section) appears to be at odds with socioemotional selectivity theory. For example, one participant described her desire to make her time count with regard to music because of her perception of less time, including finitude.

> By following my interests, it feels like the world is continuing to open up as I get older. I just don't have time for everything…. Life is short, and I am not expecting to be reincarnated. I want to learn as much as I can with this time, and learn from people.

Although contrary to Carstensen's socioemotional selectivity theory, the desire of this study's participants to increase piano and musical knowledge and performance skills in later life is consistent with other research findings in piano study (Bugos, 2014; Cooper, 2001; Coutts, 2018; Jutras, 2006; Kang, 2017; Li & Southcott, 2015). Li and Southcott (2015) noted that their participants enjoyed learning and appreciated the piano learning opportunities that may have been missed in their younger days.

Lastly, on finitude and mortality, Baars (2017) wrote, “Instead of reducing aging to the opposite or continuation of vital adulthood, it should be seen as something with a potentially broad and deep significance: a process of learning to live a finite life.” (p. 969). There was some talk about mortality. Four women mentioned death in relation to their connectedness to another person such as a family member, piano teacher, or musical ensemble partner. These four participants mentioned death briefly, except for one who spoke at length about the deaths of others. One of these participants also spoke explicitly about her own mortality and her acceptance of finitude, including discussion about preparation for her eventual passing. The participants' stories about time and aging illustrate ways of finding meaning in life combined with what Baars (2017) called learning to live a finite life.

5.3.2 Aging and Identity

The following is an excerpt of a conversation I had with a participant about our university studies in adulthood.

> Participant: You started younger, which is great.
>
> Susan: No, I didn't. … I'm 62 now.
>
> Participant: You look younger.
>
> Susan: You're very kind. I feel much older.

I begin this section with an exchange that demonstrates some of the complexity in talk about age and growing older. The brief conversation quoted above raises several questions about the ways in which we think about age and aging: Why would it have been great if I had begun my studies when I was younger? What does it mean to look younger than one's age? What does it mean to receive a comment about looking younger as a kindness? What does feeling older than one's age mean?

These questions have to do with aging and the experience of ageism broadly, "through being made aware of age and through being judged according to how we are ageing" and narrowly "through being judged to be *old*" (Bytheway, 2005, p. 362). Expressions of ageism can be *explicit* or *implicit* and may be directed towards the self or others (Ayalon [2022] uses the terms *self-* and *other- directed ageism*). Despite the fact that ageism is so prevalent, there is a lack of awareness of ageism and its consequences. In their work on reframing aging and ageism, Sweetland et al. (2017) wrote that although, "experts emphasize that older people are consistently marginalized across many domains of social life … for the public, ageism is not recognized as a problem … the concept is not even part of its thinking" (p. 7). Overall, the stories told by the participants in this study lacked a focus on aging or ageism, reflecting the public thinking referenced by Sweetland et al. (2017). An exception was the following brief story about explicit ageism as told by one participant.

> Having watched my mother go through all this and getting to that point myself, I once went to a seniors' residence and offered to give piano lessons. The administration looked at me and said, "These are old people. Why would you want to give them piano lessons?" So, I got booted out the front door …

The above is a story illustrating explicit negative ageism as told by a participant. However, I did not identify any explicit ageism, negative or positive, on the part of the participants themselves. Despite the exchange quoted at the beginning of this section, in general, there was a lack of talk about age, aging, and ageism. Although the participants had been informed that my project was about aging and piano teaching and learning, topics related to aging were discussed mostly at my

prompting. I should also say that while some of us displayed implicitly ageist behaviour at times, we also demonstrated acceptance and compassion with regard to age and aging. Our talk about aging was complex and sometimes contradictory.

The following example illustrates the general lack of focus on aging.

> *I ask how she thinks about age with regard to her teaching.*
>
> Teacher Participant: I can't say that I've really thought about age. I am not sure that parents of an 8-year-old who wants piano lessons are thinking about the teacher's age. I don't know how they feel. I have never had it come up…. Often when you get to retirement age, everyone you know is the same age as you. But, in my teaching, I have a couple of people who are around my age, a couple of teenagers, and a couple of people who are about 10 years old. You have to try to keep up to date and be able to relate to people of different ages. One of the things that I really find fun about teaching is that in every lesson you have a different student. You start your lessons with an 8-year-old beginner. Next is a teenage person, 14 and starting to lose interest. You are trying to find ways to encourage them. Then you have a retired person, followed by a 9-year-old. Every lesson is something different. You have to adapt and try to motivate that next person, and not every person is going to be motivated in the same way. You have to change yourself every lesson. That is the job for teachers – to help students to be motivated and enjoy the work that they're doing.

The participant quoted above appeared to practice a student-centred approach to teaching without regard to age—the focus was on the individual rather than on their age. Another teacher participant who only taught adults used the term *adults* but not *older adults,* also demonstrating her lack of focus on older age.

An example from a participant discussion about perfectionism demonstrates a nuanced understanding and acceptance of older age.

> I think perfectionism gets worse as you get older…. With age, I have come to realize my own capabilities. The same is true for my students. I just played the first and second movements of a classical sonata for my students, but I will never tackle the third movement. I know that is beyond me now. I just know, pretty much, what I can and cannot do, and I am content with that. I know that I don't have to do these really

> technically difficult things. I don't think about that. There is an acceptance that this is okay. Finally you're at an age where this is okay.

Another participant demonstrated a rejection of ageist narratives of decline, "I will honestly say that my last 20 plus years of life have been the greatest time of growth." The acceptance and even the embrace of older age is reflected in some of the literature on adult music learning (Hays & Minichiello, 2005; Kruse, 2021). Going further than acceptance of older age, Hays and Minichiello (2005) wrote about rejection of a decline narrative of aging, "The participants believed that retirement and ageing did not necessarily imply not having a role in society, physically or cognitively slowing down, or having less interaction with other people" (p. 445). In contrast, Taylor (2010a) noted that "the majority, though not all" of the participants in her study of older amateur piano students "commented that they did not think of themselves as older people when they were learning a musical instrument, despite there being evidence of difficulties with motor skill acquisition and memory that affected the speed of assimilating new information" (p. 351). Taylor's finding could be interpreted as an example of ageism because of the denial of older age, implied "othering" of older people, and distancing from them. As stated earlier, I identified little ageist talk or language—and what I found was implicitly not explicitly ageist. For example, a euphemism for death was used to describe the older self. In another instance, the word *still* was used in front of verbs. The use of the word *still* before a verb implies that certain behaviours are "unusual or outside the norm for an older person" (Gendron et al., 2016, p. 1002) and is not recommended in guidelines for inclusive communication.

Ageism is known to have negative effects (Chang et al., 2020; Lagacé et al., 2020; B. R. Levy, 2022; B. R. Levy & Banaji, 2002; Nelson, 2017). One participant spoke about the negative effect of public health and media messaging during the pandemic that equated older age with frailty:

> I didn't think too much about age actually until about a year and a half ago—part of the COVID-19 pandemic. They kept telling us that we were old and vulnerable. It's like advertising – if you repeat it often enough, people begin to believe it. So this, "old and vulnerable, old and vulnerable" message got through to people of my age."

The above quote is supported by a finding from Lagacé et al., (2024),

> the most prevalent and cross-cutting theme related to the 'vulnerability of all older adults' (also framed in the discourse as 'our' vulnerable older adults).The word 'vulnerable' itself

> was the one mostly used (in terms of frequency) in the government documents and well as the media. (p. 257)

This raises another concern about the association of age with disability—the intersection of ageism and ableism. In a recent study, Gendron et al., (2024) examined this intersection, finding an association between ageism and ableism, and calling for research and public policy initiatives to address anxieties about growing older and disability.

Related to the intersection of ageism and ableism is the successful aging narrative, which is dominant in gerontology and in the literature on piano and music participation involving older people. For example, despite finding that the "most enjoyable element" of a beginner level music program (piano and percussion) was "learning to play a musical instrument and reading musical notation (55%), Bugos (2014) concluded their report with the statement, "if older adults are to engage in music making … they must perceive that music contributes to successful aging" (p. 33), which Bugos defined as "associated with maintaining physical, social, and mental health" (p. 26). In other words, for Bugos it mattered most that music making contributed to health and well-being. Li and Southcott (2015) found that both teachers and students were aware of the positive association of piano playing with health, especially physical health. All participants in my study demonstrated awareness of the relationship between music and health and well-being and appeared to associate this topic with aging and older age. One student participant expressed gratitude for her good health and talked about music learning and cognitive health:

> One of the reasons I chose piano lessons and learning how to play the recorder, alto recorder, and ukulele, is that I know that it is important to keep my mind active, and to try new things. I think music is one of the main things for keeping your mind sharp. It's not the only reason, but it's one of the reasons that I'm more dedicated to music, knowing that it's helping me keep my mind sharp.

As this participant said, health was only one of the reasons for her dedication to music. For example, love of music was a lifelong motivating factor for the participants of this study. In her paper on meaning and meaningfulness in music education, Silverman (2020) echoed this sentiment: "What motivates me to practice … exists outside myself … What draws me to do these things is love. I do not care if these activities are 'good for me' ” (p. 4).

Finally, I wondered about the role of my implicit ageism in my research project. Critical gerontologists have addressed this problem (see especially Ray & Cole, 2008). In her essay "A

Feminist Confronts Ageism" Calasanti (2008) wrote, "I continue to struggle with the deeper levels of ageism in society, both within the disciplines in which I work and within myself" (p. 152). I also struggled—struggled despite also being an older person like the people in this project and despite my cognizance and dedication to raising awareness about ageism. In spite of all this, my thoughts and language sometimes betrayed the effects of implicit ageism. I was struck by Hofstadter's (1985) description of this problem, although he was writing about sexist language:

> My feeling about nonsexist English is that it is like a foreign language that I am learning. I find that even after years of practice, I still have to translate sometimes from my native language, which is sexist English. I know of no human being who speaks Nonsexist as their native tongue. It will be very interesting to see if such people come to exist. If so, it will have taken a lot of work by a lot of people to reach that point. (p. 167)

Some of the work to which Hofstadter refers is being done by gerontologists like Morrow-Howell et al. (2023) who offer suggestions for confronting ageism, such as carefully considering research approaches and academic writing.

The participants in this study found meaning in their experiences of aging through their understanding of aging and *time* and aging and *identity*. Most participants in this study did not focus on age, but talked about aging in terms of *time*: quantity of time and the perception of more or less time left in life. Some had a sense of more time to spend playing piano and continuing their musical development, looking to future challenges and growth. Others felt the limits of time more acutely and chose carefully how they spent their time. However, almost all participants expressed an apparently paradoxical perception of time—at once endless and finite. The nature of piano playing requires time and a belief that one has enough time to develop as a musician and enjoy new repertoire.

The experience of aging was also understood in terms of aging and *identity*: the way that we perceive aging in others and ourselves. In general, participants did not focus on aging or ageism even though they knew that the focus of my study was on aging and piano teaching and learning. There was no indication of explicit ageism, and implicit ageism was limited, a finding that surprised me given the ubiquity of ageism. Contradictions existed around acceptance and rejection of aging. Many participants were aware of the successful aging narrative, though not necessarily of its role in ageism—aging as a problem to be solved. Finally, I came to understand

better the insidious effects of implicit, self-directed ageism in my own position as a researcher and ageism in research in general.

5.4 Does Age Matter?

Here I return to Bytheway's (2000) notion that we should "work towards a better understanding of how we age, how we make sense of our experience of ageing, and how we relate to, and work with, people who may be older (and who may be younger) than ourselves" (p. 788). In thinking about Bytheway's statement and the results of my study, I began to wonder whether chronological age is meaningful in piano teaching and learning. I agree completely with Bytheway while also wondering whether student age and age-specific pedagogy matter in piano teaching and learning. After all, age is only one aspect of a student's identity. I also wonder whether age matters in piano teaching and learning enough to maintain separate age-specific bodies of research, about children and adults for example. While we do need to understand aging and related concerns such as ageism, a focus on age in pedagogy may be unnecessary, and worse, risk reinforcing stereotypes. However, at present, we may not know enough about the role of age in piano teaching and learning to know if age matters.

With regard to student age, piano teaching in a studio setting is different than music education in a classroom setting. Piano studio teaching involves one-to-one relationships with students of all ages. In addition, the teacher/student relationship may extend over multiple years, thereby involving aging of both the teacher and the student. In contrast, music teaching in a classroom involves a relationship with many students of similar ages. The age-segregation of school music education may make age-specific learning theory and pedagogy more practical in this context but less so in piano teaching. This may be one reason that age-specific approaches are uncommon in the practice and research of piano teaching and learning, although there are other factors such as the dominance of the traditional master-apprentice model in piano pedagogy.

Another factor in the lack of focus on age in piano teaching and learning may be that a student's ability and level of development take precedence over chronological age. The insights of study participants about age, and age-related topics in the piano teaching and learning literature caused me to begin to question age-specific pedagogy. When I asked one teacher how she thought about age in her teaching, she replied that she does not really think about her age, nor the age of her students. Instead, she tries to relate to each student as an individual, inspiring

and motivating them to develop the musical skills that they desire to learn. In general, the teacher participants in my study and the teachers mentioned by the student participants focused on ability rather than age. One might wonder if this attention to ability rather than age is an approach that is influenced by the lifelong experience and older age of the participants in my study. Similarly, would younger teachers hold similar views about aging?

We might also wonder about the utility of age categories in piano teaching and learning research. Do the findings of age-based piano studies really inform about specific age groups such as children or older adults? Alternatively, could certain results of age-based piano teaching and learning research apply equally to people of other ages? In the music education and piano teaching and learning literature, age categories were not always used to classify teachers and/or students. For example, in a study about instrumental music teachers' development of feedback across the lifespan, de Bruin (2024) classified the teacher participants by their years of teaching experience, not by age. Similarly, in a study about piano students' experiences participating in evaluative performances, Mitchell (2017) categorized the student participants by their level of proficiency; i.e., beginning and intermediate. However, despite the categorization by level of proficiency, the study was focused on children—although adults were included in the study, their contributions were reminiscences of childhood evaluative performances. This point underscores the association of children with beginners that was also mentioned by teacher participants in this study. In participant interviews, there were a couple of language slips by the teacher participants that indicated a close association of the level of experience with age, such as using the word "children" to mean beginners.

Does age matter? Is there truly a need for age-specific learning theories and approaches to teaching and learning piano in the one-to-one context of the music studio? Do such approaches reinforce age-related stereotypes? Research that takes a critical perspective on such age-related topics is needed to better understand chronological age and its relation to learning piano. Only with a better understanding of age and aging can we assess whether age matters in piano teaching and learning. Kang (2017) and Taylor (2010a) raised the question of chronological age, recognizing that piano students of any age are individuals with their own strengths, difficulties, abilities, and experiences of learning throughout the life course. As researchers in music education have recently become more interested in age-related issues such

as ageism[10] (Kruse, 2022; Laes, 2023; Laes & Creech, 2023; Mantie et al., 2021; Tsugawa, 2023), perhaps it is time for age and aging to be included consistently in social justice and diversity, equity, and inclusion discourses that often ignore the topic of aging, although that too might be improving (see for e.g., Bernard & Talbot, 2023). These discourses all have in common a focus on recognizing and valuing the individual. Whatever the approach, a critical perspective to research and pedagogy that is student-centred seems prudent.

5.5 Chapter Summary

The experiences of the participants of this study demonstrated different ways that these women found meaning in lifelong engagement with the piano. One participant theorized that their life was made more meaningful by curiosity, connection, and companionship, topics not unlike Edmondson's (2015) approaches to meaning. Although I identified many expected similarities, such as a universal love of music (musical connectedness) and learning (musical development), there were also unexpected findings, such as talk of teacher misconduct and a lack of talk about aging, including an absence of explicit or other-directed ageism.

Regarding Edmondson's (2015) first type of meaning, all participants found meaningful connectedness in their love of music and piano, often to the instrument itself. The participants also found connection in meaningful relationships with piano teachers, students, and colleagues, including participation in musical ensembles. My adaptation of Edmondson's second type of meaning involves musical development over time. All participants of this study found their musical growth and learning meaningful. Perseverance carried them through significant difficulties such as hiatuses and teacher misconduct as well as lesser problems such as physical abilities and memorization. The final type of Edmondson's meaning framework involves understanding or wisdom with regard to aging. The participants in this study talked about aging in relation to time left in life. While some had a sense of more time for piano participation opportunities, others felt the limits of time more deeply. However, all women had an awareness of the paradox of time, both endless and finite. Surprisingly, unlike myself, the participants were not focused on aging, nor ageism, although implicit ageism was identified. Finally, I questioned the significance of chronological age and aging in the context of piano teaching and learning.

[10] While the topic of ageism is currently growing in music education and piano teaching and learning, it is not new (see Lowder, 1979; Prickett, 1998).

Although the knowledge gained in this study about aging was important to understand better age and aging, whether student age matters in piano teaching and learning remains an open question.

In the following concluding chapter, I will address the results of this and the previous chapter in relation to my research questions. I will also discuss the contribution, significance, and practical implications of my project, as well as its limitations and research implications.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I conclude my thesis with a brief summary of my study followed by a discussion of my results and their practical implications. Next, I describe the contribution and significance of my research. I end the chapter acknowledging the limitations of my study and discussing research implications.

I begin this chapter by returning to key words in my thesis title, *What does it mean to Grow Older? Stories from Piano Students and Teachers.* ***Piano teachers*** are an under researched group of people who have the opportunity to observe students of all ages, sometimes teaching the same student from early childhood to adulthood. I imagined that piano teachers would have unique insights about age and musical development because of this experience. I also wondered how teachers thought about older piano students. Anecdotally, some teachers prefer not to teach adults or older people and I was curious why that might be. In addition, older piano teachers have personal experience learning piano over many years, and many teachers continue to take piano lessons in adulthood as teachers. Therefore, this group of people has experience to share about age and aging and about piano teaching and learning.

With the extension of later life, increasing numbers of older people are interested in learning piano. I wondered how ***piano students*** felt about taking piano lessons in later life. Did they feel like outsiders, as I did? Did they experience age-related limitations? Did they have teachers and mentors who made learning in later life easier, as I also did? Although there is some research about older piano students, not many studies take a life course perspective and focus on the experiences of learning piano in later life, especially in the words of older people themselves.

The purpose of my inquiry was to understand better age and aging in the context of piano teaching and learning through an exploration of the musical life ***stories*** of older people. I was drawn to my topic partly because of my life experience, but mainly due to my desire to foreground the voices and experiences of older people in the context of piano teaching and learning. I chose narrative inquiry to focus on *stories* about age, aging, and lifelong participation in piano. Seven older women piano students (4) and teachers (3) shared their experiences and knowledge about aging and piano learning and/or teaching.

Given an increasing older population accompanied by a rise in ageism and a growing interest in piano lessons for adults who enjoy longer post-retirement lives, it is important for piano and music teachers to understand each other as people who grow older. Understanding

aging and self-directed ageism is equally important for those teachers who may be reluctant to teach older people as it is for older people who want to study piano but may see themselves as being too old. ***Growing older*** brings both vulnerabilities and strengths. Rather than focusing on decline and the difficulties that can accompany later life, but also any stage of life, I presented a more holistic view of growing older.

I interpreted the participants' experiences of aging and lifelong piano participation using Edmondson's (2015) ***meaning*** framework. My study showed the ways in which the women who shared their musical life stories found meaningfulness in piano participation and meaning in aging, specifically through connectedness, musical development, and understanding and wisdom.

6.1 Results and Research Question

I presented the results of my narrative inquiry in two chapters (4 and 5). In Chapter 4, I offered the musical life stories of the seven women who participated in my study: four students and three piano teachers. The stories are models of individual and unique lifelong journeys in piano learning and teaching. The results presented in Chapter 5 involved further interpretation and highlighted the similarities and differences of the stories as a collective. In response to my research question, I interpreted the aging experiences of the piano student and teacher participants of this study in terms of musical and social connectedness, musical development, and understanding and wisdom. Knowledge gained from the participants' musical life stories offered insights and practical implications about lifelong engagement in piano, especially in later life.

The main goal of my research was to present a more detailed and nuanced portrayal of aging in lifelong piano participation. My research question was, ***How do older students and teachers experience aging in the context of lifelong piano learning and/or teaching?*** Growing older for the piano students and teachers in this study was understood in terms of meaning. Although participants were aware of age and aging as main topics of my study, they focused on a lifelong perspective of piano participation. Had I asked only about later life, I would have had a different kind of study. In addition, my methods for generating data influenced the outcome of my inquiry. The use of the river of experience exercise followed by a life story interview invited reflection over the life course.

Although my focus was on aging in later life, I learned about much more, especially about meaningfulness in piano teaching and learning. The results of my inquiry were as much

about learning, music, and piano as they were about aging. The participants' experiences of aging, their insights, and the associated aspects of meaning have practical implications and suggest questions for piano students, teachers, and others involved in piano teaching and learning such as parents of child piano students, composers of pedagogical music, piano pedagogues, and those involved in piano curricula, evaluation systems, music festivals, etc. We might wonder how we can best support meaning in piano learning for students of all ages. As Mantie et al., (2021) wrote, "it remains the case that our approaches to teaching and learning in music can actually lead to learner disengagement, and may lack connection with the fundamental ways that music has meaning in learners' lives, across the life-course" (p. 42).

6.1.1 Musical and Social Connectedness

Participants had a musical and social connection to the piano. Unsurprisingly, all participants have loved music throughout their lives, and almost all immediately loved the piano. The participants talked about flow experiences and the expression of emotion through piano playing. An unexpected result was that almost all women expressed love for the object of the piano itself, and considered the piano as much more than just a musical instrument (Sternberg et al., 2023).

Regarding social connectedness, some participants mentioned friends or teachers as models or promoters of later life learning. In addition, most spoke about the importance of collegial relationships, especially in duet and ensemble playing, activities that can be encouraged or incorporated into private piano studios. Related to social connectedness is support. In keeping with the piano teaching and learning literature, all participants mentioned support in their piano participation, whether from family and/or friends and at all stages of musical development. In addition, almost all participants talked about a positive connection with at least one of their teachers whether in childhood or in adulthood—some described teachers in adulthood as mentors. The piano student/teacher relationship is significant in piano teaching and learning and can last several years, sometimes beyond the end of music lessons.

Unfortunately, the student/teacher relationship can also be harmful. An emergent finding was the experience of teacher misconduct for three participants. Incidents of misconduct occurred when participants were children or young adults. Misconduct is a uniquely difficult harm because of the betrayal involved. Based on the experiences of the participants of this study, younger age was a risk factor for teacher misconduct. However, for these participants, breaches of the student/teacher relationship did not permanently end their pursuit of piano playing,

although it did cause significant harm, leading to hiatuses for two participants. The problem of teacher misconduct has serious and permanent effects. One teacher said that she carried a sense of guilt for not saying something about her abuse—as if it was her responsibility—as if she could have prevented the abusive teacher from molesting other children. Fortunately, there is increasing awareness of teacher misconduct and teacher resources are available, for example, studio policy guidelines. However, there is a need for research and increased awareness of this problem that predominately affects younger people, girls more so (Henschel & Grant, 2019). With regard to music and social connectedness in piano teaching and learning, we can try to ensure that piano students of all ages are supported in their love of music and piano by creating safe and welcoming studio spaces, creating opportunities for positive social connections, and encouraging a love of music.

6.1.2 Musical Development

Regardless of their level of involvement in piano playing, the participants found meaning in their musical development and learning throughout their lives. All women, whether students or teachers, demonstrated a love of learning in later life and challenged themselves by learning new skills, such as improvisation or playing by ear. Indeed, in piano, it is not unusual for expert level pianists such as teachers to continue developing piano, music, and teaching skills. Regardless of the age or stage of musical development, aspects of meaningfulness such as novelty, challenge, and growth were important for the participants of this study. In addition, knowledge of musical skills such as improvisation, reading music and lead sheets afforded these women the opportunity to pursue lifelong piano learning, either independently or with a teacher.

All participants demonstrated perseverance in their pursuit of piano learning and/or teaching. Perseverance did not seem to be associated with age, but rather with the meaningful pursuit of piano playing at all stages of development. Perseverance is required to overcome difficulties or costs as they are called in the serious leisure literature. Although piano playing may involve other costs, such as financial expense, I identified seven costs in my study data: evaluative performance, hiatuses, memorization, music performance anxiety, physical abilities, practice, and teacher misconduct. Age-related difficulties with regard to memorization or physical abilities were mentioned by some participants; however, they were not experienced universally nor were they primary concerns for piano teaching and learning. Despite a focus on physical ability in the adult piano teaching and learning literature, most adult piano students do

not experience physical difficulties that interfere with piano playing. In addition, physical limitations are not limited to later life. Young children also experience physical limitations such as their inability to reach the pedals, to reach keys, etc. It could be that the physical limitations of younger people are more widely accepted because most piano students are children.

Two performance related costs are evaluative performances and music performance anxiety. Evaluative performances, such as exams, were almost universally perceived as negative regardless of whether they were taken in childhood or adulthood. As the benefits of evaluative performance are unclear, Mitchell (2017) recommended that teachers, parents, and students might consider the benefits and risks of evaluative performance before participation. Performance of any type was also an issue for those who experience music performance anxiety. This type of anxiety is an issue for people of all ages and can be especially difficult to navigate in piano playing, which is a performing art by definition. Most participants in this research mentioned experiencing music performance anxiety at various ages and stages of their musical development, but all have persevered through this difficulty. Despite participant's abilities to persevere in spite of this difficulty, consideration of the costs versus the benefits of performance seems advisable. While piano playing is a performance art, can we accept that not everyone enjoys performance and modify our expectations? Perhaps performance opportunities could be offered but not demanded. Performance opportunities may be most beneficial when they align with the individual student's nature, and their motivations and goals for taking lessons (Mitchell, 2017).

Another demand of playing piano is practice. Not all participants mentioned practicing, but four expressed a dislike of practicing in childhood. Fortunately, neither childhood inclination to practice nor practice consistency matter for playing piano in adulthood (Lawrence & Dachinger, 1967) as long as children learn basic skills. Practicing remained difficult for one of the participants, but the other three expressed increased acceptance of practicing in adulthood. As has been said, teachers can look to student motivation and goals for guidance about practice, which is time consuming and may require sacrificing or curtailing other activities. Sometimes the demands of practice were accommodated by the participants of my study, but sometimes other demands, such as work, won out causing a break from piano lessons and or playing piano. The time demands of practicing piano call for a focus on efficient rather than lengthy practice.

All participants experienced hiatuses at various points in their lifelong piano journeys. However, for the women in my study these breaks did not mean the end of piano playing. One the one hand, this might mean that hiatuses do not affect lifelong piano learning. On the other hand, it may be that the participants of this study persevered and found piano playing compelling enough to return to it throughout their lives. Importantly, because they had initially learned sufficient skills, such as sight-reading, they were able to pick up music and piano at various points in their lives.

All participants began piano playing in childhood and continued into later life (a requirement for participation in the study), despite hiatuses on their musical journeys. They had a love of music and learning that gave them the motivation to persevere through major and minor difficulties. The women found meaning in their musical development and learning, and their perseverance and dedication served them throughout their musical lives. Possible implications for piano teaching include less emphasis on performance and skills such as memorization, and more focus on teaching skills such as sight-reading and improvisation that are necessary to sustain lifelong involvement in piano playing with or without lessons. The musical life stories presented in this thesis were not continuous, and it may help to look at lifelong piano learning in a less rigid manner than is sometimes portrayed in the literature. We can be more accepting of breaks from lessons and lack of practice or desire to perform. My study underscored that, above everything, the aim in teaching piano should be encouraging a lifelong love of music and piano playing.

6.1.3 Understanding and Wisdom

With regard to the understanding and wisdom of age and aging in later life, I expected some discussion of ageism, given its prevalence. Because ageism is ubiquitous and largely unconscious, my project was motivated partly by my desire to raise awareness and question assumptions about age and aging. However, the participants in my study did not talk much about aging or negative experiences of aging, even though they were aware that later life and views of aging were my focus. I found that I often had to prompt participants to speak about aging. This does not mean that participants did not think deeply about aging. Age was framed mainly in terms of time. Our sense of growing older may be perceived as more or less time remaining in life. All participants recognized more time, either in the present, future, or both, while also acknowledging the finitude of life. They also had a sense of the value of time. The perception of

time as valuable has implications for teaching. For example, we can involve students of all ages in decisions about repertoire, evaluative performances, and music memorization. Put another way, we can make piano learning meaningful by giving students agency and by teaching skills for independence such as sight-reading, reading lead sheets, playing by ear, efficient practice, and improvisation.

As mentioned, there was a general lack of talk about age and aging. With regard to aging and identity, I did not identify explicit ageism, negative or positive on the part of participants, though I did note that some of us showed implicit ageism. However, participants also demonstrated acceptance and compassion with regard to age and aging in themselves and others. There was also a recognition by some participants of the harms of ageism as well as an awareness of the dominant narratives, such as successful aging. Aging talk was complex and sometimes contradictory, including my own. As my study concluded, I realized that my own views of aging were possibly more pronounced than those of my participants – maybe because of my knowledge of this area of study – maybe because of my personal insecurities and experience of the effects of ageism (see Ma et al., 2024).

6.1.4 Chronological Age

Does age matter? The knowledge I gained from this study made me wonder about the importance of chronological age in piano teaching and learning. Age was not a focus of discussion for older students or teachers. Although the teacher participants were aware of age-related topics in piano teaching, they thought more about their students as individuals. In addition, while some aspects of piano study such as practice seemed to be age-related, many were not; for example, love of music and perseverance. Stebbins's (2020b) serious leisure involvement scale was a helpful framework for imagining musical development in a way that did not concentrate on chronological age but rather on levels of involvement in piano participation. It seems beneficial to have an awareness of the abilities and difficulties that may be experienced by people at different times in their lives and at various stages of learning piano, i.e., beginner, amateur, and expert. It is also beneficial to have knowledge of issues such as aging, human development, and ageism regarding younger and older people. However, it may be most helpful to consider and value each student as an individual in a student-centred approach to teaching. Similarly, although learning theories, especially adult and older adult learning theories such as andragogy and critical geragogy, were not mentioned by the participants in my study, one might

wonder about the utility of age-specific learning theories in piano teaching and learning, a topic for further study.

6.2 Contribution

This interdisciplinary thesis contributes to the knowledge on older adult piano teaching and learning by exploring meaning and experiences of aging, and questioning our assumptions about age and aging. My study draws attention to aging in the context of piano teaching and learning, contributing to the literatures on older adult piano teaching and learning, gerontology, and serious leisure. Through critiquing mainstream responses to aging, documenting and valuing the diversity of older peoples' voices, a feminist gerontology lens adds an underrepresented perspective to research in the field of older adult piano teaching and learning. In addition, this research has practical implications for piano teaching and learning, promoting understanding of and challenging the importance of chronological age and negative views of aging over the life course in musical development. This project also serves as an opportunity to present teachers' lifelong experiences of age and aging in the context of their expertise in piano teaching and learning, perhaps for the first time. Additionally, there are implications for research in terms of research design and topics for further exploration.

There is a recognition in gerontology (Edmondson, 2015; Westerhoff, 2022) and to a lesser degree in music education (Flowers et al., 2001) that the life stories of older people can serve as resources that offer insights and help to counter stereotypes. In a music education context, Flowers et al., (2001) wrote that older people offer "their broad perspective about the function of music throughout life and its implications for music goals and curricula in the schools" (p. 32). However, the points of view of older people are mostly missing from the research on piano teaching and learning, as is a life course perspective. Thanks to the generosity and thoughtfulness of the study participants, I consider my fourth chapter containing their musical life stories to be the most valuable contribution of my thesis. The fifth chapter also contributes to our understanding about aging and piano teaching and learning through my interpretation of the collection of stories in terms of meaning and wisdom. However, my interpretation using a meaning framework is only one way of understanding the participants' narratives. The life stories are individual and unique accounts of women's experiences of piano teaching and learning over the life course. They are evocative, accessible, and offer a less mediated type of knowledge about aging and piano teaching and learning than does my analysis

in the chapter that follows the stories. I hope that readers will be able to see themselves in the stories.

Representation of older people is important and the musical life stories presented in this thesis serve this purpose for others. The stories show us what is possible. These stories of experiences in lifelong piano teaching and learning allow older potential piano students to see themselves as music learners, piano teachers to see people of all ages as potential students, and researchers to discover and explore under researched topics in piano teaching and learning. Because the strength of the participant life stories is the focus on particularities and on the individual, they highlight the heterogeneity of aging and can help to challenge and dispel age stereotypes of older people as a homogeneous population. For example, in the teachers' stories presented in this thesis we can see older piano teachers as women with additional life experience and expertise, not as the stereotypical image of a piano teacher that is too often an intersection of ageism and sexism. Perhaps publications such as professional piano pedagogy journals could encourage their readership to submit stories about their later life or lifelong teaching and learning experiences as a way of encouraging representation.

Despite its small size, the collective of musical life stories in this thesis also has some historical significance.

> Older adults tell stories that are embedded in historical contexts and therefore transmit knowledge of past worlds as well as personal events. As their reminiscences knit together previous eras and draw on landmark events as memorial touchstones, their stories transcend their personal identities and become social records that define a given culture. (Baddeley & Singer, 2007, pp. 196–197)

The life stories of Chapter 4 tell us about the participants' musical lives, but also something about the place of the piano in Canadian homes and the recent history of piano teaching and learning in an Anglo-Canadian context. We can understand better the attachment of many participants to the piano when we learn how prominent pianos were in daily life. We can also understand why piano playing was so important before the widespread access to music. This historical perspective also raises questions about the future of piano teaching and learning. Why do people still play piano? What will become of acoustic pianos? Will interest in piano lessons continue as pianos become less common in households? Will the numbers of older people seeking to play piano continue to increase? Will the demographics of older piano students and teachers change?

With regard to conducting research on aging and piano teaching and learning, my study demonstrated the value of interdisciplinary associations and dialogue (piano pedagogy and music education, gerontology, leisure studies). In addition, a critical/feminist gerontology perspective and combined use of narrative inquiry with the river of experience exercise allowed for a more holistic understanding and representation of aging in piano teaching and learning over the life course. Moreover, a critical/feminist gerontology perspective is valuable for questioning the current representation of older people and the language that is used, which can be ageist. The interdisciplinary nature of this work allowed for contributions in these related fields of study.

My interpretation of the participants' experiences of aging and their musical life stories focused on meaning, which adds specifically to the scant literature on later life and meaning in music participation (see Mantie et al., 2021 for example). Given the importance of meaning in lifelong piano participation, it might be beneficial to reflect on current practice. How might piano teachers and music educators support older people (and younger people too) to make piano learning meaningful, especially in the ways that were highlighted in the outcome of my inquiry, namely connectedness, musical development through time, and understanding and wisdom about aging and the life course. Participants found connectedness in the love of music and significant social and musical relationships, for example, between students and teachers and with ensemble colleagues. The participants sustained their musical development through a lifelong love of learning. In a piano teaching context, understanding with regard to aging was supported by the representation of older people, opportunity, compassion, and mentorship. Connectedness and perseverance allowed the participants of this study to overcome the costs of piano learning and teaching, though some costs were significant and even harmful. This implies that, where possible, we should try to lessen the negative impacts of costs, especially where the benefits are questionable, as in the case of evaluative performances and where the costs are obviously harmful, as in the case of teacher misconduct. In the case of teacher misconduct, there are obvious ethical reasons for protecting people from harm that have nothing to do with musical connectedness.

This thesis also adds to the narrative gerontology literature on meaning and wisdom, especially the type of work done by gerontologists such as Baars (2012a) and Edmondson (2015). Edmondson (2015) suggested that "recovering meaning as central to ageing would involve reinvigorating" discourses about the ways in which older people interpret

meaningfulness, and valuing "what it is that older people do" (p. 29). I hope that my study builds on Edmondson's work in this way. While my small study was specific in its context, it demonstrated the ways in which the older piano students and teacher participants found meaning in lifelong piano participation through musical and social connectedness, musical development, and understanding and wisdom about growing older. I drew from Edmondson's (2015) work on meaning and Baars's (2012a) approach to the art of living—living with the finitude of life. My study adds to nonmainstream gerontology by foregrounding the voices of the women of my study and their life stories of aging and lifelong piano participation.

With regard to the serious leisure perspective and aging, Stebbins (2020b) stated that most of the related research has a focus on "later life satisfaction and well being" (p. 186), which is similar to the focus of the piano teaching and learning research about adults. To my knowledge, there is no research using a life course approach that focuses on later life piano teaching and learning in relation to the serious leisure perspective. My study contributes to the literature on the serious leisure perspective and poses questions for further research. It was not possible for me to know if the experiences of the women in this study would translate to other serious leisure pursuits; for example, do all people who pursue serious leisure love learning and continue to grow and challenge themselves.

6.3 Limitations, Reflections, and Research Implications

The breadth of detailed data that was possible to generate in narrative inquiry was of great value, sometimes allowing me to think in a new way, or causing me to question conventions of piano teaching and learning. However, conducting a narrative inquiry is difficult and I am glad that my reading about narrative inquiry made me aware of the challenges of conducting this type of research, especially for inexperienced researchers. Nevertheless, reading about doing something and doing the thing can be quite different and I did not foresee the extended length of time required for this type of research nor the struggle that I would have with my feelings of uncertainty during the analysis process. There were times when I wished that I had conducted a clear-cut study, asking each participant a set of questions. Such an approach may be a better one to explore more narrow aspects of aging in piano teaching and learning such as ageism, for example. However, despite the time investment and uncomfortable feelings of uncertainty, I valued the potential for wide-ranging information and the possibilities for unexpected outcomes that narrative inquiry provided, especially for an under researched area of study. Another

difficulty of narrative inquiry is the protection of participant identity. Although I was aware of this difficulty in theory, in practice, it was more challenging and I tried always to err on the side of privacy protection, which sometimes caused me to lose relevant data. However, I believe that any resulting limitations were offset by the abundant and detailed data that were provided through a narrative inquiry approach.

The combination of research methods, namely, the river of experience exercise, and the life story interview was an effective approach that I would use again. Beginning data generation with the river of experience exercise gave the participants an opportunity to reflect on their musical lives prior to our interviews. It also gave me a way to familiarize myself with the participants in advance of our interviews and to create individualized interview guides, which helped ease my anxiety about the interview process. Unexpectedly, the river exercise was an enjoyable experience for several participants. With regard to the interview approach, although I might have generated more data had I conducted follow-up interviews or questions, a different type of study would have resulted. After all, where does one end in asking questions, and how does one decide which questions to ask and topics to follow-up? More importantly, an approach in which the researcher is controlling much of the interview and discussion is one that is removed from a narrative approach. For me, one of the strengths of narrative inquiry is the less 'visible' researcher position in favour of foregrounding the participant and their story. This strength of narrative inquiry supported the goal of my research, which was to highlight the stories of older piano students and teachers in their words, not mine. I felt that my role was to listen, record, try to understand, and to present the participants' stories. Finally, although I would like to imagine that the spirit of my project was co-operative "'research *with*' rather than '*about*' people" (Russ et al., 2024, p. 4), truly co-operative research did not seem like a practical option due to the demands of graduate studies. However, co-operative research would be my preference for any future research.

With regard to research participation, I recognize that some people prefer not to think about age and would therefore not be inclined to volunteer for my project (Bytheway, 2011). This may have meant that only people who were comfortable with the topic of aging agreed to participate, thus limiting the discussion about aging. However, I was seeking to learn about experiences of aging in lifelong piano participation and therefore a willingness to address these topics was beneficial for data generation. In addition, I did not expect diversity in the participant

group. However, the likely predominance of White women participants reflects the demographics of older adult piano students, and especially teachers, in Southern Ontario. How these demographics change in the future is a question for additional research. Regarding participation criteria, participants in my project were required to have studied piano in childhood *and* adulthood, thereby limiting knowledge about students beginning piano study in later life and students who end their piano studies earlier in life. For example, I cannot know about the experience of learning piano in later life for someone who has never taken piano lessons. Nor can I know about the experience of learning piano in childhood or in earlier life and stopping lessons and or piano playing. These are topics for further research.

Regarding research topics for further consideration, I agree with Gendron et al. (2024) that the intersection of ageism and ableism requires further study, especially in relation to successful aging (Langmann & Weßel, 2023). Additionally, age-specific differences and approaches to piano teaching and learning require further consideration, as does a life course approach to study. What are the experiences of learning piano for beginning child students? How do the experiences of children compare with those of older people? Would piano teaching and learning be better to avoid differentiating piano students into younger and older categories? My research prompted such questions, however not enough is known about the role of chronological age in piano learning. More research about both older and younger learners will help us to gain a better understanding of aging, and only then can we begin to ask if age matters in piano teaching and learning. Moving away from the dominant research focus on successful aging, health, and well-being to under researched topics such as meaningfulness, perseverance, and the experiences of students and/or teachers in piano participation would be welcome, as would more narrative research.

6.4 Summary

This interdisciplinary narrative inquiry explored the experiences of older people in the context of piano teaching and learning thereby adding to our current knowledge of aging and wisdom, specifically meaning; of teaching and/or learning piano in later life; and of piano playing as a pursuit of serious leisure. Aspects of meaning such as connectedness, musical development, and understanding and wisdom were central to the ways in which the participants of this study understood aging in their lifelong engagement in piano. The insights shared by the study participants caused me to reconsider aspects of my own piano teaching and learning. In my piano

playing, I might worry less about aspects of playing that are important in evaluation, and instead focus on finding meaning in the experience of making music. In teaching, I might prioritize meaningfulness in piano study. I might be braver in breaking with traditions of piano teaching that focus on performance and evaluation and be more focused on helping students to build the skills necessary for lifelong music enjoyment.

As other more experienced researchers have noted (Roulston, 2010a), my interviews with the study participants sometimes changed my understanding of my topic. The knowledge gained from doing this research project expanded my thinking about age and aging and caused me to question aspects of piano teaching and learning, including age-specific pedagogy. I began my studies about aging and piano teaching and learning focusing on ageism and believing that age-specific pedagogies, such as critical geragogy and andragogy, were needed in older adult piano teaching and learning. However, my thinking has evolved over the years to include other possibilities and a more nuanced perspective on aging in piano teaching and learning that includes the importance of meaning and meaningfulness, for example. In addition, my belief in the importance of learning from the experiences of older people was reinforced by the large amount of knowledge gained in doing my research—that it is valuable to learn about experiences of aging. We need to ask for and listen to the life stories of older people—younger people too. This research project also highlighted for me the value of interdisciplinary research in this relatively new area of study, especially the explicit use of specific perspectives from gerontology, such as feminist gerontology. The gerontologist Jan Baars (2012a) called for diverse voices to counter dominant narratives about aging. He recognized that his book *Aging and the Art of Living* was only one voice but that there is strength in numbers. I hope that what he says is true as I add my voice.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Approval

20/12/2021

Université d'Ottawa
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE | CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

Numéro du dossier / Ethics File Number	S-11-21-7553
Titre du projet / Project Title	What Does it Mean to Grow Older? Stories from Piano Students and Teachers
Type de projet / Project Type	Thèse de doctorat / Doctoral thesis
Statut du projet / Project Status	Approuvé / Approved
Date d'approbation (jj/mm/aaaa) / Approval Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	20/12/2021
Date d'expiration (jj/mm/aaaa) / Expiry Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	19/12/2022

Équipe de recherche / Research Team

Chercheur / Researcher	Affiliation	Role
Susan MIELKE	Faculté d'éducation / Faculty of Education	Chercheur Principal / Principal Investigator
Bernard ANDREWS	Faculté d'éducation / Faculty of Education	Superviseur / Supervisor

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23/12/2022

Université d'Ottawa
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE | CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

Numéro du dossier / Ethics File Number	S-11-21-7553
Titre du projet / Project Title	What Does it Mean to Grow Older? Stories from Piano Students and Teachers
Type de projet / Project Type	Thèse de doctorat / Doctoral thesis
Statut du projet / Project Status	Renouvelé / Renewed
Date d'approbation (jj/mm/aaaa) / Approval Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	20/12/2021
Date d'expiration (jj/mm/aaaa) / Expiry Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	19/12/2023

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Appendix B: Interview Guides

Purpose of Inquiry and Questions

The purpose of my inquiry is to understand better aging and piano teaching and learning through an exploration of the musical lives of older people.

1. How do students experience growing older in the context of piano learning?
2. How do teachers experience growing older in the context of piano teaching and learning?
3. How might this experience inform piano teaching and learning?

Interview Question

Would you please tell me the story of your life in music?

Please take all the time you need.

Open-Ended Probes

Tell me more about…

Can you give me an example of…?

What I understand you saying is … Is that correct?

Final Question

Is there anything that you would like to add?

Individualized Interview Guide: Example Excerpt

NOTE: red ink indicates my comments added after the interview

Meeting information: date, time, and Zoom link

Email correspondence excerpts: relevant information for the interview; for example, "thinking about my river and trying to remember all the ebbs and flows"

Questions for Inquiry

1. How do students experience growing older in the context of piano learning?
2. How do teachers experience growing older in the context of piano teaching and learning?
3. How might this experience inform piano teaching and learning?

Script – Guide

Set Otter and Zoom to Record

Welcome and Consent

- Thank you for being here to share your story!
- Is it ok to begin recording now - while we go over the consent form? I need to record your verbal consent. Yes
- I have the consent form here for us to review - I think maybe you have already read it
- Do I have your consent to participate in my research project? Yes
- Do you agree to participate using a recording with videoconferencing? Yes
- Do you agree to the use of your "river"? It would be de-identified to protect your privacy. Yes
- Thank you!
- For my study, I am interested in two things:
    - Your experiences of growing older in piano learning, and
    - Your thoughts and feelings about age and piano learning
- So, I'm asking you for your story because you know about this
    - these stories are important and have not been told much
- Is there anything about the study you would like me to tell you before we begin? no

Your Experiences

I look forward to learning about your experiences. Please take all the time you want.

Questions from the River of Experience (if not already addressed)

- Maybe we could begin with your memories of your childhood piano lessons. (Keeping in mind that my focus is on later life) Dislike practice, terrified of exams, love playing
- Near the beginning of your river, you mention a period when you rarely played - Can you tell me about that? Yes
- You get a piano – a surprise?
- Piano moved upstairs from basement; play or sell?
- Started lessons with teacher – loved it and didn't mind practice
- Feel more relaxed and free playing music

Your Thoughts and Feelings about Age and Piano Learning

- What are your thoughts and feelings about yourself as an older person as a piano student?
- How do you think about your piano study now compared to childhood?
- I noticed that your river is marked by chronological time (year dates) and some ages marking childhood and adolescence. Do you have any thoughts about that?

General Probes

Tell me more about…

Can you tell me about that?

Can you give me an example of…?

What I understand you saying is … Is that correct?

What was it like to…?

What was that like?

What were you feeling…?

Could you tell me about a time that shows that?

Is there a specific incident that would make clear what you have in mind?

Could you tell me what happened, starting from the beginning?

Do you have a specific incident in mind?

What kinds of things do you mean?

What were you thinking…?

Final Question Is there anything that you would like to add?

Notes: Post-Interview

Example: I was less nervous, but I need to become better at being quiet. Or, perhaps the conversational feel promoted discussion or a collegial relationship.

Appendix C: Recruitment Letter

Subject: Request to participate in research study

Hello,

I am writing to ask for your help with a research study I am conducting about the relationship between aging and piano teaching and learning. I am an older adult student in the PhD program in the Faculty of Education at uOttawa. I am also a lifelong student of piano and a piano teacher. You have been asked to participate in this study because you have lifelong experience learning and/or teaching piano. Participation is confidential and voluntary, and if you choose to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions. Your choice to participate (or not) will have no impact on your relationship with your music teacher or with me as the researcher. Participants will be selected on a first come, first served basis.

The purpose of the study is to understand better the relationship between aging and piano teaching and learning through an exploration of aging in the musical lives of older people. Your participation in the study will contribute to knowledge about views of aging and the experiences of older people in piano learning and teaching.

If you agree to participate, you will complete a visual exercise (river drawing with brief commentary) about your musical journey and take part in an online interview lasting approximately 60 minutes. With your permission, the interview will be recorded and will take place at a date and time that are convenient for you.

I have attached a verbal consent form for your information. Please feel free to contact me if you are interested in participating in the study or if you have any questions or concerns.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Susan Mielke
Telephone: home phone number
Email: uOttawa email address

Appendix D: Consent Form

Université d'Ottawa
Faculté d'éducation

University of Ottawa
Faculty of Education

Title of the Study: What Does it Mean to Grow Older? Stories from Piano Students and Teachers

Type of Project: Doctoral thesis under the supervision of Professor Bernard W. Andrews

Name of Principal Investigator:
Susan Mielke
Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa
Telephone: home phone number
Email: uOttawa email address

Name of Supervisor:
Dr. Bernard W. Andrews
Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa
Telephone: office phone number
Email: uOttawa email address

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Susan Mielke.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to understand better the relationship between aging and piano teaching and learning through an exploration of aging in the musical lives of older people. The researcher (Susan) is interested in views of aging and the ways in which these views and experiences of aging can affect piano learning and teaching.

Participation: My participation will be twofold: 1. Completion of a visual exercise (river of experience) including brief comments about piano participation over my life course. 2. Participation in one online interview with the researcher, lasting approximately 60 minutes. The recorded interview will use a videoconferencing platform with the option to turn off my camera. The interview will be scheduled for a date and time that are convenient for me. Questions such as the following may be asked: Can you tell me the story of your life in music? How do you think about aging in relation to your music learning and/or teaching? The researcher may also request clarification or feedback by email.

Tel/Tél : 613-562-5804
Fax/Téléc :613-562-5144

145, Jean-Jacques Lussier
Ottawa ON K1N 6N5
Canada

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☐ I agree to participate in an interview using videoconferencing.
☐ I prefer an audio-recorded interview (using the option to turn off my camera).

Risks: My participation will require that I share personal experiences, reflections, and insights and this may cause some discomfort. In addition, my contribution will be interpreted and retold by the researcher, possibly in unexpected ways. However, I understand that every effort will be made to minimize these risks. For example, I will have the opportunity to provide feedback to the researcher both on my interview transcript and on the researcher's interpretation of my story and I will be given the opportunity to have my interpretation included with that of the researcher. In addition, consent to participate will be addressed informally throughout the research project.

Benefits: My participation in this study will contribute to knowledge about the experiences of older people in piano learning and teaching. This research has practical implications for piano learning and teaching, promoting understanding about the role of age and views of aging in piano participation.

Confidentiality and Privacy: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I share will remain strictly confidential and my privacy will be protected as much as possible. The information will be used for the researcher's doctoral thesis. With my permission, information from the study, including a de-identified image of the river drawing may be disseminated in forms such as a dissertation, conference presentation, article, etc.

☐ Yes, I agree to the use of a de-identified image of my river drawing in research dissemination.
☐ No, I do not agree to the use of a de-identified image of my river of experience drawing in research dissemination.

Conservation of Data: The data collected (consent form, audio/video recording, transcript, and river drawing) will be kept in a secure manner on a password-protected computer in a home office. Hard copies of documents will be kept in a locked catalog case. The data will be securely destroyed five years after completion of the project.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate, and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences or changes to my relationship with the researcher and/or my piano teacher. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be destroyed.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or their supervisor. If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Office of Research Ethics and Integrity via telephone (613) 562-5387 or email ethics@uottawa.ca

It is recommended that I keep a copy of this consent form for my records.

Acceptance: By selecting the consent statement below, I agree to participate in this research study.

☐ Yes, I agree to participate. Date: _____
☐ No, I do not agree to participate. Date: _____

Appendix E: Research Process and Schedule

Participant By Number Identifier	Recruitment: Initial Contact 2022	Follow-up 2022	Consent Given 2022	River Of Experience (RoE) Sent	RoE Received 2022 Implied Consent	Interview Date Set 2022	Interview /Consent Review 2022	Participant Approval Of Transcript 2022	Analysis Notes Created By Me 2022	Participant Feedback and Approval of Life Stories 2023
Participant 1	Mar 10	Mar 11	Yes	Mar 11	Mar 23	Apr 6	Apr 8	Apr 20	Oct 14	Jan 24
Participant 2	Apr 28	n/a	Yes	Apr 29	May 20	May 27	June 2	June 11	Oct 22	Feb 8
Participant 3	Apr 29	May 1	Yes	May 2 Hard copy by post	June 9	June 10	June 14	June 21	Oct 16	Feb 20
Participant 4	May 6	n/a	Yes	May 6	May 15	May 15	May 18	June 3	Oct 25	Feb 5
Participant 5	May 5	May 12	Yes	May 12	June 20	June 21	June 24	July 4	Oct 29	Feb 14
Participant 7	May 25	June 9	Yes	June 14	July 5	July 11	July 19	July 30	Oct 20	Feb 23
Participant 8	June 14	June 14	Yes	June 24	Aug 26	Aug 31	Sept 2	Sept 14	Oct 2	Feb 28

*Participant 6 was invited to participate and sent consent form, but did not reply to my follow-up email

Appendix F: River of Experience Overview and Instructions

Overview

The River of Experience is an exercise to help you to think about your experience of aging and teaching and/or learning piano. Your river can begin and end anywhere in your life, including the future.
Your drawing will not capture *everything,* instead the exercise is meant to provide a starting point for reflection on aging and piano participation.

Instructions

Consider where in your life you would like your musical river to begin; for example, is there a piano experience that begins your musical journey.

Look at the template provided to you and consider the shape of the river. Features such as bends or turns in the river can reflect a variation or change in direction in your own musical life experiences. You can also draw your own river rather than use the template.

At one end of the river, write in the first experience with piano that you would like to document. Briefly comment on your experience.

Continue moving along the river recalling other experiences with piano throughout your life. Annotate the river with these events.

Your river can end at any point in time, including the future.

When you are satisfied, please send your notated river drawing to me:

1. Take a photo of your river and email an attached copy of the photo to (Susan's uOttawa email address)

OR

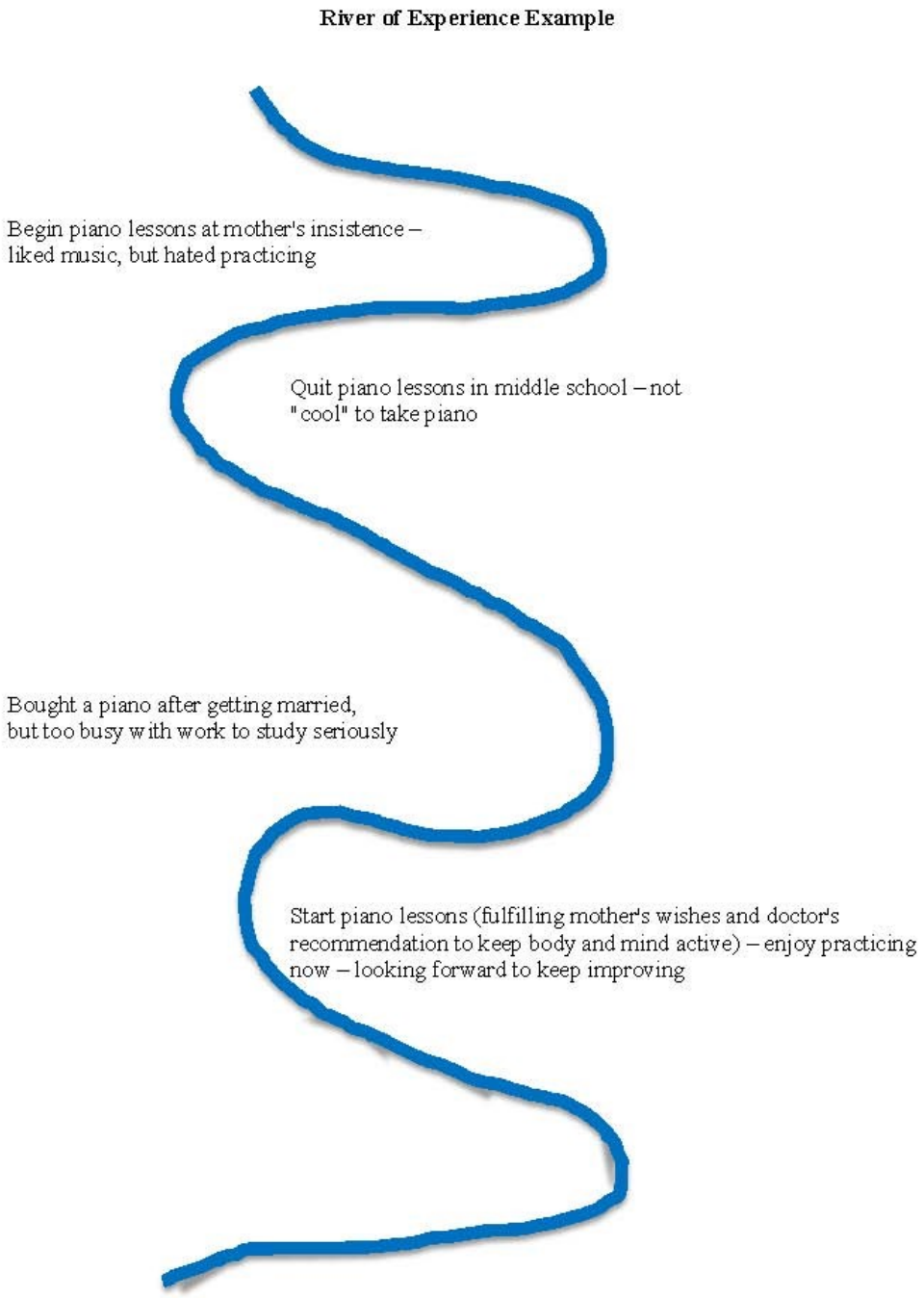
2. Use the addressed prepaid envelope to return the river to me.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at:
(Susan's uOttawa email address)
(Susan's home telephone number)

Thank you!

Appendix G: River of Experience Template

Appendix H: River of Experience Example



Appendix I: Analysis: Sticky Notes