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**The Importance of Voice and the Power of Narrative:
Developing a Workshop for Sign Language Interpreters**

**By
Ali Ann Artis**

A professional project submitted to
Western Oregon University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of:
Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies

June 2019

**WE, THE UNDERSIGNED MEMBERS OF THE GRADUATE FACULTY OF
WESTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY HAVE EXAMINED THE ENCLOSED**

- Thesis
- Field Study
- Professional Project

Titled:

The Importance of Voice and the Power of Narrative: Developing a Workshop
Interpreters

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*and hereby certify that in our opinion it is worthy of acceptance as partial fulfillment
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to those in the Deaf and interpreting communities that I've had the honor of working with, for gifting me with continued inspiration and support. I also want to express endless gratitude for the patience and encouragement of Amanda Smith and my thesis committee for sticking with me over the years. I reserve a special thanks for my family and friends for sharing with me with their wisdom, strength and unconditional love. And finally, a humble appreciation to that indescribably magnificent force, who generates within us the power to overcome, reach out, and rise.

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ABSTRACT

The Importance of Voice and the Power of Narrative: Developing a Workshop for Sign Language Interpreters

By

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Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies

Western Oregon University

June 2019

This paper outlines my process of developing a workshop for sign language interpreters. In the field, we encounter many perspectives and a diverse range of individuals who see the world in different ways. One of our roles is to become the voice of the deaf individuals with whom we work. This requires a tremendous amount of trust on the part of the signer, and it is our responsibility to do our part to ensure that their voice is accurately represented and heard. Part of our ability to do so involves seeing things from their point of view. I created a workshop based on transformative learning theory, which is the process of experiencing a shift in worldview that causes us to see our environment through a new lens. Using this the framework, I compiled data that reveals the first-hand experiences of deaf students working with interpreters in an academic setting. Their ability to have a voice and speak freely in the classroom was a meaningful

issue that arose. I then broadened my search to include stories of others who have experienced isolation and found empowerment through various methods of self-expression. This highlighted the power that narratives have on how we view the world, ourselves, and one another. It also underscores the importance of allowing space for multiple narratives to be heard and the responsibility we have in our role as we become someone's voice.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Not long ago, I had a personal experience that permanently altered the way I viewed the world. As a result, my eyes were opened to a profound understanding that people's perceptions are remarkably ingrained within them, regardless of how accurate they may actually be. More surprising than realizing how narrow the lens was through which I perceived my truth was the realization of how strongly I held onto my beliefs, readily dismissing other points of view. I set out to study to this process of realization and came across a theory that discusses it at length in terms of transformative learning. Transformative learning theory explores the process of experiencing a shift in worldview that causes us to see our environment through a new lens. The many ways in which this theory relates to my function as an interpreter became evident, so I decided to focus on two themes, the importance of voice and the power of narrative, and set out to explore them further.

As a sign language interpreter, I have the privilege of working with a variety of deaf and hard of hearing individuals who have a unique perspective. They find themselves navigating a world that is largely designed for those who hear. One deaf artist said of her experience growing up, "I was born deaf, and I was taught to believe that sound wasn't a part of my life. And I believed it to be true ... As a Deaf person living in a world of sound, it's as if I was living in a foreign country, blindly following its rules, customs, behaviors and norms without ever questioning them" (Kim, 2015).

Many deaf individuals do not have easy or equal access to the spoken information that would allow them to freely participate in their surrounding environment. The

dominant culture is built upon an audible way of transferring information, heavily dependent on spoken language. Often the hearing world is not cognizant of the presence of the Deaf community at large, and alternative ways of inclusion get overlooked. In the field, I often find myself at the intersection of these two realities. I witness the ever-present challenges the deaf face in their attempts to take in information, to communicate freely, and to be understood. I also see those of the hearing majority who are so focused on their immediate tasks that they aren't thinking about adequate accommodation; others try but aren't sure how to be truly effective.

One of my roles as an interpreter is to serve as a channel that allows access to communication between the deaf and hearing worlds. This involves building a bridge to make information openly accessible and as naturally flowing as possible. The bridge that needs to be constructed varies in design depending on the situation at hand, and sometimes an additional hearing or deaf interpreter is needed. In each case, the end goal is the same: an effective exchange of communication that is clear, faithfully rendered, and free flowing.

One of the arenas where attempts have been made to create an equitable system for the deaf to access information is in the academic setting. In the phenomenological study *It is Still a Hearing World: A Phenomenological Case Study of Deaf College Students' Experiences of Academia*, Brooks (2011) researched deaf students' experiences with educational interpreters at mainstream colleges. She documented their first-hand accounts of what concerned them when working with interpreters on campus. Brooks's participant, Linda, said, "I want an interpreter that really matches who I am and the educational program in which I am enrolled. I want my peers to look at me as an equal"

(p. 192), and Mona stated “I want to be able to feel comfortable. I want to be able to speak up in class. I want to be comfortable if I give a presentation. I want to trust the interpreter to know how to say what I am talking about, and I want it to be smooth” (p. 168). According to Linda’s and Mona’s perspectives, an interpreter’s ability to provide clear and accurate communication is related to the signers feeling comfortable participating in their environment and contributes to their feeling viewed “as an equal.”

Statement of Problem

As Brooks’s study highlighted, a deaf individual’s willingness to allow an interpreter to voice for them is based on an enormous amount of trust. Communication can be altered, or go awry, with even the most minimal of errors. Interpreters must earn the trust of the Deaf community as professionals who faithfully render the dialogue taking place. Unfortunately, not all interactions are successful. A common result of an ineffective interpreting experience is the deaf person becoming more guarded and less confident in future interpreters or in the interpreting process altogether. If they don’t feel like their voice is being portrayed accurately, they may decide to disengage from fully participating in the communication (Brooks, 2011).

When an individual disengages from communication, their voice is not heard. Not only do they lose out on the opportunity to express themselves, other people lose out on the opportunity to engage with them in response to their ideas and input as well. When an interpreter is involved in the communication process, the interpreter must strive to stay connected to the signer and maintain an open channel that allows information to flow, providing opportunity for the signer to have a voice. Trust is a key component for this to take place, and an interpreter must be standing on a firm foundation of language

comprehension and subject matter knowledge to contribute to that trust. However, trust is not built upon language ability and knowledge alone; it is rooted in a profound awareness of the deeper implications embedded within the interpreter's role (Witter-Merithew, 1999). Brooks (2011) reiterated this idea:

There is power in voice. The power to decide who and what represents us or who gives voice to our thoughts and emotions is something deaf people experience every time they raise their hands to communicate in a non-signing, hearing world. They must trust that the interpreter attaching verbal meaning to the conceptual movements of their hands, face, and body are accurate in content. They must trust in a hegemonic process... that their voice will be heard. (p. 192)

This leads to the questions: How can we as interpreters acquire insight that promotes a more profound understanding of the power of voice? How can we use this knowledge to create a stronger channel of communication with those we work with in the field?

Purpose of the Project

I began my project by exploring how my work as an interpreter connects to the bigger picture of social equality and multiple ways of knowing. I set out to develop a workshop that introduces transformative learning theory in an effort to inspire interpreters to expand their own perspectives and explore strategies that lead to a more grounded presence in the field and within the community. Instead of focusing on language skill, which is essential for successful interpretation, I attempt to dig deeper into the interpreter's cognitive constructs that shape how we define ourselves, the world around us, and how we identify with one another.

Maslow (1965), speaking at a conference for adult educators, discussed self-actualization:

Most of the literature on learning theory deals with what I call "extrinsic learning" to distinguish it from "intrinsic learning." Extrinsic learning means collecting acquisitions to yourself like keys... or adding another craft. The process of

learning to be the best human being you can be is another business altogether. The far goals for adult education, and for any other education, are to find the processes, the ways in which we can help people to become all they are capable of becoming. This I call intrinsic learning... That is the way self-actualizing people learn. (p. 110)

My endeavor is to present a workshop that introduces the concepts and schema of transformative learning theory that participants can use as a framework to build upon intrinsically. My objective is to help them recognize how perceptions of reality have been shaped and how others may perceive things with a different lens. The theory explains how individuals can transcend the ways of thinking that currently create limitations and develop new pathways that rise above these barriers and produce alternative and more encompassing perspectives. This process of perspective transformation is intended to encourage interpreters to become increasingly adaptable to the ever-changing environments they work in, maximizing their flexibility to accommodate people of a diverse range of cultural and communication styles. As Rowley, Kraft, and Dyce (2008) described it:

Interpreters work with a variety of deaf people from numerous backgrounds and ethnicities, including those that are both deaf and Deaf. How do interpreters fit into both worlds? How do they develop the cultural dexterity to successfully negotiate all possible situations? How do we provide a balanced educational experience ... that leads to a well-rounded, bi-cultural, empathetic professional? (p. 75)

I aim to address these concerns within the workshop setting to improve the interpreters' abilities to provide optimal communication access to those they work with in the field.

Definition of Terms

Throughout this paper I refer to the term "voice" and recognize it carries multiple connotations. Depending on context, it can refer to one having a literal voice in communication or to one attaining a figurative voice to encompass one's own identity

and expression in life. I also frequently use the term “narrative,” which is also applied in more than one way. In general, I use it to mean a particular way of explaining or understanding events. However, depending on context, it can refer to an individual’s personal story, a common description of a person, group or community, or a set of beliefs that are instilled through cultural or global constructs.

Overview

I begin the next chapter with an overview of transformative learning theory as the basis for my theoretical framework and discuss how it influenced the shape and design of my workshop to encompass the body of knowledge I am presenting. I will then explore the nature of Deafhood, as it is described through the lens of a Deaf scholar, to share his narrative of the experiences of the Deaf community as a whole. In the Methods chapter, I outline my process of researching and analyzing a broad array of stories to incorporate into the content and design of my workshop. My intent is for the workshop to be varied and refined over time. The Results chapter contains the qualitative data I compiled—the quotes and stories of those who have transformed in some way and have recognized the power of their narrative. It also includes a summary and discussion of the aspects of these findings that can be considered during the course of the workshop. The Discussion chapter presents an outline of the workshop itself, as well as a reflection of the presenting process and what future modifications could be made. I conclude with a summary of my report and thoughts on continued avenues for development.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There is more in a human life than our theories of it allow. —James Hillman (2017)

During their lives, individuals acquire a way of perceiving the world through a filter, or lens, with which they understand and explain their experiences. This lens is shaped by the explanations, narratives, and language usage acquired through family, culture, tradition, and the surrounding environment (Merizow, 1991). Through this lens we interpret and make meaning of what is going on in the world around us. According to constructivist theory, each person has an individual lens, and in a diverse world of people coming together with a wide range of experiences, beliefs, and learned narratives, there can exist multiple realities, or lenses, in any given situation. Transformative learning is explained as the process of effecting change in this lens, or habit of mind, with which we identify and understand our reality. Transformative learning allows a move toward an expanded lens, or frame of reference, that has greater breadth, depth, and reflection.

Mezirow (2000) described it this way:

Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. (p. 214)

Transformative learning can happen over time, but it is often triggered by a life event that is a catalyst for a more drastic transformation. This catalyst necessitates the development of a new framework apart from the one we've been accustomed to operating from, a process that has been termed perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1991). In the literature, this trigger is called a disorienting dilemma. Merizow described a 10-phase

process involved in perspective transformation, although not all of these phases are always required for transformative learning, nor are they necessarily in this order:

- Phase 1** A disorienting dilemma
- Phase 2** A self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
- Phase 3** A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions
- Phase 4** Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
- Phase 5** Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
- Phase 6** Planning of a course of action
- Phase 7** Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
- Phase 8** Provisional trying of new roles
- Phase 9** Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
- Phase 10** A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's perspective (Mezirow, 1991)

The disorienting dilemma can appear in many forms and often includes the acquisition of new knowledge that challenges a former belief or perspective (Mezirow, 1997). This knowledge may have existed all along, unnoticed as one functioned on their original track, and either dismissed or remained blind to information that didn't align with what they already attributed to be truth. When the learner becomes open to recognizing, accepting, and integrating this new information, a period of "unlearning" may be required if a former belief is rendered inaccurate. This process could be potentially destabilizing, painful, and intense as one begins to question what other knowledge they have built into their framework that may not be complete or accurate. In some situations, one's own identity might be tightly woven into a former belief, custom, or narrative, adding to the sense of disorientation and isolation when others in their

sphere aren't experiencing the same thing. It is during this phase that the discovery and support of others who have experienced a similar dilemma can bring relief, stabilization, and guidance throughout the transformation (Cranton, 2016). In her book *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A Guide to Theory and Practice*, Cranton (2016) highlighted a study performed at the Highlander Folk School (now Highlander Research Center) where research was conducted to decipher what attitudes and environments most effectively fostered the transformative learning process. The following nine facets were reported as relevant to transformative education:

1. Providing a safe place to encourage discourse and reflection
2. Assuming participants bring a wealth of knowledge and experience
3. Helping people discover they are not alone
4. Facilitating critical thinking
5. Helping people develop voice and the confidence to act
6. Solving problems through synergy
7. Encouraging lifelong and diverse learning for change
8. Promoting the idea that everyone is an important member of a community
9. Implementing continuous improvement. (Ebert, Burford, & Brian, 2003)

In developing a workshop for adult learners, I aim to set a stage that emphasizes and encompasses these practices as they also reflect the standards that I follow personally and professionally as an interpreter in the field. Emphasis on dialogic communication is key, for it helps learners work together to co-create a new understanding as part of a joint effort in the formation of a new lens. Mezirow (1997) highlighted this idea:

Learners need to be assisted to participate effectively in discourse. Discourse is necessary to validate what and how one understands, or to arrive at a best

judgment regarding a belief. In this sense, learning is a social process, and discourse becomes central to making meaning. Effective discourse depends on how well the educator can create a situation in which those participating have full information; are free from coercion; have equal opportunity to assume the various roles of discourse (to advance beliefs, challenge, defend, explain, assess evidence, and judge arguments). (p. 10)

Often transformative learning is manifested through discovery of imaginative ways to solve and redefine problems (Cranton, 2016). My attraction to this theory was the encompassing way it connects learning to an awakened kind of listening, and how it explores the various ways we “let the soul speak” (Palmer, 2009, p. 22). Transformative learning includes an element of rediscovery and reconstruction that opens a pathway that connects the brain’s developmental processes to the heart (Hillman, 1992). It is this impact that drives action, motivation, empathy, and compassion. I aim to expand on learning that produces this type of result as another way to enhance our effectiveness as a sign language interpreter. While there are varying fields to which this theory has been applied, I was drawn to its overall purpose as described by Morrell and O’Conner (2002):

Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our body awareness; our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy. (p. xvii)

While I realize I cannot induce a transformative learning experience within the span of one workshop, my goal is to introduce the concepts of transformative learning theory as schema that participants can learn to recognize and build upon. I hope to identify key ingredients of this process through analyzing my own and others’ experiences of transformative learning, with the goal of recognizing, developing, and fostering

transformative learning in day-to-day life. I aim to present my workshop in a way that highlights the value of challenging a passive frame of mind and actively seeking ways to broaden one's perspective. Integral to this process is open communication with the ability to express ourselves to others without fear of judgement and to learn from others' expressions. I hope to shed light on the power generated through having voice, being heard, and having a platform to share. I explore how the sign language interpreter's role is integrated into that platform as it affects the extent to which signing individuals interact with others in their environment and how clearly their narrative is understood.

The workshop is designed to answer the questions: What is transformative learning? What are phases involved in this process? What are the outcomes? What impact has the power of narrative had on people who have been systemically marginalized? What factors have contributed to their ability to be heard? How can this understanding affect our practice in the field of sign language interpreting? How can we continue to challenge ourselves as transformative learners?

CHAPTER 3: HISTORY

As a professional, it is important to step back and try to understand the placement of one's role in the function of the environment and society as a whole. Sign language interpreters work with and for deaf individuals and the Deaf community, serving as a channel of communication for those who belong to a group that has not been able to equally access information within the surrounding dominant majority of spoken language users. However, the role of the sign language interpreter is just one aspect in the lives of signing individuals and in the understanding of the Deafhood reality. Not only is it important to examine our role in the context of today's society, but it is also critical to understand the history of the culture.

Language allows us to connect within our self, to our environment, and between one another. Built within language are the keys with which our worldview is constructed (Boroditsky, 2011). For example, the use and reclamation of indigenous language is currently a priority and tremendous efforts are being utilized to preserve and teach it for purposes deeper than just communication (Krauss, 1996). Through use of native language, tribes gain access to their ages-old history of traditions, culture, and ways of knowing (Hallett, Chandler, & Lalonde, 2007). As one anthropologist described:

a language is not just a body of vocabulary or a set of grammatical rules. A language is a flash of the human spirit. It's a vehicle through which the soul of each particular culture comes into the material world. Every language is an old-growth forest of the mind, a watershed, a thought, an ecosystem of spiritual possibilities. (Davis, 2003)

The beautiful gift that has emerged from Deaf communities is that of signed languages that facilitate visual communication to a depth that those relying on spoken

language have not developed (Gulliver, 2009). Without a physical territory to ascribe to—and the reality that many deaf youth don't have full inclusion or communication with their non-signing family members at home—the issues of adequate support, education, cultural and language acquisition for the deaf population at large is vital.

In the article *Sign Language Peoples as Indigenous Minorities: Implications for Research and Policy*, Deaf researcher Paddy Ladd and his co-authors draw on the similarities between the experiences of the Deaf community (termed Sign Language Peoples, or SLPs) and those of First Nations people. There are notably many differences between and among these groups, but the authors emphasized similarities such as the magnitude of cultural sensitivity, heritage rights, and the ongoing issues of an historically marginalized people in order for them to be more readily understood. Ladd and colleagues described the history of the Deaf and their experiences as a cultural group; these accounts have been shared by those residing throughout many lands, not just in his country of origin (Batterbury, Ladd, & Gulliver, 2007).

Individuals who are either born significantly hard of hearing or who later develop a decreased function of their auditory senses are often termed clinically deaf, which is a description of a physical condition. However, “Deafhood is not seen as a finite state but as a process by which Deaf individuals come to actualize their identity” (Ladd et al., 2003, p. xviii). Rowley et al. (2008) stated, “The process and understanding of being deaf and what it means to be Deaf is a very individual experience yet universal in members of the Deaf community worldwide. This shared experience is the understanding of *Deafhood*” (p. 74).

According to Ladd et al. (2007), both the Deaf and First Nations people, though

members of their individual communities or tribes, ascribe to a global affiliation with other people who have had experiences that echo their own. Many Deaf and First Nations people live in a different paradigm amidst a majority culture that is largely unaware of the underlying issues at hand. First Nations peoples have a history to a place and a connection to their physical environment that is interwoven into their stories, their identity, and their sense of belonging. Their beliefs and traditions have been passed down through oral traditions of storytelling and ritual, and they have a history that shapes their identity. Often their frame of reference is entirely different from that of the surrounding cultures. They find camaraderie, support, and power by meeting together and keeping what remains of their traditions alive (Dementi-Leonard & Gilmore, 1999).

The Deaf also have a unique way of viewing the world, many finding liberation and belonging in environments where they can freely communicate in sign language with others who have a shared perspective that has been shaped by their existence in a hearing world. They have become accepting and proud of their heritage and language, and they find strength in their connection with others with similar experiences. In other words:

Whereas disabled people applaud the journey that integration allows them to make from marginal spaces into spaces of the mainstream, SLP's [sign language peoples] narratives are altogether different. Whilst they identify with similar concerns over the need to access majority society as bilingual citizens when they so choose, an enforced normalisation... removes them from the 'native' territory and floats them in isolated bubbles of silence with the mainstream. (Ladd et al., 2007, p. 2902)

Deaf communities have a heritage language that is, in many cases, indigenous to the country in which they reside. This language serves to be very much a part of their culture and identity. "These 'SLP spaces' developed into a network that was not merely the hearing world replicated in sign language, but a separate, SLP-authored reality within

which they lived and died” (Ladd et al., 2007, p. 2902). Through the use of language and expression the people of the Deaf culture collaborated to create a sense of belonging and purpose: “Their communities are the loci for performing, building, and reproducing a collective topography expressed through a common language and a shared culture and history” (Ladd et al., 2007, p. 2900).

Over time, both groups have experienced a detachment from their heritage language through the systemic means of the dominant (colonizing) class. The Deaf, who were educated and immersed in the use of signed language at schools for the deaf, were forced to assimilate to an oral tradition of learning:

From the late 19th century, Deaf teachers and sign languages were progressively prohibited, and speech therapy was prioritized over genuine education and learning for Deaf children. Under Oralist colonialism, the use of sign language resulted in severe, daily punishment. When the appalling academic and emotional consequences were finally researched (Conrad 1979), sign language returned to the education system and during the 1980’s a “Deaf resurgence” began. (Ladd et al., 2007, p. 2904)

With many still not receiving full immersion to language access at a formative age, many Deaf share the experience of being educated in mainstream settings and feeling different from the majority of their class, unable to freely communicate and express themselves to their hearing peers. As a result of a lack of adequate support systems in place for some of these individuals, there have been higher rates of youth struggling academically and emotionally in comparison with those of the majority population (Hindley, 2005).

In reference to both Native and Deaf individuals’ identity development, Ladd et al. (2007) pointed out a shared dilemma: “Thus, the opportunities to define themselves in holistic terms are profoundly disrupted, and redefining themselves according to the majority language and culture is highly problematic ... for both groups, the internal

reconstruction of their communities is a major priority” (p. 2912). In an effort to reconnect and develop their own innate sense of who they are, many deaf turn to digging deeper and uncovering stories from others in their community:

Increasing numbers, however, are seeking out and locating their roots - ‘coming home’ to what they term their ‘Deaf family’ (DEX 2004). An equivalent hybrid identity is also found in numerous First Nation peoples, rooted in similar educational policies designed to remove those languages and cultures. (Ladd et al., 2007, p. 2901)

As with First Nations peoples, much of the initial research of the Deaf and their language and the resulting information disseminated across academia was in the Western tradition of inquiry and conducted by members of that prevailing culture. Thus, the lens through which these perspectives were shared came from an outside source, not from within the communities themselves. In our current era this is starting to change:

“Alongside books written by hearing researchers, more articles, books and research done by Deaf people on their own culture and community have been published ... making true insider perspectives accessible to all students of the language and culture” (Rowley et al., 2008, p. 72).

As with research now disseminating from within First Nations communities, the methodologies now emerging within the Deaf communities align with cultural norms and consist of recorded storytelling, signed poetry, and collective forums where members discuss and share knowledge and collaborate for community-based solutions. The fields of interpreting and education for the Deaf that were once taken over by members of the dominant hearing paradigm are beginning to be reclaimed by Deaf educators and professionals who have stepped up, with the support of their communities, to have a leading voice in the ownership and future of these fields. As a result of increased

representation and a rising comprehension of their heritage, there has been “a growing self-awareness as well as transcendence within the thinking of Deaf people” (Rowley et al., 2008, p. 72).

Major technological advances have created new forums for the Deaf to connect to each other and to others by use of social networking and video-streamed conversations. These resources have been groundbreaking in terms of communication viability. However, many issues still persist in the Deaf community at large as individuals struggle for access to information, avenues for advocacy, and a stronger voice in society.

Deafhood is considered a cultural affiliation, and it is important to understand that the people interpreters work with and interpret for in the field are individuals first. They have a diversity of beliefs and backgrounds and, like all people, preferences and personality traits. Though they sign, they may not identify with the Deafhood culture or may choose to identify a variety of other ways. As interpreters, it is important to respect their right to shape their own narrative and aim to understand their reality as they see it.

CHAPTER 4: METHODS

In the social sciences, there is growing recognition of the need for qualitative methods to serve as not only a source of information but as a means of inspiration. This is especially true in the sense of how research can influence the way individual practitioners connect with the people they work with in the field. This approach in research involves taking information and re-presenting it in a way that brings it to a human level, connecting the head to the heart (Hillman, 2017). Its aim is to sensitize the practitioner allowing that practitioner to become more aware, open, and compassionate in interactions with others in the field (Todres, 2008). In the development of my workshop, I was drawn to the grounded theory approach to research (Baker, Wuest, & Stern, 1992) and decided to draw on stories that had an emotional impact on me, as I sought to compile data to inform those involved in educating, working with, and interpreting for the deaf.

The transformative learning process can be researched exploring narratives told in novels, film, and social media and by listening to those we meet in our day to day life (Cranton, 2016). This type of learning is not only interesting and intellectually stimulating, but the stories being shared provide a source of context and meaning to relate to from the heart. Almost every new experience or piece of information I acquire has an impact on my practice as a sign language interpreter in some way, because I interpret in a vast range of settings between individuals of varying backgrounds, discussing an endless array of topics.

The intention of my workshop is to motivate participants to acquire a fresh approach to the practice of interpreting and for this understanding to have an impact on

their interaction with the people they meet in the field. In a study of embodied relational understanding, Todres (2008) described aspects of presenting qualitative data in a way that would have a sensitizing effect on the reader:

- It would tell us something that connects with universal human qualities so that the reader can relate personally to the themes.
- It would tell a story which readers could imagine in a personal way.
- It would not attempt to exhaust the topic but would attempt to allow it to be seen more clearly: like shining a light which increases the reader's sense of contact with this phenomenon without fully possessing it. (p. 1571)

With these aims in mind, my method involved two phases of researching qualitative data that contained aspects of the themes I wanted to explore. The first phase involved an investigation of published literature to compile a deaf perspective on the topic of communication accessibility when relying on an interpreter to have a voice. I aimed to find direct quotes from deaf participants in phenomenological investigations that were intended to amplify their voice in order to understand the reality of their experience from their perspective. The three areas of concern that surfaced were:

- Deaf education, self-empowerment, advocacy, knowledge of rights
- Interpreters providing optimal services
- Systemic change to accommodate full language access

After identifying how this initial research relates to a bigger picture of social justice, I repeated the process of investigation with a wider population that I could draw data from. In considering the many places this information could be found, I decided to limit my data source to a selection of TED Talks. This proved to be a valuable database for me due to the quality and nature of the topics at hand, the ease of finding related presentations, the caliber of the speakers, and accessible transcripts. I then viewed a large number of presentations that contained transformative-level insights on the themes of systemic isolation and having voice. I decided to narrow it down to stories of those that

had to overcome barriers, and from those, I chose four that touched me in a personal way that I could use for the workshop.

I viewed them many times, and for reporting purposes, compiled the transcripts and quoted the parts that added meaning to my line of investigation and illuminated aspects of transformative learning. I then explored how these narratives fit into the context of transformative learning, connecting the themes of finding voice, reframing perspective, creating narrative and having a platform to share. I finally connected the role of the interpreter as part of this platform. From the additional themes that emerged, I analyzed them in terms of categories; however, I soon discovered that the power of these themes resided in the whole of the story and lost something in the complexity of my analysis. I touch on these themes in the discussion, but I actually processed them on a more personal level in terms of reflection and application. These TED Talks are the primary source of reference throughout the workshop and laid the groundwork for discussion of transformative learning in an applicable and tangible way.

Using the compiled data, I designed a workshop with the intent of creating an environment that promotes awareness of transformative learning and fosters dialogue as part of its process. I submitted my proposal to Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) to obtain approval to present. I piloted and presented my workshop, and I incorporated my participants' feedback to make appropriate adjustments to the workshop layout and flow.

Summary of Methodology

- Research meaningful sources of qualitative data that contain aspects of the topic of investigation
- Capture the data to create a compilation to present for the purpose of explanation/discussion

- Study the data as part of an interrelated whole and consider other themes that emerge
- Consider how the data connects to transformative learning by correlating it with the phases of disorienting dilemma, critical reflection of beliefs, dialoging with others and the outcome of the individual's life experiences.
- Consider how the data connects to interpreters in their work in the field, on both an individual and systemic level.
- Use the analysis to create an interactive workshop that promotes storytelling, dialogue, and reflection. Try to make it fun, thought provoking, inspiring and useful.
- Record what was discovered throughout the course of the workshop and make modifications for future workshops.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

Deaf in Post-Secondary Education

In the investigation of my inquiry in published research, I focus on the deaf perspective of their journey through mainstream education, from their point of view. I resonated with the methods of phenomenological research as it aims to “describe the world-as-experienced by the participants of the inquiry in order to discover the common meanings underlying empirical variations of a given phenomenon” and studies these conscious experiences from the subjective or first person point of view (Baker et al., 1992, p. 1356). In my review, I draw from two phenomenological studies that, combined, investigate the experiences of 13 deaf students in undergraduate and graduate programs attending college in a mainstream (spoken language) setting. The studies did not provide the names of the schools, so the number of colleges and universities represented 19 to 22 institutions. In these studies, in-depth interviews were conducted to record these students’ authentic accounts of learning, navigation, and communication within the academic environment. Student names were changed for reporting purposes.

There were many overarching themes that ran throughout these pieces (Brooks, 2011; McCray, 2013), and the themes affecting the deaf students’ ability to approach communication equality included (1) the institution’s willingness provide students with their preferred platform to access information, (2) the sign language interpreter’s ability to convey what the students were signing, (3) alternative methods used for inclusive communication, and (4) self-advocacy. I will mainly present narratives as shared by the students to present a deeper view of how they were impacted by their experiences.

Results—Published Research

1) Institution's Willingness to Provide students with their Preferred Platform to Access Information

I draw the majority of my data from the phenomenological study entitled *It Is Still a Hearing World: A Phenomenological Case Study of Deaf College Students' Experiences of Academia*, conducted by Brooks (2011) in her research of deaf students' experiences with educational interpreters in postsecondary education. I highlight quotes I chose from the study, but they are by no means all-encompassing of the findings published in this article. I chose quotes that resonated with me and the experiences I have observed as an interpreter in similar academic settings.

Rebecca expressed her feelings coming from a high school where there was not an interpreter utilized in the classroom. Having access to this form of communication had a profoundly liberating effect:

In high school I was very isolated. I could not communicate with my teachers like I can now. The teachers pushed me away. They did not want to take the time to re-teach me things after class. I needed individual attention. In high school I had a "C" average because I just gave up. College was sort of a shock for me because I had an interpreter. I had new access to information and I had a new way of expressing communication. I felt so free. I felt like a weight was lifted from my chest and I could breathe. I realized I had the power to decide what I want! I had never experienced that before." (p. 176)

Linda shares her conviction in her request for a sign language interpreter at her institution. While there are other means to access information, she recognizes their limitations, especially when it comes to classroom participation: "We all wanted an interpreter... we are all strong ASL users. That was our preference. With an interpreter, we could raise our hand and the interpreter can voice for us. You cannot really participate with CART because everything is typed." (p. 149)

In addition to the inability to participate freely in class without speaking, accessing information in written form also proves to be problematic. As Brooks's (2011) study acknowledged:

Faculty are often unaware of the needs of their deaf students. It could be easily perceived that an interpreter in a classroom equalizes the playing field. However, many instructors do not realize the English language can also be a barrier for their deaf students. (p. 142)

Comprehending the entirety of assignments in written form and submitting written work has been a barrier when the institutions do not provide additional accommodation for the student to hone and practice their reading and writing skills. As Brooks (2011) goes on to state:

Utilizing technology for communication bypasses the need for an interpreter, but can raise issues with the English language and deaf students' writing skills. The average deaf adult has a fourth grade reading level (Parault & Williams, 2010). Thus, writing can become a challenge for many deaf students. (p. 141)

A source of frustration can be when an institution has a department that is designed to provide needed support, but fails to make that support accessible. Linda goes on to relate an experience that she had:

I went to the writing center. They would not provide an interpreter for me, so that is the reason I would not go often. My advisor suggested I go to the foreign language writing center, but they were clueless regarding ASL. Most of the tutors were from Korea or from other countries. They could help students from their countries, but not me. (p. 141)

These are just a few examples of the many accounts dealing with the importance of an institution's willingness to provide students with the necessary supports to access information. Some of these quotes I intend to preserve and use for a version of my workshop that would be presented to teaching staff or other faculty that work with deaf students in an educational environment.

2) The Sign Language Interpreter's Ability to Convey What the Students Were Signing

This section focuses on how the interpreter influences the student's ability to participate fully in class. As highlighted in the introduction of this paper, Mona shared her perspective regarding the influence an interpreter can have on her feelings in the classroom: "I want to be able to feel comfortable. I want to be able to speak up in class. I want to be comfortable if I give a presentation. I want to trust the interpreter to know how to say what I am talking about, and I want it to be smooth" (Brooks, 2011, p. 168).

With a lack of trust in the ability of the interpreter, Mona goes on to relate the impact that having an interpreter can potentially have on classroom participation:

It is difficult when my interpreters have a hard time understanding me. I will raise my hand to be called on and I will start to explain my point. People are looking at me and I am signing. My peers are waiting for me to say something, but the interpreter does not understand what I am saying. I just stop signing and say never mind. (p. 161)

Linda also speaks of the element of trust and willingness to have an interpreter speak for her if she was not familiar with their voicing abilities: "If I had a substitute interpreter, then I would remain quiet because I did not know if I could trust them. I did not know how they would speak for me" (Brooks, 2011, p. 159).

In the dissertation *A Phenomenological Study of the Relationship Between Deaf Students in Higher Education and Their Sign Language Interpreters*, McCray's (2013) participants also expressed how the interpreter's voicing abilities had a direct impact on their experience in the classroom. Shauna shared, "When I signed a question, she did not understand me and I had to repeat myself several times ... Interpreter's receptive skills are the number one frustration!" (p. 114). Mary and Jennifer also relate similar feelings

and share their concerns regarding the perceptions others in the classroom might have of them:

I stay after class to ask a question and when the interpreter does not understand me it is really frustrating. It might cause the teacher to have a different perspective of me and it becomes a negative perception of me, not the interpreter.
– Mary (p. 117)

If the interpreter is qualified and comfortable voicing for me then I am OK with asking questions in class, but if they are not fluent, then I won't ask questions because I don't want to embarrass myself. – Jennifer (p. 117)

In the course of my workshop, I aim to underscore the importance of providing the signer with an accurate voice and how it impacts the signer's ability to have relevant involvement in the communication at hand. Building an environment of trust is an essential element in this process.

3) Alternative Methods Used for Inclusion

I included this theme in my compilation because of how these experiences shed light on the other ways inclusion manifests without the use of an interpreter. It highlights how everyone can have a share in providing an atmosphere of access and value toward those who may otherwise be overlooked. Mona related:

One of my online professors ... could hear the other student's voices, but he always checked to make sure if I had something to say. He recognized that I was a part of the class. He would tell people to hold on so that I had time to read the discussion. That was wonderful! ... I feel like when the teacher recognizes my participation, then my classmates notice me ... It's important to be recognized.
(Brooks, 2011, p. 137)

In McCray's (2013) study, Jason expressed how he has the ability to use alternate means of communication via email to access the professors directly, and the other students in the study likewise took advantage of this provision:

Jason emails his professors when he feels necessary, stating, "I will email the teacher directly when I am not comfortable with the interpreter voicing my

comments.” The discussion on emailing faculty was an automatic “yes” from each of the participants. (p. 124)

Another enormous act of inclusion is when peers take an active interest and initiative in communicating directly with their deaf and hard of hearing peers. One important way this is done is by their acquisition and use of sign language. Rebecca recounted:

Many ASL classes are offered here. As a result, many people that I know in my communication classes have already taken an ASL class. So a lot of my peers already know about deafness. It absolutely influences socialization!” (Brooks, 2011, p. 150)

These experiences emphasize some of the many ways instructors and peers can create an inclusive environment for the deaf students. As interpreters, we often encounter individuals in the field that express a desire to reach out in an effort to communicate directly with deaf individuals. This is an area I also plan to address in the course of my workshop.

4) Self-advocacy

Self-advocacy is a theme I encounter in the field often. It can be as a source of frustration when individuals I interpret for are facing an act of injustice and may be unaware of their rights or how to exercise them. It can also be a source of empowerment when I witness those who may find themselves in a circumstance of inequality and are able to advocate for themselves and assist others to do the same.

Brooks’s (2011) article discussed this theme at length, and the students share their insights as to the importance self-advocacy has in their ability to obtain what they need in the form of communication. Linda asserted, “I hand-selected my interpreters. I actually contacted two of them before student services contacted them. My university honored my request for them to interpret my class. The interpreters really matched my personality and

sign style” (p. 169). Brooks goes on to say, “The students in this study reported that self-advocacy was a key element in determining their successful navigation of their academic work. As a deaf student, Linda stated, ‘You have to be assertive! You have to advocate for yourself!’” (p. 181). In McCray’s study, students also reported on making needed adjustments to ensure clarity of the information being communicated. Jason shared the following technique: “If the interpreter cannot voice for me at all, I will generally talk to the teacher one on one after the class so that the interpreter can ask for clarification and the communication can be a slower pace” (p. 117).

In recognition of the importance self-advocacy has for deaf individuals, Rebecca articulated the continuing need for the deaf to be educated about their rights and aware of what support systems are available to them:

I think it is important that something is set up to educate deaf students of their own power in the system. I know when I started college; I did not know my rights. I did not know about the services that were available for me. I learned that as I went along. I think it would be beneficial if deaf students were provided a list of information regarding their rights. This would help them to understand and help them to be more assertive. I do not think many deaf students realize that until it is too late and the information is already lost.” (Brooks, 2011, p. 190)

Summary and Reflection

While learners in an academic setting have standards they’re expected to meet as a measurement of achievement, these become less attainable when involvement in the learning process is not equally or consistently accessible. Many factors may contribute to this lack of access for deaf students, including an institution not providing quality classroom interpreters or other adequate support services. The potential effects of not providing these services have resulted in feelings of frustration, withdrawal, and exclusion due to their inability to successfully access information on par with their

hearing peers. Conversely, providing these services had an effect of empowerment and relief within the classroom environment.

Though alternative methods of communication may be available, the proficiency and trustworthiness of the sign language interpreter often plays a key factor in the student's involvement in the classroom. Sign language interpreters interpret for individuals of diverse backgrounds and communication styles. To better understand the relationship between the deaf student's ability to have a voice and our work as interpreters, it is important to gain insights into their way of experiencing the situation. When the student doesn't have confidence in the interpreter's abilities, feelings of hesitancy were reported and withdrawal from peer and classroom involvement occurred. Conversely, when there were adequate services in place to provide a strong platform for the students to have a voice, they felt included, supported, and able to participate more fully. It is also important to recognize the teacher's role in making the time and space for the deaf students to feel valued and heard.

Ultimately, self-advocacy serves as a vital way for students to express concerns, inform faculty of their needs, and attempt to obtain the services they need. Awareness of their rights and the ability to communicate those rights proves to be of paramount concern. After reviewing the data, three integral features surfaced as being key to forming a more equitable environment:

- Deaf education, self-empowerment, advocacy, knowledge of rights
- Interpreters providing optimal services
- Systemic change to accommodate full language access

These features are interrelated, and interpreters striving to provide optimal

communication access also run into barriers when the other two parameters are lacking. So in consideration of this data for the purpose of workshop development, I found many practical applications not only for sign language interpreters, but also for administrators and teachers who currently have or will have a deaf student in their classroom. They may not be aware of the prevailing feelings and issues that potentially arise in a mainstream classroom environment, so this information could serve to prepare them to consider modifications that can be made to better accommodate and educate their students.

TED Talks

I chose this selection of TED talks for reporting purposes, but there are many others delivered by those who have experienced powerful and life changing transformations. During my workshop, the participants will watch the chosen TED talks in their entirety, but in this chapter I parse out quotes highlighting some of the essences that each presenter manifested. There are many themes that emerge throughout, and I will briefly touch on what spoke to me and how it relates to my line of investigation of the power of narrative. I will introduce each talk by identifying the presenters and the media that facilitated their transformation process. I will then analyze each talk in the Summary and Reflection section in a way that highlights how the presented experiences fall in line with the phases of transformative learning. I will also reflect on personal and professional application of some of the emerging concepts. These points are intended to be used to prompt discussion and dialogue during the course of the workshop.

Results—TED Talks

TED Talk 1: Poetry that frees the Soul (Domenech, 2014)

Presenter: Cristina Domenech, speaking of the inmates in her San Martin prison Unit 48 writing workshop

Medium used: Poetry

Excerpts: [italics added for emphasis]

The first time I met with the prisoners, I asked them why they were asking for a writing workshop and they told me *they wanted to put on paper all that they couldn't say and do.*

Many of the prisoners hadn't even completed grammar school... They didn't write fluently, either. So we started looking for short poems. Very short, but very powerful.

And we started to read, and we'd read one author, then another author, and by reading such short poems, they all began to realize that what the poetic language did was to break a certain logic, and create another system. *Breaking the logic of language also breaks the logic of the system under which they've learned to respond.* So a new system appeared, new rules that made them understand very quickly - very quickly - that with poetic language they would be able to say absolutely whatever they wanted.

One of them once said: "In prison you never sleep. You can never sleep in jail. You can never close your eyelids." And so, like I'm doing now, I gave them a moment of silence, then said, "That's what poetry is, you guys. It's in this prison universe that you have all around you. Everything you say about how you never sleep, it exudes fear. *All the things that go unwritten -- all of that is poetry.*"

So we started appropriating that hell; we plunged ourselves, headfirst, into the seventh circle. And in that seventh circle of hell, our very own, beloved circle, they learned that they could make the walls invisible, that they could make the windows yell, and that we could hide inside the shadows.

That moment made me think a lot that *for most of them, it was surely the very first time that someone applauded them for something they had done.*

What I see week after week, is how they're turning into different people; how they're being transformed. How *words are empowering them with a dignity they had never known, that they couldn't even imagine.* They had no idea such dignity could come from them.

At the workshop, in that beloved hell we share, we all give something. We open our hands and hearts and give what we have, what we can. *All of us; all of us equally.* And so you feel that at least in a small way you're repairing that *huge social fracture* which makes it so that for many of them, prison is their only destination. I remember a verse by a tremendous poet, a great poet, from our Unit 48 workshop, Nicolás Dorado: "*I will need an infinite thread to sew up this huge wound.*"

Poetry does that; it *sews up the wounds of exclusion.* It opens doors. Poetry works as a mirror. It creates a mirror, which is the poem. They recognize themselves, they look at themselves in the poem and *write from who they are, and are from what they write.*

-TEDxRiodelaPlata 2014

Translation by Sebastian Betti

TED Talk 2: Why do I make art? To build time capsules for my heritage (Briet, 2017)

Presenter: Kayla Briet

Medium used: Storytelling with music; film

Excerpts: [italics added for emphasis]

As a filmmaker and composer, it's been *my journey to find my voice*, reclaim the stories of my heritage and the past and infuse them into music and film time capsules to share.

To tell you a bit about how I found my voice, I'd like to share a bit about how I grew up.

My mother is Dutch-Indonesian and Chinese with immigrant parents, and my father is Ojibwe and an enrolled tribal member of the Prairie Band's Potawatomi Tribe in Northeastern Kansas.

Being surrounded by many cultures was the norm, but also a very confusing experience. It was really hard for me to find my voice, because *I never felt I was enough* -- never Chinese, Dutch-Indonesian or Native enough. Because I never felt I was a part of any community, I sought to learn the stories of my heritage and connect them together to rediscover my own.

The first medium I felt gave me a *voice was music*. With layers of sounds and multiple instruments, I could create soundscapes and worlds that were much bigger than my own. Through music, I'm inviting you into a sonic *portal of my memories and emotions, and I'm holding up a mirror to yours*.

I wondered if I could make this feeling of immersion even more powerful, by layering visuals and music -- visuals and images on top of the music. So I turned to internet tutorials to learn editing software, went to community college to save money and created films.

After a few years experimenting, I was 17 and had something I wanted to tell and preserve. It started with a question: *What happens when a story is forgotten?* I lead with this in my latest documentary film, "Smoke That Travels," which immerses people into the world of music, song, color and dance, as I explore my *fear that a part of my identity, my Native heritage, will be forgotten in time*.

Many indigenous languages are dying due to historically forced assimilation. From the late 1800s to the early 1970s, Natives were forced into boarding schools, where they were violently punished if they practiced traditional ways or spoke their native language, most of which were orally passed down. As of now, there are 567 federally recognized tribes in the United States, when there used to be countless more. In my father's words, "Being Native is not about wearing long hair in braids. It's not about feathers or beadwork. *It's*

about the way we all center ourselves in the world as human beings.”

After traveling with this film for over a year, I met indigenous people from around the world, from the Ainu of Japan, Sami of Scandinavia, the Maori and many more. *And they were all dealing with the exact same struggle to preserve their language and culture.*

At this moment, I not only realize the *power storytelling has to connect all of us* as human beings but the responsibility that comes with this power. It can become incredibly dangerous when our stories are rewritten or ignored, because *when we are denied identity, we become invisible*. We’re all storytellers. Reclaiming our narratives and just listening to each other’s can create a portal that can transcend time itself.

-TED2014

TED Talk 3: The enchanting music of sign language (Kim, 2015)

Presenter: Christine Sun Kim

Medium used: Visual art

Excerpts: [italics added for emphasis]

I was born deaf, and I was taught to believe that sound wasn’t a part of my life. *And I believed it to be true*. Yet, I realize now that that wasn’t the case at all. Sound was very much a part of my life, really, on my mind every day. As a Deaf person living in a world of sound, it’s as if I was *living in a foreign country*, blindly following its rules, customs, behaviors and norms *without ever questioning them*.

In Deaf culture, movement is equivalent to sound.

I realized that... I actually know sound. I know it so well that it doesn’t have to be something just experienced through the ears. It could be felt tactually, or experienced as a visual, or even as an idea. So I decided *to reclaim ownership of sound and to put it into my art practice*. And everything that I had been taught regarding sound, I decided to do away with and *unlearn*. I started creating a new body of work.

And when I presented this to the art community, I was blown away with the amount of *support* and attention I received. I realized: sound is like money, power, control -- social currency. In the back of my mind, I’ve always felt that sound was your thing, a hearing person’s thing. And sound is so powerful that it could either disempower me and my artwork, or it could empower me. *I chose to be empowered*.

There’s a massive culture around spoken language. And just because I don’t use my literal voice to communicate, in society’s eyes it’s as if I don’t have a voice at all. So I need to work with individuals who can *support me as an equal and become my voice*. And that way, I’m able to maintain relevancy in society today.

So at school, at work and institutions, I work with many different ASL interpreters. And their voice becomes my voice and identity. *They help me to be heard*. And their voices

hold value and currency.

If I didn't continue this practice, I feel that I could just *fade off into oblivion* and not maintain any form of social currency.

So it's amazing to see how ASL is alive and thriving, just like music is. However, in this day and age, we live in a very audio-centric world. And just because ASL has no sound to it, it automatically holds no social currency. We need to start thinking harder about *what defines social currency* and allow ASL to develop its own form of currency -- without sound. And this could possibly be a step to lead to a more *inclusive society*. And maybe people will understand that you don't need to be deaf to learn ASL, nor do you have to be hearing to learn music.

ASL is such a rich treasure that I'd like you to have the same experience. And I'd like to invite you to open your ears, to open your eyes, *take part in our culture and experience our visual language*. And you never know, you might just fall in love with us.

-TED Fellows Retreat 2015

Interpreted by Denise Kahler-Braaten

TED Talk 4: The danger of a single story (Adichie, 2009)

Presenter: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Medium used: Books, stories

Excerpts: [italics added for emphasis]

I'm a storyteller. And I would like to tell you a few personal stories about what I like to call "the danger of the single story."

...when I began to write, at about the age of seven, stories in pencil with crayon illustrations that my poor mother was obligated to read, *I wrote exactly the kinds of stories I was reading*: All my characters were white and blue-eyed, they played in the snow, they ate apples, and they talked a lot about the weather, how lovely it was that the sun had come out.

What this demonstrates, I think, is how impressionable and *vulnerable we are in the face of a story*, particularly as children. Because all I had read were books in which characters were foreign, I had become convinced that books by their very nature had to have foreigners in them and had to be about things with which I could not personally identify. Now, *things changed when I discovered African books*. There weren't many of them available, and they weren't quite as easy to find as the foreign books.

But because of writers like Chinua Achebe and Camara Laye, I went through *a mental shift in my perception* of literature. I realized that people like me, girls with skin the color of chocolate, whose kinky hair could not form ponytails, could also exist in literature. *I started to write about things I recognized*.

...the year I turned eight, we got a new house boy. His name was Fide. The *only thing* my mother told us about him was that *his family was very poor*. My mother sent yams and rice, and our old clothes, to his family. And when I didn't finish my dinner, my mother would say, "Finish your food! Don't you know? People like Fide's family have nothing." So I felt enormous pity for Fide's family.

Then one Saturday, we went to his village to visit, and his mother showed us a beautifully patterned basket made of dyed raffia that his brother had made. I was startled. It had not occurred to me that anybody in his family could *actually make something*. All I had heard about them was how poor they were, so that it had become impossible for me to see them as anything else but poor. *Their poverty was my single story of them*.

Years later, I thought about this when I left Nigeria to go to university in the United States. I was 19. My American roommate was shocked by me. She asked where I had learned to speak English so well, and was confused when I said that Nigeria happened to have English as its official language. She asked if she could listen to what she called my "tribal music," and was consequently very disappointed when I produced my tape of Mariah Carey.

What struck me was this: She had felt sorry for me even before she saw me. *Her default position toward me, as an African, was a kind of patronizing, well-meaning pity*. My roommate had a single story of Africa: a single story of catastrophe. In this single story, there was no possibility of Africans being similar to her in any way, no possibility of feelings more complex than pity, no possibility of a *connection as human equals*.

So, after I had spent some years in the U.S. as an African, *I began to understand* my roommate's response to me. If I had not grown up in Nigeria, and if all I knew about Africa were from popular images, I too would think that Africa was a place of beautiful landscapes, beautiful animals, and incomprehensible people, fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and AIDS, unable to speak for themselves and waiting to be saved by a kind, white foreigner. I would see Africans in the same way that I, as a child, had seen Fide's family.

But I must quickly add that *I too am just as guilty in the question of the single story*. A few years ago, I visited Mexico from the U.S. ... I remember walking around on my first day in Guadalajara, watching the people going to work, rolling up tortillas in the marketplace, smoking, laughing. I remember first feeling slight surprise. And then, *I was overwhelmed with shame*. I realized that I had been so immersed in the media coverage of Mexicans that they had become *one thing* in my mind, the abject immigrant. *I had bought into the single story* of Mexicans and I could not have been more ashamed of myself.

So that is how to create a single story, *show a people as one thing*, as only one thing, over and over again, *and that is what they become*.

It is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power... Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to *make it the definitive story of that person*.

The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.

I've always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with *all of the stories* of that place and that person. The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. *It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult*. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar.

Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also *repair that broken dignity*.

I would like to end with this thought: That when we reject the single story, when we realize that *there is never a single story* about any place, we regain a kind of paradise.

-TEDGlobal 2009

Summary and Reflection

“Poetry that frees the soul” is a TED Talk I had seen before commencing my research, and it resonated with me as I would recall parts of it often. It introduced me to a few themes that began to echo in my observations of everyday life, and I was moved by the transformation these prisoners underwent. In terms of the beginning phase of the transformative learning process and the prisoner’s initial situation in terms of a “disorienting dilemma,” it struck me as more of an impasse that needed to be overcome than it did an erroneous belief. They felt the need to express things in a way that they were currently unable. What the poetry workshop did was not only introduce them to a tool that allowed their expressions to become manifest, it opened up to them a whole new way of seeing and creating their reality. Through poetry they harnessed the ability to reclaim their narrative and tell their story that was previously silenced. The outcome of this empowerment was a renewed sense of dignity, a connection with others sharing the

same experience, and the ability to see things through a whole new lens. This type of expression allowed them to transcend their daily existence and feel something deeper and more powerful than what they had previously known.

As Domenech (2014) stated in her TED Talk, the prisoners “began to realize that what the poetic language did was to break a certain logic, and create another system. Breaking the logic of language also breaks the logic of the system under which they’ve learned to respond.” Through poetic language they found a sense of freedom to be, say, and create what they wanted to without the rigid guidelines they were so accustomed to. They were able to rediscover a sense of themselves.

This newfound knowledge and ability happened within the context of a class, or workshop, with a facilitator who was herself a poet and transformative learner. She created the space, provided the support, and supplied the resources needed to allow this type of development to flourish. She didn’t buy into the “single story” of prisoners’ motivations, behaviors, and attitudes. She viewed them as they were: other human beings in a situation she could very well be in herself under different circumstances.

Many of these points hit home with me because sign language has a way of breaking a certain logic and creating another system. It breaks the logic of a phonetically based grammatical structure, and by association, a sound-based thought process. In sign language, one can become the tree blowing in the wind or the atom losing an electron. It flourishes in the facets of a story rather than the point of it. Sign language is poetic in its very design, and many users have experienced a similar sense of liberation when able to use sign language freely as opposed to a required standard of a spoken language.

As an interpreter I have often seen the deaf I work with unable to access the resources needed, whether it be in a class, support group, counselling appointment, etc. This talk spoke to the need for a created space of support and communication to equip learners with tools for success. As my first round of investigation revealed, without this space, one's voice could easily go overlooked and unheard. However, as illustrated in this talk, with the right support and resources, one can discover ways to recreate their narrative and be drawn to evoke further positive action.

In her presentation, "Why do I make art?," Kayla also displays a sort of impasse that she needed to overcome. It was that of finding her voice and her identity. She never felt like she was "enough" to be fully a part of any community, so she set out to discover her own. She delved into histories of her ancestors and discovered her "voice" through music and film that reflected her heritage. Using this medium she confronts her fear of people's life stories disappearing and that part of her native heritage would eventually be forgotten. Through the act of filmmaking, she works toward the preservation of this narrative. She had to make the effort to find and acquire the tools to create these stories, and the result was an outpouring of overwhelming support from those who have shared similar fears and experiences. She came to realize the enormous power of storytelling and how harmful it can be when stories are altered or ignored because "when we are denied identity, we become invisible." Yet, as mentioned regarding poetry in the first talk, the authentic expression of creating and sharing stories can serve as a mirror that connects and unites us as human beings, as we actively strive to discover and listen to one another.

Christine emphasized the importance of voice in "The enchanting music of sign language" from another lens. As a deaf artist, her conception of sound was challenged

when it entered into her art realm. In the introduction of this paper, she was quoted as stating that growing up in a world of sound was like “living in a foreign country, blindly following its rules, customs, behaviors and norms without ever questioning them.” Her transformative experience came with the realization that she actually did know sound, as “it could be felt tactually, or experienced as a visual, or even as an idea.” So she decided to “unlearn” everything she was told about sound and “reclaim ownership” of it as she put it into her practice. As Christine stated, “sound is so powerful that it could either disempower me and my artwork, or it could empower me. I chose to be empowered.”

She goes on to describe the impact having an interpreter has on her ability to be heard. She states that “just because I don’t use my literal voice to communicate, in society’s eyes it’s as if I don’t have a voice at all. So I need to work with individuals who can support me as an equal and become my voice. And that way, I’m able to maintain relevancy in society today.” This underscores the responsibility that we have as interpreters to be prepared to faithfully and accurately render the voice of signers in order for their ideas, feelings, questions and stories to be shared. Without a means to communicate, Christine described feeling that she “could just fade off into oblivion and not maintain any form of social currency.” In her work, she goes on to recognize that not all interpreters are the same, and she highlights the importance of working with interpreters she can trust, connect, and collaborate with.

Ultimately, she invites the hearing world into her realm of communicating visually through sign language. As she stated, “We need to start thinking harder about what defines social currency and allow ASL to develop its own form of currency—without sound. And this could possibly be a step to lead to a more inclusive society.”

This reminds me of a vision I have of a world where my job as an interpreter is no longer relevant, where we are all living in a society filled with people who can freely and fluently communicate through sign.

The final TED Talk shared is entitled “The danger of a single story.” This talk really drove home for me the power of representation, and misrepresentation. It acknowledges the variety of ways this power permeates our ways of seeing ourselves, one another, and groups of people in society as a whole. The power of narrative can be explained in the sense that people often base their perceptions on what they’ve heard, have been taught, or have been told. When this information is one-sided or incomplete, it can become what is termed “a single story” or “a single narrative.” The ramifications of believing in a single narrative can be misleading at best, and devastating at worst. One of the functions of transformative learning is the ability to assess a given story or narrative, especially one that you may attest to, and realize that there may be facets that are missing, narrowly defined, or inaccurate.

As interpreters, we are constantly exposed to a wide array of stories, perceptions, and attitudes in the field. Depending on a given situation, we may see things differently than those we are working with, whether it be a hearing/deaf client or a fellow interpreter. Our ability to see things from the other’s perspective provides a way to react more objectively and communicate in a way that can lead, more effectively, to successful interpretation. Understanding not only their language, but their viewpoint, becomes essential when we need to become a person’s voice while they engage in communication with others in dialogue.

Basing opinions on a single narrative, or propagating one, can have the effect of influencing our own attitude and the attitudes of those around us. We need to ask ourselves, are we are only seeing a single story of those with whom we engage with in the field? We need to be open to listen, understand, and connect with those we work with before we communicate. It is our responsibility to build within our solid language foundation an understanding of the deeper issues of equality, voice, and the existence of multiple stories. The intention of active listening and transformative learning is to bring a more present, open, authentic, informed and compassionate interpreter to the field. Our ability to honor, listen to, and understand another's story enhances their ability to share it.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

The information in the previous chapters informed the content and design of the workshop I developed for colleagues in the field of interpreting. This chapter describes the workshop outline as it has been presented, my experiences while presenting, and ideas for future modification.

Workshop Outline

- **Welcome: What to expect for the course of the workshop**
 - Housekeeping
 - Fill out pre-workshop questionnaire (see Appendix B)
 - Participation will be in an open, safe and confidential space to share
 - Learning process to be multi-directional, discovering knowledge through dialogue
 - Please feel free to provide feedback, ask questions throughout

- **Introduction to transformative learning**
 - History of transformative learning theory
 - Explanation/drawing of cognitive processes that shape our reality
 - Phases and outcomes of transformative learning
 - Discussion of personal experiences of transformation
 - Watch YouTube video url: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=cJ3CdgeG4M4>

- **Analysis of transformative learning and personal application**
 - How does the transformative learning process apply to our work in the field?
Discussion
 - Overview and explanation of handouts (see Appendix A)
 - Analysis of transformative processes through observation
 - Watch TED Talk
 - Fill out worksheet, share ideas, discuss emerging themes
 - Watch TED Talk
 - Discuss connected themes. Address the power of narrative and how it relates to our work in the field

- **Concluding remarks**

- Share ideas about how we can continue to develop a more open and flexible lens. What practices can we implement?
- Future learning, resources
- Fill out post-workshop questionnaire, feedback and evaluation form (see Appendix B)
- Gratitude and Good-byes

Discussion

This workshop was intended to be two hours long, a timeframe I chose because I am new to presenting and it seemed like a manageable way to test the waters of workshop facilitation. So far, I have conducted the workshop twice and two hours was not enough time to cover the material with the depth that the workshop has potential for. Both times, participants were intrigued and offered viewpoints and made connections that I had never considered. I received excellent feedback, and the most satisfying result has been the participants reaching out to me later and sharing pertinent information (e.g., articles, books, videos) that they subsequently encountered. These resources were not only relevant to the topics we had discussed, but also were sources of insight they found that had an impact on their personal lives.

I especially enjoyed the atmosphere of the workshop I created, intentionally keeping it to a small group with a comfortable, safe, and relaxing environment. This made it conducive for dialogue, turn taking, and the sharing of stories. The flow worked well, and I was much less tied to my PowerPoint than I had anticipated. I had looked forward to the filling out of worksheets (see Appendix B) during the session as a way to stimulate thinking and reflection after viewing each TED Talk, but during the course of

the workshop it seemed to detract from the natural flow of communication and felt forced and robotic.

For the two-hour timespan, viewing even two TED Talks was a bit of a crunch. There are various ways I've thought about modifying the workshop in the future. One way would be to keep the two-hour timeframe but make it into perhaps a three-part series. Other ways would be to co-present with a Deaf instructor, as well as opening it up to participants who were not interpreters. The diversity of resources related to this topic allows for ongoing exploration that is easily accessible, and each workshop can be delivered in a flexible and versatile way to suit the participants' interests and knowledge base.

Overall, I'm fascinated by the process of transformative learning and the various features it entails. As I explore it further, I am able to consider areas of my own development that permeate all aspects of my life, and as I discuss these things with others I can continually re-examine and expand my own way of seeing the world and those with whom I share it.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Summary

When I underwent a personal shift in my worldview, my new outlook was so profound I endeavored to research what processes were involved in this phenomena of transformation. I discovered a theory that discusses it at length, describing it as transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000). The effects of my personal experience made me more aware, understanding, and open to seeing the perspectives of others. This had a positive impact on my effectiveness as a sign language interpreter, so I set out to create a workshop based on transformative learning theory to explore it further.

Transformative learning theory is based on the premise that we have a specific way of viewing the world based on the schema we acquired during our formative years through our family, culture, belief system, and experiences in our surrounding environment (Mezirow, 1991). Our worldview can change and expand over time, which occurs when we're exposed to new ways of seeing and understanding our reality. Everyone around us has their own set of beliefs and perspectives, and their way of seeing or explaining something may be different from our own. Transformative learning occurs when one realizes that their belief or way of seeing something is limiting and/or inaccurate, leading to a process of dismantling a former understanding and developing a new schema in order to function with this new outlook.

One of the issues I discovered was that many of our beliefs and ways of seeing something are based on a viewpoint or story that is coming from a single narrative. This can happen when that narrative is the only one we have access to or we, for some reason,

reject another way of explaining or viewing the matter. Being truly open to understanding another belief, and being able to access and investigate multiple narratives, was fundamental to my process of transformative learning.

Many deaf individuals cannot easily access or freely participate in their surrounding environment. The dominant culture is built upon a way of transferring information that is heavily dependent on spoken language. Often the hearing world is not cognizant of the presence of the Deaf community at large, and alternative ways of inclusion get overlooked. One of my roles as an interpreter is to serve as a channel that allows access to communication between the deaf and hearing worlds. Part of my responsibility is to provide a voice for the deaf who are involved in the situation. Their willingness to allow an interpreter to voice for them is based on an enormous amount of trust, and interpreters must earn the trust of the Deaf community as professionals that can be relied upon to faithfully render the dialogue taking place. If they don't feel like their voice is being portrayed accurately, they may decide to disengage from fully participating in the communication. An interpreter must be standing on a firm foundation of language comprehension and knowledge of the subject matter at hand to contribute to that trust. However, trust is not built upon language ability and knowledge alone; it is rooted in a profound awareness of the deeper implications embedded within the interpreter's role. This led to the questions: How can we as interpreters acquire insight that promotes a more profound understanding of the power of voice? How can we use this knowledge to create a stronger channel of communication with those we work with in the field?

I began my research by exploring different places I could find deaf individual's first-hand accounts of their experiences when working with sign language interpreters. I

found some phenomenological studies that really echoed what I had also observed when working as an educational interpreter in the field, so I compiled quotes from these published sources that highlighted the feelings and stories the deaf shared in relation to inclusion and having voice. The themes that emerged were (1) Deaf education, self-empowerment, advocacy, and knowledge of rights, (2) interpreters providing optimal services, and (3) systemic change to accommodate full language access.

From this data, I recognized a strong connection between the deaf individuals having a voice and their sense of feeling heard, valued, and included. I furthered my investigation to find stories of a wider audience that also experienced a sense of isolation and consequently discovered ways of empowerment through self-expression. I started finding these stories everywhere. I also noticed that these stories were examples of transformative learning. So for reporting purposes and workshop development, I compiled a series of TED Talks that were presented by individuals who shared their personal journeys of empowerment through use of tools of expression and the creation of their own narrative.

From these compilations, I created a workshop with the objective of providing further insights into how interpreters can acquire a more profound understanding of the power of voice. This became inseparable from a greater theme of the power of narrative and how it shapes our own and others' ways of viewing each other and world. As we endeavor to uncover the multiple narratives of our surrounding environment, we realize the profound value of each person having the right and ability to share their own story. With this holistic understanding of coexisting perspectives, and a deeper appreciation of

the power of voice, it is my hope that we instill this knowledge to create a stronger bond of trust and channel of communication with those we work with in the field.

Future Projects

While the first presentations of my workshop were successful overall, I feel like I was barely able to scratch the surface in the two-hour timeframe I used. I realize that approaching topics of this depth and magnitude is an ever-growing personal process for each of us, whether learning individually or collectively. Throughout my time spent researching and reflecting, a myriad of other themes and ideas began to form that I had to set aside for a future time. However, the nature of these topics served to provide fertile ground for discussion and critical thinking that happened informally throughout my days chatting with colleagues and friends. I hope to continue my research and modify my workshop in a way that is effective for inspiring myself and others to expand our ways of thinking and our approach to what may seem like insurmountable odds. I also hope my motivation for continual transformation is contagious, as we build on methods of learning that invoke collaboration in environments that are authentic, thought-provoking, inclusive, and fun.

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APPENDIX A: TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING WORKSHEET

“Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 10).

“Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our ways of being in the world” (Morrell & O’Conner, 2002, p. xvii).

- 1) What was the Disorienting Dilemma?
- 2) Was there Critical Reflection of a belief or assumption? What was it?
- 3) Describe the dialogue, interaction or collaboration with others.
- 4) What was the outcome? New outlook, new role, new behavior?

Parameters Involved in Transformation

SELF / OTHERS

Empowerment

Sense of responsibility—social action, decisions based on new perspective

Knowledge of self—personal narrative

Personal meaning/purpose

Personality—empathetic, reflective, artistic, intuitive, contemplative, emotional, imaginative

Attitude—tolerance, self-compassion, patience, disposition, acceptance, resilience, steady in the storm, mindful awareness

More open, accepting of uncertainty

Acquiring a new skill to further learning/impact

New ways of engaging with others—teamwork, leadership, communication

Increased cognitive capacity and consciousness

BELIEFS / WORLDVIEW

Existing meaning schema—“unlearning” old beliefs, adding new

Viewpoint, Perspective—expanding, or new way of seeing, multi-faceted lens

Expectations—changed, removed or created

Ways of interpreting an experience—new way or ability to interpret more than one way

More comprehensive or complex worldview

New awareness, new understanding

Spiritual—a stronger awareness and connection with something bigger than themselves

More Holistic

Nine facets of practice relevant to transformative learning:

1. Providing a safe place to encourage discourse and reflection
2. Assuming participants bring a wealth of knowledge and experience
3. Helping people discover they are not alone
4. Facilitating critical thinking
5. Helping people develop voice and the confidence to act
6. Solving problems through synergy
7. Encouraging lifelong and diverse learning for change
8. Promoting the idea that everyone is an important member of a community
9. Implementing continuous improvement

APPENDIX B: PRE AND POST-WORKSHOP QUESTIONNAIRES

Pre-Workshop Questionnaire

What is transformative learning as opposed to traditional learning?

In what context might have you had a transformative learning experience?

How do you think transformative learning might apply to your work as a sign language interpreter?

Post-Workshop Questionnaire

What are four steps involved in the process of perspective transformation?

Identify three outcomes of transformative learning.

List two ways the process of transformative learning can be applied to your practice in the field.

Feedback Questionnaire

What part of the workshop was most enjoyable / beneficial to you?

What concepts do you feel could be further expanded on?

What part(s) of the workshop could be reduced or eliminated?

Other feedback?