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Enhancing Young Adult Learning Through Interpretive Skills Training: A Case Study of Student Tour-Guide Interns at a University Photography Center

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Abstract

This case study explores the application of interpretive strategies as tools to facilitate transformative learning and advance young adults' abilities in various learning contexts. While much of the literature on adult museum program education focuses on older adults' learning, this study emphasizes the impact of interpretive skills training at a Southwestern university photography center on student tour guides' personal and professional learning. The findings reveal that the training allowed these student tour guides to transform their notions of learning and teaching through interpretive dialogues, cogenerative learning, and critical reflections. The interpretive skills training enhanced the participants' abilities to become better public speakers, interpretive writers, thoughtful educators, and efficient learners. Based upon the findings, the research suggests that interpretive strategies are useful to develop future

teachers to be open to different perspectives, willing to consider new ideas, and create a two-way transformative learning loop with their students.

Introduction

Tour guides are significant museum educators in museums and they are usually volunteers. Considering the recruited tour guides may have varied levels of knowledge about museum collections, different museums frequently design customized tour-guide training programs. However, many studies regarding museum adult tour guides in art education and adult education focus on adults over the age of thirty-five, rather than younger adults between the ages of eighteen to thirty-five (Allen & Crowley, 2014; Grenier, 2009; Grenier & Sheckly, 2008). Young adults, in fact, have a significant influence on advancing society as they will become teachers and parents for the next generation. The perspectives through which they see the world influence their actions and decisions, in turn further impacting their students and children. Hence, their worldviews will influence significantly society's future development and progress.

In their day-to-day lives, people serve as their own interpreters. They apply knowledge and prior experience to make sense of the world around them and to construct their worldviews (O'Sullivan, 2012). A worldview, "combines beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, values, and ideas to form a comprehensive model of reality. Worldviews also encompass formulations and interpretations of past, present, and future" (Schlitz & Miller, 2010, p. 19). As educators, we should encourage learners to look at and learn things from multiple perspectives. As young adults prepare to take on important roles in society, it is crucial they have the necessary tools. This study analyzes the ways in which interpretive skills provide such tools to young adults, reconstructing their worldview and modes of learning and decision-making.

While there are ample museum studies demonstrating how interpretive tours can significantly increase the interaction between tour guides and visitors (Barrett, 2008; Falk & Dierking, 2013; Hooper-Greenhill, 1999), few studies explore how young adult tour guides apply the strategies or skills learned during training to their own academic studies or personal learning. Studies related to young adult tour guides tend to focus on student internship case studies, which deal primarily with the training process and how student performances benefit the organizations where they intern (Barrett, 2012; Jones, 1977; Neilson, 1949; Pyatt, Rosser, & Powell, 2009; Roberts, 1997). These studies do not discuss how the young adults transfer the knowledge gained from the program to enhance their learning in other aspects of their lives. Although Abigail Housen (2002) explored how college students, who were trained by one

type of interpretive strategies—Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS)¹, could transfer their aesthetic thoughts and critical thinking across social context and content, she did not identify what aspects students applied their visual thinking strategies to and how that advanced their learning abilities.

In an effort to fill this gap in the field, this paper presents the critical reflections from four undergraduate and graduate student tour guides who attended the student tour-guide internship program at the photography center at a Southwestern university. The participants share how they have applied the skills learned from the interpretive skills training program to improve learning in other aspects of their lives. Considering the similarities between interpretive theories and transformative learning theory, I employ the core elements of the transformative learning theory to analyze how the student tour guides, who were both the learners and the educators in interpretive tours, transferred their interpretive learning to enhance their performance in various learning contexts.

The analysis will be focused on how the participants transform their old perspectives into new understandings and expand their new worldviews in terms of enhancing and comprehending their own studies. Results from this study indicate that the application of interpretive skills can extend beyond training young adult educators to lead museum tours. The strategies can also enhance young adults' self-directed learning and further reinforce their confidences in various learning aspects.

Interpretive Skills in Museum Education

Interpretive skills are usually applied in constructivist museums to construct museum visitors' own interpretations about artworks (Barrett, 1994, 2004; Hein, 2012; Hooper-Greenhill, 1999, 2000). Constructivist educational theory advocates that visitors are their own interpreters (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p. 143). In the postmodern era, many museums have changed their education model from delivering information to providing an interpretive learning atmosphere for visitors. Terry Barrett (1994) promotes the idea that art educators should engage their students in, “interpretive dialogue about works of art and to provide criteria for assessing their interpretations of art” (p. 8). Museum educators become assistants to help visitors utilize their own personal experiences to interpret artworks by asking open-ended questions. Malinda

¹ Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) has been a well known approach that art educators utilized in art museums and art classrooms to guide learners to interpret artworks. According to Yenawine (2013), “VTS uses art to teach visual literacy, thinking, and communication skills— listening and expressing oneself” (Kindle Location 339). Please reference Yenawine's *Visual Thinking Strategies: Using Art to Deepen Learning Across School Disciplines* to see more VTS applications.

Mayer (2007a & 2007b) also notes the significance of creating an interpretive atmosphere for visitors to establish their own meanings in museums. She states, “meaning making occurs as viewers, expert to novice, weigh through the filter of their own experience, the information they derived from these resources” (Mayer, 2007a, p. 42). Although visitors are the primary interpreters and learners in an interpretive tour, the tour guides are not relegated to the role of lecture instructor. Rather, they are also learners. The tour guides learn from their tour members’ interpretations. Interpretive tours result in a two-way power-shifting phenomenon. Further discussion on this topic will take place in later sections analyzing the participants’ interviews.

Recognizing that tour guides and volunteers function as museum educators (Grenier, 2009), many museums have started providing interpretive skills training for their tour guides and volunteers. However, most museum studies of interpretive tours emphasize visitors’ reflections and what they learn from museum collections rather than investigate what museum educators learn from the process. In doing so, these studies may be overlooking the possibility that these educators will transform their learning to facilitate learning in other fields, such as academic or personal subjects.

From Interpretive Learning to Transformative Learning

Jack Mezirow, who first proposed “transformative learning” in adult education, based his theory upon Jürgen Habermas’s theory of communicative action (Habermas, 1971, 1984, 1987). Mezirow applied the three types of knowledge in communicative action as a new foundation for adults’ understanding (Mezirow, 1978a, 1991). The three types of knowledge are instrumental, communicative, and emancipatory (Mezirow, 1991, p. 72-89). Instrumental knowledge is, “cause-and effect, objective knowledge derived from scientific methodologies” (Cranton, 2002, p. 64). People acquire instrumental knowledge by using, “particular means to attain a desired end result” (Gouthro, 2006, p. 8). Differentiating from instrumental knowledge, communicative knowledge is, “the understanding of ourselves, others, and the social nor of the community or society in which we live” (Cranton, 2002, p. 64). Habermas (1984) believes that by means of communicative actions, people can also gain knowledge during the process when they try to understand and justify their established norms, assumptions, desires, or intentions. Finally, emancipatory knowledge is a kind of self-awareness that frees us from constraints. It is a product of critical reflection and critical self-reflection (Cranton, 2002, p. 64).

Relying on the three types of knowledge mentioned above, transformative learning theory was established in the hope of advocating, “a critical dimension of learning in adulthood that enables [people] to recognize, reassess, and modify the structures of assumptions and expectations that frame our tacit points of view and influence our thinking, beliefs, attitudes,

and actions” (Mezirow, 2010, p. 18). After more than four decades, transformative learning theory has been comprehensively applied to adult education related to various issues such as race (Dei & McDermott, 2014; Verjee, 2012), culture and identity (Illeris, 2014; Tisdell, 2008), and gender (Madsen & Cook, 2010; Sartor, 1997). However, no matter how transformative theory has evolved, there are still some elements that are essential to frame the structure of a transformative approach on teaching. These essential elements include: individual experiences, critical reflection, dialogue, holistic orientation, awareness of context, authentic relationship, and learner-center teaching (Taylor, 2010, pp. 5-14).

Among these core elements, this study presents interpretive dialogues’ success in transferring student tour guides’ learning to the visitors in their interpretive tours. The interpretive dialogues that the student tour guides created as part of the tours also assists them in transforming other areas of study. As Edward Taylor (2010) asserts, dialogue is the essential medium, “for critical reflection to be put into action, where experience is reflected on, assumptions and beliefs are questioned, and habits of mind are ultimately transformed” (p. 9). By creating interpretive dialogues with visitors, the student tour guides were fostering and developing, “critically reflective thoughts, imaginative problem posing, and discourse [which is] learner-centered, participatory, and interactive” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 10). Interpretive dialogues can facilitate communicative knowledge, which can assist learners to acquire, “human relations, political and social system, and education” (Cranton, 2002, p.14). Considering the overlap between transformative learning theory and interpretive strategies, I apply a transformative theory lens to examine how, through training on the application of interpretive strategies, participants reconstruct their perspectives of learning and teaching.

Tour-guide internship program at the Southwestern University Photography Center. The study was conducted at a research center located at a Southwestern American university campus. The visitor population is comprised of the university students, staff, photography clubs, and nearby local communities. The collection on display at the time is well known by its contemporary Northern American photography. Unlike many museums, which recruit older volunteers or retired people as tour guides, Ms. K., the previous education coordinator of the photography center and worked in museum education for twenty years, decided her tour-guide recruitment at this university gallery center would be a type of student internship. In the museum profession, the interests and motivations of student interns and volunteers versus elder docents are different.

Elizabeth Beckmann (2013) notes that an internship is normally treated as the, “moment of truth,” (p. 39) providing a professional opportunity for interns, especially student interns, to gain practical experience and work with people in their field. Often times, student interns and volunteer docents are assigned similar tasks, such as guiding tours and customer services, and

both of the parties' positions are unpaid. Nonetheless, a crucial difference between student interns and volunteers or docents is that most student interns have to pay extra fees to register their internship credits to complete an academic subject (Beckmann, 2013). As such, the student interns have an added incentive to work hard in order to fulfill their graduate credits. Furthermore, if the student interns perform well at the institution, they will be in the position to request a letter of recommendation from the museum staff which is important if students wish to apply to a graduate program or a museum position in the future (Beckmann, 2013; Hoy, 2011). In short, a good museum internship can enhance a student intern's credibility and professional experience while also providing the museum with efficient volunteers.

In my interview with Ms. K., she explained that she recruited and trained volunteer docents at a previous museum but chose to create a different model using graduate students at this center. Many of her reasons reflected viewpoints from Beckmann's study. First, the center is considered a university educational institution. Therefore, the museum should provide opportunities for the university students to practice what they know or what they want to learn for future career development. Second, student interns usually like to devote more time and effort to their internships they are paying for the credits. The requirements for the student intern position are: (1) The applicant needs to have knowledge and/or interest in photography since the center is a photography based research center; (2) graduate students, who are majoring in photography and in a relevant field, such as art history and art education etc., have priority; (3) undergraduate students will be considered only if they can demonstrate that they have enough knowledge in photography. However, other than the conditions mentioned above, there are some general personalities that Ms. K. also values when she selects her interns. For example, the intern has to be comfortable speaking in front of the public; he or she has to be open-minded and responsive to their visitors; and, a tour guide has to be able to adjust his/her voice in a loud and clear volume so that everyone in the group can hear the conversation (Ms. K., personal communication, April 21, 2015).

Interpretive skills training at the Photography Center. There are many kinds of interpretive skills that facilitate the museum experience. Compared to the traditional information-based tour, which usually positions visitors as listeners, interpretive tours focus on creating dialogues. Terry Barrett (2004) believes that learning to make art does not mean that one can transfer his or her art-making experiences to appreciating or enjoying art. He proposes that it is necessary to learn to "talk" about art (Barrett, 2004, p. 87). Interpretive tours emphasize establishing connections between artworks and the visitors. One of the most popular interpretive strategies used among museum educators is Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS), which was invented and promoted by Abigail Housen and Philip Yenawine. They advocate inviting viewers to analyze artworks by asking three basic questions: (1) What's going on in this picture? (2) What makes you say that? (3) What more can you find? (Yenawine, 2013,

Kindle Location 431). Harvard University also designed a series of programs to promote the idea of “Artful Thinking” through, “questioning and investigating, observing and describing, reasoning, exploring viewpoints, comparing and connecting, and finding complexity” (Tishman & Palmer, 2006, p. 8). Artful Thinking strategies are commonly employed by classroom teachers. The proposed strategies can be seen as extensions of VTS’s three fundamental questions.

In addition to the two streams of interpretive strategies, many scholars have invented their strategies to prompt interpretive dialogues with visitors in museums or students in the classroom (Barrett, 1994, 2003, 2004, 2008; Hooper-Greenhill, 1999, 2000; Hubbard, 2015). These strategies all share three fundamental elements:

- Asking open-ended questions to connect with learners’ prior knowledge and personal experiences.
- Creating comfortable interpretive environment for analyzing and sharing.
- Helping learners to make meanings for themselves.

Interpretive tours in museums are visitor centered and inquiry based. As Mayer (2007b) asserts, “conversation is one of the delights of being human. As we talk with each other about topics that matter, we find out what we care about, how we think, and who we are (ourselves and others)” (p. 188). Thoughtful conversations help people create meanings on a deeper level. In order to create these meaningful conversations, an interpretive tour values open-ended questions, which invite and stimulate viewers to make their own meanings from their personal history and prior knowledge.

As is the case with many current museum educators, Ms. K. places visitors’ needs as the educational priority of the photography center. In the interview with Ms. K., she stated that the interpretive skills that she designed for the student tour-guide internship program was not based upon any specific theory or scholar’s approach. The strategies she developed were a combination of her own tour leading experiences and the useful strategies that she retained from her previous studies (Ms. K., personal communication, April 21, 2015). After twenty-eight years of experience leading tours, she created a ‘leading example’ of the interpretive strategies to be used for training the student tour guides at the center. There are four basic strategies in the photography center’s interpretive skill training process: one-word, see and respond, stand in the photographer’s footsteps, conduct a thorough visual analysis, and divide visitors into small groups.

The strategies listed above are meant to assist a tour guide in establishing a dialogue with their tour members. The one-word strategy is a narrow-down question similar to VTS’s “What is

going on in this picture?” “See and respond” is asking viewers to provide their reflections based upon what they see. “Stand in the photographer’s footsteps” is inviting the viewers to learn or try to utilize artistic vocabulary such as *angle*, *frame*, *light*, and *contrasts* to describe the composition of the photography. This is particularly beneficial for a class field trip where the students have learned or are learning about formal elements in art. “Conduct a thorough visual analysis” asks viewers to closely analyze what they can see from the artwork. This strategy is similar to Artful thinking’s “observing and describing” and “exploring viewpoints.” The tour guides always ask open-ended questions, such as asking viewers to imagine, for instance, how they would feel if the artwork’s light changed. Additionally, tour guides can ask VTS’s “what more can you find” to encourage viewers to discover more details in the observed artwork. The final strategy of dividing visitors into smaller groups is often used when leading a large group or class. The tour guide divides visitors into smaller groups and assigns each small group a work to discuss. After a while, the tour guide will lead the entire group or class and go through each assigned work and invite each small group to share their findings. The five strategies are individual strategies and not listed by order. However, most tour-guide participants in this study agree that the one-word strategy is most useful as an ice-breaking exercise.

During the training process, student interns are required to be familiar with the center’s interpretive strategies and construct their own skills of leading interpretive tours. They are assigned research to complete on the photographs that will be shown in the upcoming exhibition. The student tour guides share their research and how they will conduct their tours in the weekly meetings where they receive feedback from their intern colleagues and Ms. K. When a new exhibition is in the final stages of preparation, Ms. K. will schedule a time with each intern and observe his or her ‘tour practice’ in order to provide further comments and suggestions. Only the interns who have been given approval can lead an interpretive tour in the upcoming exhibition. After their first tour for the exhibition, student tour guides share their personal reflections as part of the weekly meeting format and make adjustments for future tours.

Research Design

Research Questions

The main research questions for this study are: What kinds of abilities the student tour guides enhanced through applying interpretive skills? And how interpretive skills trigger them to transform their existing perspectives to new/renewed ones?

Methodology and data collection. In order to understand how transformative learning and learning enhancement can occur after being trained in interpretive skills, I undertook a case study to explore the connections between participants’ learning transformations and

interpretive skills. Robert K. Yin (1984) states that a case study is, “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). In order to achieve rich data, I interviewed each participant individually to collect research data. I asked both closed and open-ended questions to my participants in addition to recording interview conversations and taking observational notes during the interviews and their interpretive tours. Each one-on-one interview lasted thirty to forty minutes. Some follow-up questions were asked through emails and short personal conversations. The interview and observational phase took place between March 2015 to May 2015.

Participants

In this small scale but in depth case study, I had four participants to participate in this study. Their ages are between eighteen to thirty-five years old and they are or were serving as a tour guide at the university photography center. All four participants had served as a tour guide for at least one semester. In addition to four student tour-guide participants, I also interviewed Ms. K. to gain background information on the training program. In the following paragraphs, I will present participants’ reflections on their interpretive skills training and how they transformed their learning to improve other learning experiences. All the participants’ names in this study have been changed for anonymity.

The first participant is Bruce, who is a practicing photographer and a Master’s student in Studio Art. His focus is photography. The second participant is Lisa, who is a Master’s student in Art History with an emphasis in the history of photography when I interviewed her. She is currently a Ph.D. student for the same program from fall 2015. The third participant is Hannah. She was one of the few undergraduate students that Ms. K. agreed to include her on the tour-guide team because of her knowledge of photography. Her major is Art Education and she has been a commercial photographer since she was a high school student. The fourth participant is myself. I am a Ph.D. student in Art and Visual Cultural Education with a concentration in museum education. I am the only international student among the four participants. Since interpretive skills assisted me in many aspects of my first-year studying abroad, I decided to include myself as one of the participants. I believe that presenting my experience with the tour-guide training and how it impacted my learning and teaching would provide a different perspective to enrich this study. In order to present a neutral tone in the following discussion of participants’ reflections, I will refer to myself in the third person as “Kuan-shin.”

The four participants share similar motivations for applying to the internship program. First, they all like museums and photography. Second, they share the same passion and interest in educating people. Earning credits to fulfill their study requirement was not a primary reason

or motivation. In their reflections, it is clear that they value how this intern position served as a bridge to connect them with a future job, which would relate to their passion of being an art educator or museum educator.

What abilities the student tour guides enhanced through applying interpretive skills?

According to the interviews, the participants stated that the interpretive skills they developed enhanced their learning abilities across the following aspects:

- Interpretive skills motivated them to become better public speakers.
- Interpretive skills helped them to become interpretive writers.
- Interpretive skills assisted them in becoming thoughtful educators.
- Interpretive skills reinforced their abilities to become efficient learners.

Better public speakers. Bruce, Hannah, and Kuan-shin all shared that interpretive skills training helped them become a better public speaker. The skills taught them how to interact with an audience by asking them open-ended questions about photography. As a result, they had “less fear of [being a public speaker]” (Bruce, personal communication, April 16, 2015). Bruce was not a stranger to being a public instructor. Although he had not previously been a tour guide at a museum, he had experience as a college teaching assistant and a health care instructor. Although he was not nervous speaking in public, he felt more comfortable speaking to small groups of people. Hannah shared this perspective. She recalled her first experience of leading a tour: “I felt that in the beginning I was very scared, I was very nervous. I almost didn’t want to do the tours because I was so scared” (Hannah, personal communication, May 8, 2015). Her solution for overcoming her fear was “doing it.” She stated that, “You have to put yourself in that position and you have to figure out how to read the audience and kind of what do they need to learn” (Hannah, personal communication, May 8, 2015). During the “doing” process, the one-word strategy greatly assisted Hannah. It guided Hanna to ask more interpretive questions, which allowed her to better engage her visitors on the tour.

Kuan-shin shared Bruce and Hannah’s insecurities when she prepared her first tour. She recalled that, “There were many nights that I kept asking myself why I decided to do this. I felt terrified to speak in front of a group of native English speakers (Kuan-shin, personal communication, May 21, 2015). Kuan-shin was an elementary English and Art teacher in her home country of Taiwan. She was never afraid of speaking in front of the public because her job required her to do that in the past. However, her confidence was not as strong when she had to speak English, her second language, in front of the American public. That feeling changed though. Kuan-shin shared:

Once I started to let interpretive dialogues in, the visitors’ responses naturally put both the visitors and I in a casual learning zone. It was so excited to see their engagement

and that helped me forget my fear. After the first tour, I knew that I was totally capable to do the next one. (Kuan-shin, personal communication, May 21, 2015)

The interpretive strategies that she learned from the tour-guide training provided her a different way to guide the tour by asking open-ended questions to create an inclusive environment for visitors.

Interpretive writers. Hannah and Lisa both mentioned that interpretive skills helped them to improve their writing. For Hannah, she realized that she was applying art vocabulary to describe things, which made her writing richer than before. She said:

I believe it helps my writing a lot and just trying to how to say things in a more precise manner almost. Capture the key points and like how to pin a picture with my words. It influenced my writing in a very drastic way. My writing came along more precise to the point. Start using proper vocabulary to support that point rather than having a bunch of sentences that were just all over place. (Hannah, personal communication, May 8, 2015)

She further stated that the interpretive skills also allowed her a “critical scope” (Hannah, personal communication, May 8, 2015) to analyze her own practices, both writing and leading tours.

Lisa’s writing improved in a different aspect. She considered herself an academic writer rather than an interpretive writer. She illustrated:

I am not a very personal writer so it has helped that in regard that in academic writing, there still, it’s still inappropriate for me to give a very personal response, but in actual writing cover letters, several different letters, it’s helped me there to identify personally with the content that I am talking about rather than to say I have done this and this this thing, and this is why I [do this], and add that sort of extra. So it helps me personally in that regard applications. (Lisa, personal communication, March 28, 2015)

Identifying as an art historian, Lisa believes academic writing should be more objective than subjective. However, when it comes to jobs or other non-academic settings, she agreed that a more reflective and personal writing style would be more approachable to readers. Through the interpretive training, she learned what key words could encourage people to engage more easily in a tour conversation and transferred that skill to introducing herself in cover letter writing. This kind of interpretive writing also provides her with a new form of self-exploration.

Thoughtful educators. All participants reflected that interpretive skills significantly improved their teaching. The four participants are all students, but also educators at the same time. For example, other than being university students, Bruce, Lisa, and Kuan-shin are also teaching assistants at the university and Hannah had been working at a downtown museum. Bruce taught photography class. Other than making photos, learning how to critique is also an important learning objective for the studio art majors. Bruce always tries to prompt his students with questions. He demonstrated:

It's [about] asking questions, always directing the same line of questions... What I am trying to do is get the student to engage in the same kind of interpretive questioning that I am using. In that process, explaining how they are reacting to a piece [and trying] to instruct them how to give a good feedback. (Bruce, personal communication, April 16, 2015)

Bruce's statement reveals how an educator can apply interpretive skills to encourage students to elaborate on their interpretations. This teaching strategy echoes the art criticism attitude that Terry Barrett (2004) claims art educators should encourage in their students to make foster better and deeper judgments rather than superficial ones. For Lisa and Kuan-shin, interpretive skills enhanced their classroom management. One reason is that many of the tours they led were college students, which was the same population they taught at the university. The other reason is that interpretive skills provided them with an approach to "break the ice" with their students. For example, although the class that Lisa taught was a lecture-based course, she inserted the one-word strategy to promote students' responses and reactions to specific artworks from the lecture. She stated, "If there were pieces that I think were really significant or that were generally more controversial or make students just seemed really dead and clearly were really not paying attention then I will go into interpretive" (Lisa, personal communication, March 28, 2015).

Kuan-shin also shared how she utilized interpretive skills to guide students to look at the pictures, which she had shown in lecture. She asked students to start looking at the picture and apply "one-word" to it and then she kept developing discussions based upon their answers. She said that instead of asking students to find the "focal point" of a picture, which is a commonly used technique in art analysis, applying "one-word" allowed students to more deeply share how they felt about a picture. It is directly connected to the viewer. Kuan-shin further shared:

A lot of times I would be amazed how they could come up with those ideas. When I facilitated interpretive strategies on my students, I opened my mind through receiving so many different perspectives. In their reflections, many of them also shared that they started to look art in different ways by hearing various opinions in class. (Kuan-shin, personal communication, May 21, 2015)

The interpretive skills enhanced Lisa and Kuan-shin's ability to establish a relationship with their students. Moreover, the interpretive skills they learned helped them to transform their students' perspectives and interests to approach and analyze visual arts.

Hannah, on the other hand, was able to transfer the skill she learned at the photography center to her teaching at a downtown museum. Other than utilizing one-word and open-ended questions to guide her students at the museum, Hannah noted that the interpretive strategies that she learned helped the groups she taught reimagine things. She asserted that, "I think if you can help someone reimagine something in a new way and transform it in their own art making or go back from an end. You start seeing things differently" (Hannah, personal communication, May 8, 2015). Hannah herself benefited from this "reimagining ability." As she applied the strategies to her writing, she also became a sensitive observer and noticed those details in her daily life. She said, "You look those details a little bit differently and just while you walking around I think you start to transform the world" (Hannah, personal communication, May 8, 2015).

Hannah's statement reveals that when people develop and apply different lenses they transform their perspectives and thinking. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (2000) states that when viewers analyze a work, they have to look at it as a whole and then go back to look at the details in order to create a "hermeneutics circle" from which to make meanings (p. 48). VTS also states that it is essential to ask viewers "what can they find more" from an artwork in order to discover more information to construct the viewers' knowledge. In this study, Hannah enhanced that ability and transformed her learning to support her teaching.

Efficient learners. In this case study, all four participants shared that interpretive skills assisted them in becoming better learners. Bruce, Kuan-shin, and Hannah mentioned that in particular, the skills enhanced their ability to capture ideas and organize information faster. Bruce reflected on his learning that:

I am able to do things faster. I am able to break things down faster. It just really helps me speak, be a better speaker, more an inform speaker, so that I know the information I am giving them is correct and that I am covering everything that I want to and I am saying it clearly. (Bruce, personal communication, April 16, 2015)

Kuan-shin felt that after the training, she could capture the main idea of her study easier and faster as well:

My skill of performing my presentation is advanced obviously. I can quickly organize a concise and clear format because I can summarize data and capture the key points quicker than before. I utilize the one-word strategy to ask myself what is the main key concept that I want to present. I utilize the same strategies on my essay writing, too. (Kuan-shin, personal communication, May 21, 2015)

Hannah's enhancement was intertwined with her speaking and writing. She described that she was able to, "capture the key points and like how to pin a picture with my words..." (Hannah, personal communication, May 8, 2015). She also mentioned that if she took a subject other than art, such as a science class, she would apply a different lens to learn things in that class (Hannah, personal communication, May 8, 2015). The interpretive skills not only altered her way of thinking, looking, writing, and speaking, but also influenced her personal work as a photographer. It increased her sensitivity to noticing details when she observed objects and the environment. In her example of observing shadows, Hannah stated her enhanced sensibility assisted her to "see things:"

For example, there's a spotlight. I will look the shadow. No one is going to normally look at a thing like that, but I am looking at where the shadow's falling; why is the shadow falling like that... I start to see things, really. (Hannah, personal communication, 2015)

Participants reported an improvement in their communicative skills with others as well as greater sensitivity in experiencing their own lives.

In summary, the four participants in this case study indicated that the interpretive skill training enhanced not only their skills on leading a center tour, but also consciously or unconsciously improved their learning abilities in other areas. Interpretive skills training transformed into a leaning skill and helped them become better public speakers, more sensitive writers and more thoughtful educators and learners.

What Triggers Transformative Learning to Happen?

The photography center's interpretive skills training in this study was not designed with the purpose of transformative learning. However, it clearly embodies many of its key concepts and transformed the participants' frames of reference and worldviews during the training process. The key concepts that could be observed from the center's interpretive skills training process include: Interpretive dialogues, cogenerative learning, and critical reflections.

Interpretive Dialogues

Mezirow (2012) asserts that, “Our understandings and beliefs are more dependable when they produce interpretations and opinions that are more justifiable or true than would be those predicated on other understandings or beliefs” (p. 74). This is one of the ways that people establish their worldviews. The interpretive skills that the center student tour guides learned efficiently assisted them to open dialogues with their visitors. Visitors were asked to make interpretations about photographs and were led to think more deeply via a series of interpretive dialogues. However, unlike a traditional tour guide who delivers information, an interpretive tour guide is usually actively involved in conversations with their tour members, allowing for more rounds of guiding questions.

An interpretive dialogue represents more than a one-sided authority, rather it is a power-sharing and knowledge-exchanging platform. In this case study, the four participants exchanged interpretations and comments on the exhibited works in their weekly meetings. And then, later, they heard the visitors’ interpretations and comments in the tours. As Kuan-shin mentioned, visitors’ interpretations, a lot of time, “reshape her judgments” (Kuan-shin, personal communication, May 21, 2015) on those works while Hannah felt that her conversation with the visitors granted her the ability of “re-imagination” (Hannah, personal communication, May 8, 2015). Through interpretive dialogues, the student tour guides provided multiple ways for tour members to look at the exhibited objects. Furthermore, the various responses from the tour members reshaped the tour guides’ original perspectives. Moreover, the interpretive dialogues provided the four participants an opportunity for self-reflection and the means to express themselves in a different capacity; Lisa’s and Hannah’s improvement in writing are examples of this.

Cogenerative Learning

The interpretive dialogues that the participants created together with their tour members also fostered a cogenerative learning environment that allowed all stake holders to participate in “cogenerative dialogue as (institutionally, psychologically) different but equal participants for the purpose of making sense of their own practices” (Stith & Roth, 2010, p. 363). This type of learning can be associated with transformative learning’s concept of dialogues, which states that exposure to and consideration of alternatives allow people to (re)construct their own meaning structure. As Haber-Curran and Tillapaugh (2015) discuss, “cogenerative dialogue[s] reflect[] the aims of transformative learning, providing an opportunity for students to engage in authentic learning experiences in which they learn to work effectively with others, learn from their behaviors, and take responsibility for their learning” (p. 69). In this study, two participants, Hannah and Kuan-shin, noted how their perspectives were shaped by their tour

members and that they also learned from the tour members in the dialogues that they created together.

A cogenerative dialogue shifts the power dynamic from a one-way authority to a two-way interactive meaning making. The student tour guides shared their authoritative power by guiding their tour members through open-ended questions and gained insights from the generated answers. The tour members also learned to construct their authoritative voices by thinking and responding to those guided questions. In cogenerative learning, every teacher (guide) is also the learner and every learner is also the teacher (guide). It reshapes both parties' perspectives and knowledge.

Critical reflections. Cranton (2011) states that transformative learning always happens when learners critically reflect upon the knowledge they gained. Brookfield (2012) proposes that critical thinking should include:

1. Identifying the assumptions that frame our thinking and determine our actions.
2. Checking out the degree to which these assumptions are accurate and valid.
3. Looking at our ideas and decisions (intellectual, organizational, and personal) from several different perspectives.
4. Taking informed actions on the basis of all above. (p. 1)

Learning to accept various perspectives reshaped the student tour guides' assumptions and affected their learning actions in other aspects, especially with regard to teaching. The results reflect what Mezirow (2012) claims: "A mindful transformative learning experience requires that the learner make an informed and reflective decision to act on his or her reflective insight" (p. 87). In Lisa's case, she critically reflected and revised her conflict with personal writing when she realized that becoming more interpretive would make a person's characteristic more visible and vivid. Other participants, applied their revised perspectives to their own studio practices, classroom teaching, or/and assignment writing. In this study, the four participants revised their old thoughts after their interpretive skills training and the interpretive tours they led. They critically reflected upon their interpretations in their weekly and after-tour meetings, leading to modifications on future tours. Additionally, by sharing authority and exchanging ideas with visitors in interpretive dialogues, the student tour guides consciously and unconsciously learned to expand and (re)shape their minds to accept a wider variety of opinions and perspectives related to the photography exhibits.

Summary. Continuously immersing in interpretive dialogues, cogenerative learning, and a critically reflective environment allowed participants to be involved in different transformation cycles (Mezirow, 1978b, p. 12). Mezirow (1978b) has listed ten situations that

will result in transformation cycles. The situations involve: (1) a disorienting dilemma; (2) self-examination; (3) a critical assessment of sex-role assumptions and a sense of alienation from taken-for-granted social roles and expectations; (4) relating one's discontent to a current public issue; (5) exploring options for new ways of living; (6) building competence and self-confidence in new roles; (7) planning a course of action and acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans; (9) provisional efforts to try new roles; and (10) a reintegration into society on the basis of conditions dictated by the new perspective (p. 12).

It is clear from this study that interpretive training encouraged "self-examination," and that participants "build competence and self-confidence in new roles," as well as to establish "provisional efforts to try new roles" in their academic or personal learning contexts. As a result, the participants' previous ways of analyzing artworks, composing their writings, understanding academic studies, or creating artworks evolved and transformed. Moreover, the participants became better public speakers, interpretive writers, thoughtful educators, and/or efficient learners.

Discussion and Future Implication

Although the interpretive skills training of the university photography center was not designed with the purpose of transformative learning, it clearly embodied a transformative learning process by opening up interpretive dialogues. Through different interpretive strategies, student tour guides learned how to better initiate dialogues with the public. Furthermore, they applied these strategies to open dialogues with themselves and now know how to better express themselves. By means of interpretive skills training, student tour guides also advanced their learning ability to capture ideas and more efficiently make decisions. In other words, it improved their ability to organize large amounts of information. Most important, this study reveals that all four participants became better art educators when they absorbed and made good use of the interpretive strategies they learned. The participants are all consciously and unconsciously transformed by their experiences facilitating interpretive tours. Moreover, they applied the interpretive skills to their own learning and enhanced their performance in their studies, personal art-making, or expressive writings. The experiences shared by the participants in this study illustrate how interpretive skills training can be employed as a tool of interdisciplinary application, transformative learning, and learning enhancement.

The findings indicate that interpretive strategies are a useful means to stimulate transformative learning. They provide educators who dedicate themselves to educating young adults additional strategies to enhance students' transformative learning via interpretive dialogues, cogenerative learning, and critical reflections. I believe that the results of this study are beneficial for adult educators who teach art to rethink how to create art conversations with their students. I also want to further suggest teacher educators consider incorporating

interpretive strategies when they teach pre-service teachers. Interpretive strategies can foster people's abilities to ask questions, to construct meanings, to create dialogues, and to make critical reflections, which are important abilities that a pre-service teacher needs to have. Furthermore, interpretive strategies are helpful to create a two-way cogenerative learning, which not only opens pre-service teachers' minds, but also increase their students' engagement in class activities. In doing so, pre-service teachers can enhance their teaching confidence by gaining students' active participation. Such a two-way transformative learning loop can cultivate a positive educational culture for those pre-service teachers, allowing them to foster and mentor our next generation.

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