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Enhancing the visitor experience: reconceptualising the tour guide's communicative role

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ABSTRACT:

This paper reviews and synthesises research findings to date on (1) the role of the tour guide as experience broker, (2) the relevance and efficacy of guide communication, and in particular the application of nature and heritage interpretation principles to enhance the guided tour experience, and (3) visitor demands and expectations of a tour guide's communication. These collectively provide a basis for deepening and reconceptualising the communicative role of the guide beyond a one-way commentator to that of an experience broker. With this as a foundation, the authors report on how the content of one tour guide training program, the Tonga Whale Guide Training Program (TWGTP), was selected, developed and delivered in a specific developing country context. Based on pre-post differences reported by training participants, the training was successful in impacting the guides' self-reported capacity to broker physical access, encounters, understanding and empathy of their tour groups. The training also improved guides' understanding of and capacity to apply the principles of interpretation to their tours. Perhaps most importantly, participants shifted the importance they placed on enhancing the tourist experience and their capacity to do so. This case study demonstrates that, when informed by theory and research, training can successfully equip guides to engage visitors, impact their understanding and empathy, and enrich their experience.

Keywords: tour guide; experience broker; interpretation; visitor expectation; guide training

1.0   Introduction

This paper draws on research about tour guides' use of mediation and interpretation, together with tourists' expectations of their guides, to reconceptualise the communicative role of the tour guide as a vehicle for brokering and thereby enhancing the visitor experience. *Mediation* in the context of a guided tourist experience may be defined as any active attempt to act as a go-between to help

tourists construct or make sense of their experience (Jennings & Weiler, 2006). It is often used interchangeably with the word broker. *Interpretation*, a term that has been a bit slower to find its way into the tourism literature, is defined as engagement with tourists/visitors in ways that provoke them to think about and connect with natural and cultural heritage, including places, sites, people, artefacts, and natural and historical events, and that foster a sense of care and stewardship among tourists/visitors (Weiler & Black, 2014). While the importance of tour guides and their capacity to be effective mediators and interpreters have been mooted in numerous papers (Holloway, 1981; Ap & Wong, 2001; Bowie & Chang, 2005; Huang et al., 2010; Mak et al., 2011), the pathways and strategies through which a tour guide effectively engages with visitors to enhance visitor experiences are poorly understood. Moreover, the demands and expectations of twenty-first century visitors have grown and evolved, adding to the breadth and depth of what tour guides need to know and be able to do, and in turn adding to what needs to be incorporated into tour guide training. In the meantime, many guide training programs continue to rely on past experience, intuition and casual observations by trainers rather than assessing training needs based on theory and research findings regarding what constitutes successful and effective guide communication and experience brokering (Black et al., 2001). As a result, too often guide training, particularly in developing countries, continues to be focused on hard skills such as vehicle and boat operation, map-reading, first aid, group safety and outdoor recreation competencies (Weiler & Black, 2014) and on language training and technical public speaking skills such as voice projection, diction and eye contact, at the expense of delivering the knowledge and skills required to fully and competently communicate with and engage visitors.

This paper begins with a review and synthesis of research findings to date on (1) the role of the tour guide as experience broker, (2) the relevance and efficacy of guide communication, and in particular the application of nature and heritage interpretation principles to enhance the guided tour experience, and (3) visitor demands and expectations of a tour guide's communication. The aim of this review is to provide a theoretical basis for reconceptualising the communicative role of the guide as an experience broker, which can then inform the identification of the content of tour guide training. A secondary aim is to illustrate the application of these findings to the development of selected elements of one tour guide training program, the Tonga Whale Guide Training Program, developed for and delivered in a specific developing country context.

2.0   Literature and significance

Prior to reviewing relevant research on the guide as experience broker and communicator, it is useful to set this paper in the broader context of the tour guiding and guide training literature. At a macro level, there is considerable support by researchers and scholars for the multiple roles played by guides and their various accountabilities to a wide range of stakeholders (Weiler & Davis, 1993; Ballantyne & Hughes, 2001; Black & Weiler, 2005). In recent years, attention has turned to the guide's roles in relation to sustainability outcomes, including improving levels of understanding and valuing of sites, communities, cultures and environments, influencing and monitoring on-site visitor behaviour, and fostering pro-conservation attitudes and behaviours (Ballantyne, Packer & Hughes, 2009; Weiler & Kim, 2011; Hu & Wall, 2012). In their recent review of some fifty years of tour guiding research and scholarship, Weiler and Black (2014) conclude that there has been a shift away from

guides playing a largely instrumental role (e.g. managing tour logistics) to playing multiple roles relating to destinations, sustainability, mediation and experience. Nonetheless, the communicative aspects of guiding, particularly via interpretation, have been and continue to be highlighted as central to guiding practice and guide training since the first comprehensive tour guiding textbook was written by Pond (1993).

Acknowledging this broader context, the remainder of this paper focuses on the guide as experience broker and particularly the communicative roles that a guide plays to enhance the visitor experience. Three bodies of literature are reviewed for this paper, selected for their potential relevance to the present context: training guides with little or no previous training who are employed in a developing country context, primarily to guide groups of visitors from developed countries. While these bodies of literature sit alongside each other and the intersections between them may seem self-evident to some, there has been very little cross-referencing between them. Thus an important contribution of this paper is to foster cross-fertilisation of the concepts, findings and implications embedded in each, as a basis for re-examining and reconceptualising the communicative role of the guide in relation to enriching the visitor experience and the implications of this for tour guide training.

The first body of literature includes studies focused on *the guide as mediator and experience broker*. Much of the theorising in these studies has developed on the basis of observational studies of guides and guided tours, including participant-observation and in some cases interviews with guides. Researchers contributing to the second body of literature, *interpretation principles and practice*, have drawn on a wide range of study contexts and methods but mainly in a non-commercial context such as national parks and heritage sites. This literature focuses largely on non-personal, unguided media such as signs, exhibits, audio-visual presentations, computer-based communication, and static and interactive media used in visitor centres rather than on tour guides and guiding. Nonetheless, a number of interpretation studies have included face-to-face communication with visitors, and a few of these have collected quantitative and qualitative data in the context of guided tours. The third body of literature, research on *visitors' expectations of tour guides* and their perceptions of the performance of these guides, is underpinned mainly by quantitative surveys of visitors on guided tours.

2.1   The tour guide as mediator / experience-broker

Few would argue that a key role played by tour guides is as an experience broker (Jennings & Weiler, 2006), yet literature on the tour guide as mediator is quite limited. This section of the paper focuses on prior research on the mediatory and experience management sphere of tour guiding.

Within the mediatory sphere of tour guiding, guides can broker visitors' physical access (to places and spaces), visitor encounters (interactions with host communities and environments), visitor understanding (cognitive access) and visitor empathy (affective or emotional access) (Weiler & Yu, 2007; McGrath, 2007). The guide's role as a mediator/broker in each of these four domains can be positive as well as negative; that is, the guide can facilitate but can also limit access, encounters, understanding and empathy (Markwell, 2001). Much of this is done by way of verbal and non-verbal communication with visitors. The following paragraphs report relevant research findings within each

of these four mediatory domains to illustrate how guides can use communication to broker and thus enrich the visitor experience. The implications for training are examined in a later section of this paper.

Firstly, Macdonald (2006) and Weiler and Yu (2007) acknowledge the role of guides in *brokering physical access* to places and spaces. They do this not only by physically channelling and manoeuvering visitors to be in the right place at the right time, but also by what Arnould et al. (1998) refer to as communicative staging; that is, by controlling what and how they present and interpret to visitors. In what MacCannell (1976) calls staged authenticity, guides can: focus on the 'front stage'; introduce visitors to real and authentic backstages in response to visitors' desire for authenticity; or construct a pseudo 'backstage' that gives visitors the impression of authenticity. In other words, tour guides can mediate physical access by not only providing opportunities to see and experience elements of the local environment, heritage and culture but also by determining what is not revealed to visitors (Holloway, 1981). Howard et al.'s (2001) study of Indigenous tour guides in one national park in regional Australia found that guides played a role in mediating (limiting) physical access to sites through the use of both verbal communication and role-modelling.

Secondly, both Macdonald (2006) and Weiler and Yu (2007) stress that the guide is a *broker of encounters* or interactions within and between the group and host communities and environments, for example by providing language interpretation and facilitating communication between hosts and visitors. Guides also broker encounters with heritage (Macdonald, 2006) and nature (Markwell, 2001). As with physical access, a guide can also limit visitors' interactions by drawing a group's attention inwards toward the guide rather than outwardly directing it (Holloway, 1981; Cohen, 1985). Tour guides can passively or actively mediate encounters and may act as a role model for appropriate environmental, social and cultural behaviour and interactions (Gurung et al., 1996; Weiler & Yu, 2007).

The third and most researched domain of mediation is the guide as a *broker of understanding* (Macdonald, 2006; Weiler & Yu, 2007) or intellectual access (McGrath, 2007). Tour guides can mediate understanding by using information as a tool for conveying the significance of a place or site (Ap & Wong, 2001; Bras, 2000; Hughes, 1991). Often they use multi-lingual skills that visitors and hosts may lack in order to bridge communication gaps. Howard et al. (2001) concluded in their case study of Indigenous guides that the guides played a role in mediating access to information (understanding) through the use of interpretive techniques and role-modelling, but also by challenging stereotypes and visitors' misconceptions about Aboriginal culture. The guides' brokering role revolved largely around communicating and interpreting local cultural values, both those of the site and those of Aboriginal society more generally. Several other studies have observed tour guides' use of interpretive techniques ranging from the use of anecdotes and other techniques that personalise the commentary to non-verbal and interactive communication tools to foster understanding and meaning-making. (Leclerc & Martin, 2004; Davidson and Black, 2007)

As with the first two domains of mediation, there are also studies that demonstrate the role of guides as negative mediators of understanding, in the sense of inhibiting rather than fostering understanding. For example, McGrath (2007) is critical of tour guiding of archaeological sites in Peru that predominantly focuses on knowledge transfer rather than on brokering understanding. Like

Kohl (2007), McGrath suggests that the role of the guide in developing countries needs to mature to being a facilitator and broker of multiple meanings rather than the more traditional 'show and tell' role currently played by guides in many of these countries.

The *brokering of empathy or emotion* is the final and least developed of the four domains in which guides mediate experiences. McGrath suggests that a tour guide needs to help visitors "get under the skin" (2007: 376) of places, rather than just providing physical and intellectual access. Eliciting affective outcomes has also become topical in the interpretation literature (Madin & Fenton, 2004). Modlin et al. (2011) observed how guides at a southern US-based heritage site used interpretive techniques such as storytelling to create not only cognitive but affective connections with the former plantation owners. However, through selectivity in narrative content and in how and where they move visitors through the site, guides in this study actually failed to create empathy for the enslaved community. Packer and Ballantyne (2013) propose that incorporating reflection or reflective activities into the visitor experience can promote emotional engagement. They describe reflection as "a deliberate attempt to process the events, and the associated feelings" (page 170), and report evidence from the adult education and learning literature that supports reflection as an important process for integrating sensations, perceptions, feelings, emotions, memories and ideas together with old and new information to make new meanings. Similar to mediating understanding, the mediation of empathy or emotion is heavily reliant on a guide's skills in interpretation.

In summary, there is a body of research on the mediatory sphere of guiding, particularly the guide's mediation or brokering of *understanding* (cognition), although comparatively less research on the other three mediatory domains of brokering *physical access*, *encounters* with host communities and environments, and *emotion* or affect. Weiler and Black (2014) note that the body of knowledge on mediation has not been used to inform training, particularly with respect to the knowledge and skills that guides require to be effective experience brokers. Among other recommendations for research, they call for detailed investigation into training that develops guiding knowledge and skills in each of the four domains of mediation/brokering – physical access, encounters (interactions), understanding (cognitive access) and empathy (emotional access).

2.2   *The efficacy of interpretation principles in enhancing the guided experience*

The second body of literature that can underpin critical analysis of the use of communication by guides to enhance the visitor experience, and in turn inform the identification of the content of tour guide training, is the heritage and nature interpretation literature. While there has been some separation of the two fields of heritage interpretation and nature interpretation in the past, they are underpinned by the same concepts and share the same purposes as defined at the outset of this paper. Moscardo's early efforts (Moscardo, 1996; Moscardo & Woods, 1998) to engage theoretically and empirically with the principles of interpretation and explore their relevance to tourist experiences are important here. In particular, her work in integrating the mindfulness concept into interpretive delivery led to a call for widespread application and extension of the principles of interpretation to tourism and specifically to tour guiding, a call that has been sustained for more than a decade (Davidson & Black, 2007; Peake, 2007; Pereira & Mykletun, 2012). The authors share the views of Moscardo (1996), Ham and Weiler (2003) and others (Weiler & Black, 2014) that the application of interpretation principles to tour guiding can enhance the guided tour.

As noted earlier, interpretation can also achieve other pre-determined outcomes of benefit to other stakeholders and destinations (Ormsby and Mannle, 2006: Kohl, 2007; Jensen, 2010; Hu & Wall, 2012; Pereira & Mykletun, 2012) but these are not the focus of the present paper.

There is a substantial body of literature on interpretation principles, but much of this focuses on the application of these to non-personal, unguided interpretation practice. This section of the literature review provides a brief synopsis of the principles of interpretation as they pertain to tour guiding, and particularly on the findings of research examining the links between interpretation principles and the outcome of an enriched visitor experience.

Since Tilden (1957) first defined a set of principles of interpretation, at least a dozen other authors, some of whom have authored multiple textbooks and training manuals, have tried to capture the key 'best practice' principles of interpretation (Skibins et al., 2012). Drawing on communication, museum and heritage studies and, more fundamentally, cognitive and behaviour psychology, a body of theory has emerged to better understand and explain the effectiveness of interpretation (Ham & Weiler, 2003). In their meta-analysis of research that has sought to produce evidence of the efficacy of specific interpretation principles in achieving desired outcomes, Skibins et al. (2012) identified 18 interpretation practice sources (including Tilden), mainly written for American audiences and nearly all for interpretation in natural settings, particularly in national parks.

Skibins et al. (2012) identify 17 interpretation best practice principles potentially applicable to tour guiding, all of which have been developed exclusively in Western, developed country contexts. It is not possible or even appropriate to discuss all of these in this review, as some of the principles are targeted at fostering change or reinforcing key values, attitudes and behaviours associated with conservation and so are not directly relevant to brokering or enhancing the visitor experience. Those that are particularly relevant to enriching the experience of visitors on guided tours are listed in Table 1.

==Table 1 about here==

Much of the tour guiding literature has been uncritical in its consideration of the application of specific interpretation principles and the relative efficacy of these principles in achieving desired outcomes in a tour guiding context. Skibins et al.'s (2012) study is thus important, in that they conducted a meta-analysis of 70 peer-reviewed articles published between 1996 and 2009 that reported on studies attempting to link the application of interpretation principles to 6 outcomes, one of which was visitor experience and satisfaction. Most of the studies were undertaken in the US (60%) or Australia (30%), and 95% were undertaken in Western contexts. Somewhat surprisingly, of the 70 articles reviewed, only 10 studies examined links between interpretation principles and the outcome of visitor experience or satisfaction. Notwithstanding these limitations in scope, interpretation principles that were found to be effective in these studies in enhancing the visitor experience were (i) actively involving visitors (9 studies), (ii) theme development (8 studies), (iii) use of relevant messages (5 studies), (iv) diversity of communication approaches, activities or media (4 studies) and (v) physical interaction with the site or resource (4 studies) (see Table 1).

In their review of a wide range of research on the application of interpretation to tour guiding including Skibins et al. (2012) and Weiler and Black (2014) conclude that interpretive principles that have been found to deliver satisfaction and enrich visitor experiences include (i) interpretation via a diversity of enjoyable communication approaches, activities and experiences, (ii) interpretation designed to promote the use of two or more senses, (iii) interpretation designed to facilitate individual and group involvement, contact or participation, (iv) communicating the relevance of an object, artefact, landscape or site to visitors, (v) communicating by way of theme development (thematic interpretation), (vi) communicating accurate fact-based information that facilitates understanding, and (vii) interpretation that makes people feel empathy or emotion (Weiler & Black, 2014). As shown in Table 1, these closely align with the meta-analysis of Skibins et al. (2012). They also resonate with at least three of the four domains of mediation reviewed in Section 2.1, notably brokering interaction, understanding and empathy. The relevance of the last column of the table is explained later in the paper.

Table 1:   **Principles of Interpretation that Enhance the Guided Tour Experience**

Skibins et al (2012)	Weiler & Black (2014)	To enhance the visitor experience guides need to make "IT-REAL"
Physical interaction with the site or resource	Promoting the use of two or more senses	I = Involving (sensory)
Actively involving visitors	Facilitating individual and group involvement, contact or participation	I = Involving (active)
Theme development	Communicating by way of thematic interpretation	T = Thematic
Use of relevant messages	Communicating the relevance of an object, artefact, landscape or site	R = Relevant
Diversity of communication approaches, activities and media	Diversity of enjoyable approaches, activities and experiences	E = Enjoyable (through diversity of experience)
	Communication that engages empathy or emotion	E = Engaging empathy/emotion
	Communicating accurate information that facilitates understanding	A = Accurate and L = Logical (facilitates understanding)

This implies the need for training programs to equip guides with the knowledge and skills to apply these principles, and many training programs may well do this. However, the links between the teaching of specific interpretation principles and the guide's capacity to enrich the visitor experience have not been examined in any formal way.

2.3   *Visitors' expectations of tour guides*

A third body of literature that examines the links between communication by tour guides and the visitor experience and thus has relevance to tour guide training is research on the demands and expectations of the visitor. For example, in Black and Weiler's (2005) review of 12 of studies over a period of 22 years (1979 to 2001) the most frequently mentioned roles expected of guides – interpreter/educator, information giver, leader, motivator of conservation values/role model, social role/catalyst, and cultural broker/mediator – all rely on a guide's knowledge and skills in communication. In the ensuing decade since this study was published, visitors' expectations of their guides as communication and experience brokers seem to be increasing. Although there has been no published research focused on visitors' expectations of a guide's role *as an experience broker* as such, a number of studies have included visitors' expectations and perceived performance of *guides as interpreters* (Beaumont, 1991; Peake, 2007; Randall & Rollins, 2009; Weiler & Crabtree, 1999). Perhaps not surprisingly, the results have been mixed, with the guide's interpretation often perceived as falling short of expectations of visitors, assessors and others.

Only a handful of studies have sought to empirically investigate the guide's competency or the visitor's satisfaction with the guide's *performance of specific interpretation principles*.   Weiler and Crabtree (1999), for example, used expert structured observation of guiding performance and feedback from visitors on a number of ecotour experiences in Australia to conclude that guides performed strongly on most evaluative criteria dealing with site knowledge, tour management and interpersonal communication skills, but poorly on indicators pertaining to the application of interpretation principles, especially the delivery of *thematic interpretation* (e.g. evidence of a theme, sequencing, introduction and conclusion). Ham and Weiler (2003) found that guides were perceived by their clients (n=297) and the researchers as successfully applying the principles of enjoyment and relevance on their cruise-based tours to the Galapagos and Alaska. Guides who presented information in an *enjoyable* way, provided *understanding* of local features and phenomena and made the information *relevant* were viewed by visitors as delivering high quality experiences.

In summary, the concept of effective communication by tour guides has moved well beyond one-way delivery of commentary to that of experience brokering, applying mediation and interpretation principles. Words such as narrative, story-telling, staging, interpretation and even "choreography" (Beedie, 2003) are often used by researchers in describing the techniques used by tour guides to broker a satisfying visitor experience. Visitors too "… are now well informed, more interested, and have high expectations of their guides … to have not only the ability to convey factual information but other skills such as interpretation …" (Weiler & Black, 2014: 116). That said, research that explores or examines the efficacy of guide training with respect to interpretation and mediation and their contribution to enhancing the visitor experience seems to be non-existent.

2.4   Implications for the identification of guide training content

The three bodies of literature – tour guide mediation/brokering, heritage and nature interpretation and visitor expectations of guides as communicators – are distinct and mostly disconnected in the academic literature, and yet they are complementary. Collectively they suggest the need for deepening and reconceptualising the communicative role of the guide, which in turn suggests a number of implications for tour guide training. Most tour guide training, particularly in developing

countries, seems to be designed and delivered in isolation of scholarly literature and thus uninformed by research findings such as those presented in this paper. Training that focuses exclusively on the hard skills necessary for guides to lead and manage groups can fall short of enabling guides to be successful at meeting the needs and expectations of visitors and brokering a quality experience. Because enhancing the visitor experience is communication-dependent, tour guide training needs to have a strong emphasis on the acquisition and refinement of so-called soft skills, notably a guide's communication and interpretation skills to help broker physical, interactive, cognitive, and affective access, including visitors' expectations of these.

It is acknowledged that there are some very good training materials and products including tour guide training texts, workbooks and video packages that, while not reviewed for this paper, include many specific and highly effective communication and interpretation techniques (e.g. Ballantyne et al., 2000; Pastorelli, 2003). Guide training programs in developing countries may include mediation and interpretation skills and knowledge, however, they rarely convey the research and interpretation principles that underpin these techniques, and thus their transferability across different guiding contexts and in turn their usefulness to guides is greatly constrained.

In summary, to enhance the visitor experience and remain relevant to visitors in the 21st century, guides need to be competent experience brokers and interpreters and to do this, they need to understand and be able to apply the principles of interpretation that are relevant in a tour guiding context.

3.0   The Development of Interpretive Guide Training: A Case Study of the Tonga Whale Guide Training Program

The remainder of this paper describes the development of an interpretive guide training program that is underpinned by a reconceptualisation of the communicative role of the tour guide, as informed by the literature on tour guide mediation/brokering, the application of interpretation principles to tour guiding, and visitor expectations of guides that has been presented in this paper. The program, referred to here as the TWGTP (Tonga Whale Guide Training Program), was developed and delivered by the authors (in collaboration with others) in 2012 to train guides who broker the experiences of mainly overseas tourists swimming with Humpback whales in the wild. The focus here is on *training content*; other considerations such as who to involve in developing a training program, training participant prerequisites such as aptitude, attitude and language competency, trainer qualifications, training delivery methods and teaching and learning styles are discussed elsewhere (Kohl, 2007; Christie & Mason, 2003; Weiler & Ham 2002). There are some specific communicative roles (e.g. public relations, interactions with other sectors of the tourism industry, cross-cultural communication, handling complaints, and the delivery of sustainability messages) and instrumental roles (e.g. navigation, itinerary management, group safety) that also are not reported in this paper. While all of these were included in the training program that is the subject of this case study, this paper focuses on the identification of training content designed to build the guide's communicative competence in relation to enriching the visitor experience.

3.1   Case study background

Tonga is a South Pacific archipelago made up of four small groups of 176 islands scattered longitudinally north of New Zealand between Fiji and the Cook Islands. Distinguished in the region for not having completely lost its indigenous governance in the Pacific's history of European rule, Tonga remains the only monarchy in the Pacific. Tonga is also identified as a critical South Pacific breeding and birthing habitat for Humpback whales, on which its national tourism industry and attraction is largely based, along with being an international yachting destination, both during the months of April and October. It has a very limited export base in agricultural goods, imports a high proportion of its food, experiences high unemployment among its largely rural-based population and remains dependent on external aid to offset its trade deficit. Hence, tourism is economically vital to Tonga, as it represents its second largest source of hard currency earnings following remittances (that is, money sent home by Tongan communities overseas, who represent up to a third of its population of 106,000 at any one time) (Central Intelligence Agency, 2014).

Tonga was the first nation (globally) to officially permit swimming with Humpback whales and their newborn young. This industry has grown rapidly since the late 1990s (IFAW, 2009) after being initiated by one expatriate tourism operator, and the majority of overseas tourists (83%) who arrive by air visit Tonga specifically for this experience, whilst 53% of arrivals by yacht also watch or swim with the whales (Kessler and Harcourt, 2010). Beyond this, there is little verifiable information regarding the profile or expectations of current visitors to Tonga. The industry is predominantly operated by expatriate owners and managers, though all operations employ local guides, boat crew and skippers, and has expanded in the last few years to be conducted in all four island groups of Tonga. This rapid growth is consistent with the international growth and attraction of marine mammal tourism in the past 10 years (Walker and Hawkins, 2013).

The 68 individuals who participated in the training program, whose responses are reported in this paper, were mainly Tongans who, along with a few expatriate guides working in Tonga, collectively represented 23 whale tourism operations including both Tongan and expatriate owned operations. Nearly all of the Tongan participants had virtually no previous formal training in tour guiding and while many were reasonably fluent in English, most lacked confidence in speaking to overseas visitors, let alone leading and managing groups of tourists, providing commentary and interpretation, and brokering the experience.

3.2   Training program content

Tonga, via the industry's representative body in collaboration with the government's business enterprise centre, requested the development and delivery of a training program that could be the basis for national accreditation. While the program needed to be designed to suit local conditions and participants, who were almost exclusively Tongan, the controversial nature of permitting swimming with wild Humpback whales and their calves also meant it needed to be of an acceptable standard in order to stand up to international scrutiny. These and other considerations such as environmental and community sustainability issues relating to appropriate environmental

management, compliance and conduct by local Tongan employed guides and boat crews, as well as local retention, employee performance and visitor satisfaction were identified in a previously conducted pilot study and are discussed in Walker and Moscardo (2011).

The development of the TWGTP provided the authors with the opportunity to incorporate theory and research findings into the training program, in particular the literature on tour guiding, mediation, interpretation and tourist expectations of each of these that underpins the present paper. The program was delivered by a 4-person team (plus 2 Tongan language interpreters and assistants) over 5 days and included 7 training modules:

1) Introduction to Tourism (local, regional and global perspective of tourism and specifically marine wildlife tourism; understanding tourists, their expectations and the tourist experience)
2) Tour Planning (logistical planning and the tour as a story book – beginning, middle and end)
3) Interpretive Guiding (understanding and applying interpretive principles taught via six pillars which formed the acronym IT-REAL = Involving, Thematic, Relevant, Enjoyable/Engaging, Accurate and Logical) (see column 3 of Table 1)
4) Group Management (including observation, leadership, cross-cultural and non-verbal communication skills)
5) Ecotourism and Guiding Goals (introducing contemporary sustainability perspectives and goals, a guiding model and the personal insight interpretive approach - PIIA[1], to facilitate tourists' reflection)
6) Humpback Whale Information (biology, behaviour, habitat, threats)
7) Industry Regulations, Risk Management and Operational Skills

Collectively the modules included lectures, whole-group and small group discussion sessions, group activities, individual in-class and out-of-class exercises, demonstrations, and role-plays. Training in the application of mediating/brokering the tourist experience, interpretive guiding principles and visitor expectations as discussed in this paper, were included as components in all modules but particularly as parts of Modules 1, 3 and 4 and involved approximately 35% of the training hours, and close to 50% of the training if the participants' interpretive presentations are included (delivered as part of their assessment process).

The three bodies of literature informed the training in different ways. The concepts associated with *mediation/brokering* underpinned substantial components of the training. Specifically, content was developed and delivered that would enable the guides to be able to give visitors *physical access* to, and *manage interactions and encounters* with Humpback whales and their habitat with the opportunity to observe, photograph and swim with whales. These components were delivered via hard skills training such as swimming, snorkelling, boat handling, navigation, regulations and operational best practice (Module 7), group management (Module 4), and sustainability principles (Modules 1 and 5). *Facilitating encounters* also requires the guide to understand the whales and their behaviours (Module 6). Of particular relevance to this paper, guides were also trained in

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[1]The PIIA consists of a simple series of questions to ask tourists towards the end of a tour to encourage consideration of specific moments of their experience most important to them and reflect upon this meaning. It can be asked in a group or individual setting and is a product of empirical research that explored tourists' responses and cognitive linkages between interpretive activities in an ecotourism setting and their reflective outcomes referred to as "personal insights" (Walker & Moscardo, 2011).

interpretive guiding knowledge and skills that would enable them to communicate and thus *broker understanding* (Module 3) of whale habitat, behaviour and biology, about the threats to whales, and about the actions that visitors and others can take to help protect them. Finally, interpretive knowledge and skill was developed in the training to ensure guides could *engage visitors on an affective (emotional) level* (Modules 3 and 5 where an interpretive approach to facilitate tourists' reflective process was introduced (see earlier footnote).

The *interpretation* literature, and particularly the identification of interpretation principles relevant to tour guiding, directly informed the Interpretive Guiding module (3), packaged and delivered as six "pillars" of interpretation (see column 3 of Table 1). As foreshadowed earlier in the paper, these six principles align closely with Weiler and Black's (2014) and Skibins' et al.'s (2012) interpretation principles: *involving* (active and sensory), *thematic*, *relevant* (content, to what visitors know and care about), *enjoyable* (diverse approaches) and *emotionally engaging*, *accurate* (facilitates understanding) and *logical* (organised and sequential).

Finally, research on visitor expectations of their guides was incorporated directly into Module 1 and also indirectly informed Modules 3, 4 and 5.

3.3   *Methods and results of a pre and post-survey of participants involved in the training*

Pre- and post-training questionnaires were provided to all 68 training participants to fill in on a voluntary basis at the beginning and immediately following the training program (Kirkpatrick, 1983). These were administered using a respondent numbering system that preserved the anonymity of the participant to reduce social desirability bias, while allowing for matched-pairs analysis. Both closed (rating) and open-ended (written and oral) feedback was sought from the guide training participants; only those questions and responses that are relevant to the focus of this paper are included here. The pre- and post-training questionnaires included an identical set of 30 questions regarding skills and knowledge included in the training program. The participants answered each of the 30 questions from two perspectives: (i) how *well they could perform* these skills or had this knowledge; and (ii) *how important* they felt these skills or knowledge were to their guiding role. Respondents (guides) rated themselves on a scale of 5, from "I can't do this or I don't know this" (1) to "I can do this really well or I know this really well" (5), and from "Not important" (1) to "Essential" (5) respectively. Some of the rating items were quite specific skills and techniques (e.g. non-verbal communication, facilitating group interaction); others were more broad-based questions relating to one or more interpretation principles (e.g. theme development); and still others asked respondents to rate their capacity to enhance the visitor experience (e.g. provide a satisfying experience). In the latter case, participants were asked to rate themselves on a 5-point scale regarding their ability to provide tourists with a satisfying experience (from "I don't really know how to do this at all" to "I know how to do this really well and know my tourists have satisfying experiences on my tours"). Selected responses are presented here that illustrate what the training participants reported they had learned regarding mediation/brokering the experience (4 questions), interpretation principles (9 questions), and providing a satisfying experience (1 question). There was also a set of open-ended questions in the pre and post questionnaires, one of which asked what participants felt were the most important things a guide needs to do in their job.

The sample size (n) for the results reported here varied between 46 and 50. The statistical analysis used for the identical scale questions was a paired-sample t-test to determine if there was a significant difference between each respondent's pre- and post-training responses (p <. 05). The open-ended questions were qualitatively analysed using the SPSS Text Analytics software designed to identify recurring themes and concepts in relatively short answer responses. These respondent-derived categories and their response examples were subsequently analysed by a second coder familiar with the results and questionnaire. This second iteration of the categories was then independently considered by a third coder who was an experienced researcher and trainer in the program. The final set of categories presented in this paper represents a consensus between the three coders.

3.3.1   *Results of the training: Brokering the visitor experience*

Figure 1 shows pre- and post-training means for the program-specific scale items related to brokering aspects of communication. Items were worded to be consistent with the content of the training program. It is clear that the training impacted respondents' (guides') views of both the importance of the four domains of mediation/brokering and their own competence as experience brokers in relation to these four domains, with statistically significant improvement on all of these (p<0.05). The bar graphs in Figure 1 show that respondents' perceptions of their own competence appear to have been particularly impacted by the training.

==Figure 1 here==

Figure 1 Respondents' (guides') perceptions of the 4 domains of brokering the visitor experience
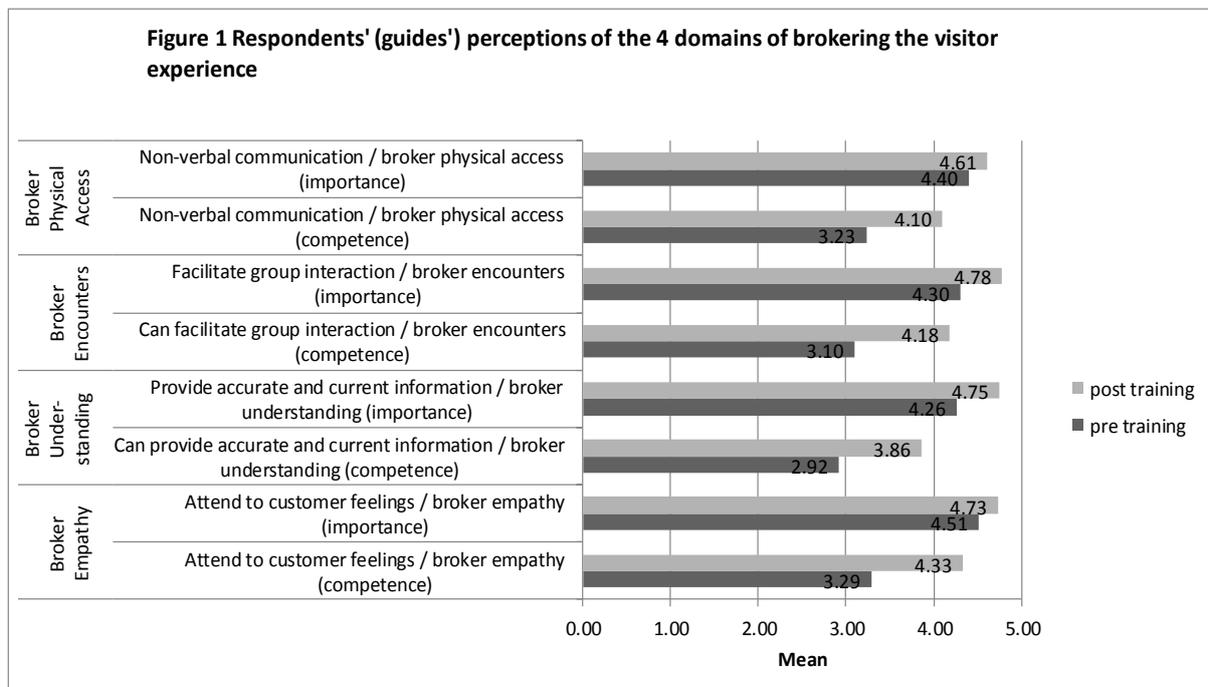
3.3.2 Results of training: Interpretation principles

Figure 2 presents the pre- and post-training ratings of respondents on 9 items relating to the application of interpretation principles to tour guiding. Again, there were statistically significant improvements on both importance and performance ratings of all of these ($p<0.05$). It is clear that the training impacted respondents' (guides') views of both the importance of the interpretation principles and their own competence as interpretive guides, with statistically significant improvement on all nine items ($p<0.05$). The bar graphs in Figure 2 show that respondents' perceptions of their own competence in some cases appear to have been dramatically impacted by the training.

Figure 2 here

Figure 2 Respondents' (guides') perceptions of interpretive guiding roles and principles
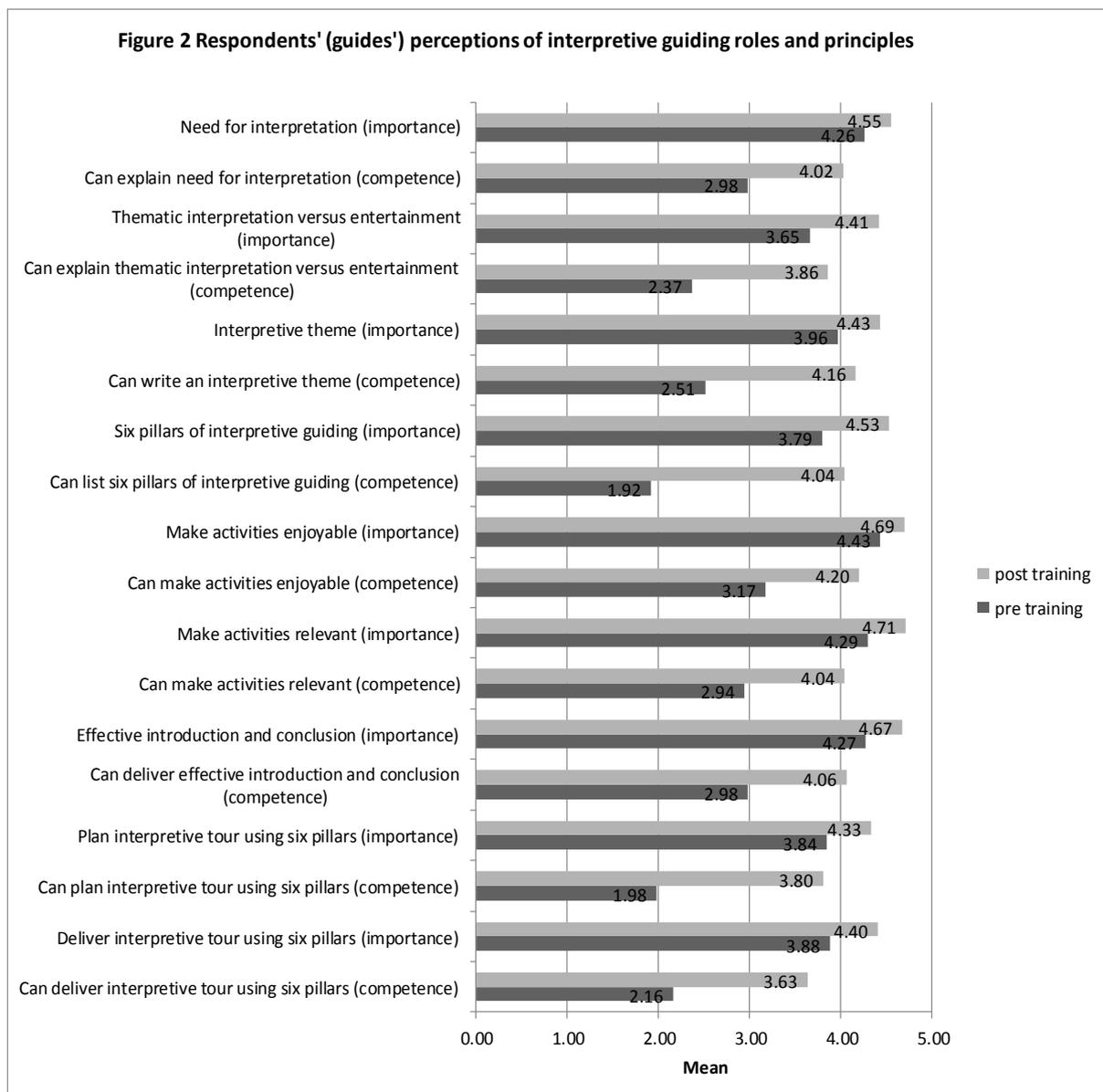
3.3.3   Results of training: Providing satisfying visitor experiences

Again, self-ratings by respondents (guides), in this case regarding their capacity to provide a satisfying visitor experience, significantly improved from 3.3 pre-training to 4.0 post-training (p<0.05) (see Figure 3). Perhaps most notable with respect to enhancing the visitor experience, however, were the pre- and post-training responses to the open-ended question asking participants to identify the most important things for guides to do in their job (see Figure 4). The response descriptions for the categories that appear in Figure 4 are presented in Table 2. As illustrated, the most common response provided to this open-ended question pre-training was that guides should look out for the safety of their group. The frequency with which this was mentioned remained much the same in the post-training responses. However, the dominance of this response was replaced post-training by the response that guides should enhance the visitor experience (e.g. provide a good or new experience; satisfy the tourists; keep the tourists happy; look after customer needs; make it memorable). The frequency with which open-ended comments were made regarding the importance of enhancing the visitor experience post-training was more than double its occurrence pre-training.

Figure 3 here

Figure 4 here

Table 2 here

Figure 3: Respondents' (guides') perceptions of their capacity to provide satisfying tourist experiences
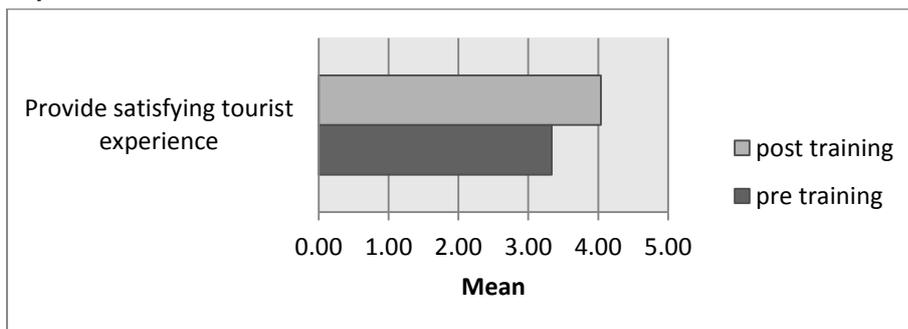

Figure 4: Respondents' (guides') perceptions of important aspects of tour guiding
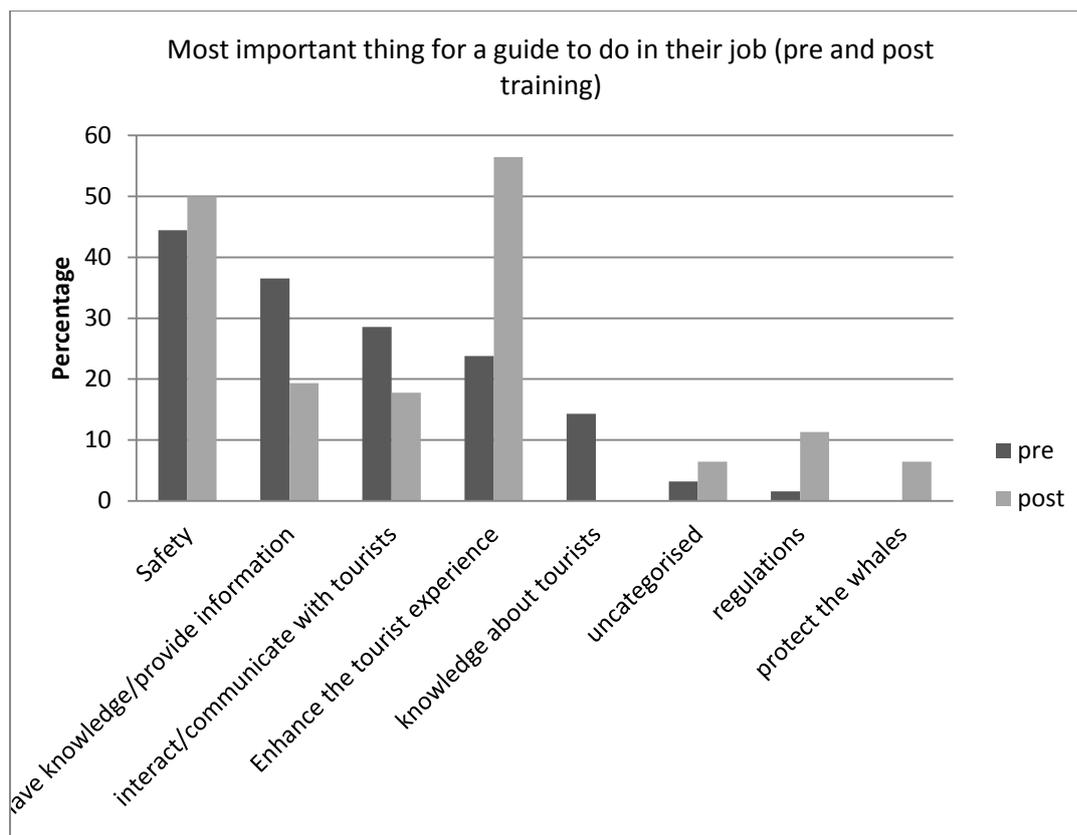
Most important thing for a guide to do in their job (pre and post training)

Table 2: Response descriptions for Figure 4 (most important aspects of guiding) categories

Category	Definition
Safety	keep tourists safe/ensure safety
	meet safety standards/practices
	awareness of risks
	provide safety information
Have knowledge/provide information	knowledge of whales
	provide information for tourists
	accurate information
Interact/communicate with tourists	communication/speaking skills
	leadership/confidence
	English/language skills
	answering questions
	being friendly/smiling
	involve people
	make it relevant
Enhance the tourist experience	provide a good/new experience
	satisfy the tourists/customer satisfaction
	keep the tourists happy/make them enjoy it
	look after the tourists/customer needs
	make it memorable
Knowledge about tourists	know about tourists/different types of tourists
	know what tourists want/read the tourists
	how to handle/deal with tourists

Regulations	know regulations
	Tell people the rules
	importance of regulations
	follow/abide by regulations

4.0 Discussion, study limitations and implications

In some cases, the significant differences between pre- and post-training perceptions found in this case study may be a result of low levels of awareness and perceived competency prior to the training in relation to both experience brokering and interpretation. Many of the guides had no previous formal training or had been exposed only to training conducted by a conservation organisation with a primary goal of whale conservation and providing whale information. Nonetheless, the post-training responses on the experience-brokering and interpretation competence items are remarkably high, rarely below a 4 on the 5-point scale. It is acknowledged that participants' self-reports of what they learned or gained from training provides only part of the picture of the impact of the training on guides' capacity to communicate and to enrich the visitor experience. Clearly, on-the-job observations and responses from visitors would provide a more complete picture of the guides' roles and competencies in enhancing the visitor experience. This was attempted in a six-month follow-up field-based study, but proved to be highly resource-intensive with too many in-field variables that could not be controlled or accounted for. Not surprisingly, this type of evaluation is rarely undertaken in tourism or indeed in the evaluation of training of any type (Weiler & Ham, 2002).

It also needs to be acknowledged that this paper has applied the theory and findings gleaned from the literature to a single case study in a developing country context, while (as noted earlier) the principles of interpretation (and to a lesser extent mediation) were developed in western, developed countries. Wider application to other types of tours in other countries (both developed and developing) is needed before generalising beyond the present study context, particularly for guides being trained to broker experiences of non-western tourists. Notwithstanding these limitations, the results of the case study reveal that training that is informed by sound theory and the findings of research with respect to mediation/brokering, interpretation and visitor expectations of these can indeed inform training and that such training can be effective in impacting participants' perceptions of themselves, their knowledge and skills and the importance of the guide's role.

Acknowledging these limitations, the findings support the premise of this paper: that the communicative role of the guide should and can be reconceptualised. Guide training in experience brokering, communication and interpretation can and did succeed in shifting participants' understanding of the importance of these aspects of guiding, as well as shifting participants' confidence in their own capacities to undertake these roles. This suggests that guide training should include content on visitor expectations, the four domains of experience brokering, and the six pillars of interpretive guiding. Overall, training content should be integrated to convey the guide's role not as a one-way communicator but as one who engages with visitors and facilitates their experience on a physical, cognitive, social, and affective level.

It is important to reiterate that much thought went into other aspects of the training beyond the selection of content. The actual training approach, selection of trainers, training materials, and both classroom and field delivery methods are not reported in this paper but may well have been important factors in the success of the training. Helping guides to see the links between what they say and do with their visitors and the quality of the visitor's experience was a key focus of the training. To develop guides who are skilled at fostering appreciation, reflectiveness and mindfulness in their visitors, the training itself needed to be reflective and mindful. An integrated approach to and sense of connectedness between modules and between the trainers may also have helped facilitate a greater uptake of the overarching concept of the guide as the broker of the tourist experience. The implications are that inclusion of the training content identified in this paper is necessary but may not be sufficient to producing guides who are competent communicators and effective experience brokers. Training development, packaging, delivery and evaluation may be equally important to successful guide training.

5.0   Conclusion

This paper has reviewed and synthesised research findings on the role of the tour guide as experience broker, the applicability of nature and heritage interpretation principles to enhance the guided tour experience, and visitor expectations of a tour guide's communication and interpretation, to collectively inform the identification of the content of tour guide training and provide the theoretical basis for reconceptualising the communicative role of the guide as an experience broker. An effective guide has been reconceptualised beyond a one-way communicator of commentary to an experience broker who applies mediation and interpretation principles in his/her guiding. The case study suggests that, if underpinned by appropriate theory and informed by previous research, guide training can successfully deliver the knowledge and skills required by guides to help improve their capacity to effectively engage visitors, impact them and thereby enrich their experience.

Replication of the study in other training and guiding contexts is, of course, needed. This includes tour guiding and training in both developed and developing countries and in a range of cultural contexts. Field-based research is needed to ground-truth guides' self-reports of the impacts of the training. A comparison of trained and untrained guides via on-the-job observations and responses from visitors on tours could build further evidence of training effectiveness, but is rarely done (one exception being Morgan & Dong, 2008), and is subject to the considerable methodological and logistical challenges. Feedback from operators and other stakeholders regarding the impact of the training on desired organisational outcomes such as satisfied customers, repeat visitation, profitability and sustainable operations are all higher-level evaluations that have been advocated in the training evaluation literature for some decades (Kirkpatrick, 1983).

Further research is needed on both tour guide training and tour guiding practice to fully understand how well training and practice are aligned and able to cope with changing expectations of visitors, including not only knowledge and targeted skills in mediation and communication but also new trends and concepts such as some tourists' desire to co-create their own experiences (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009). This is an important avenue for future research to further unpack the

reconceptualization of communication by tour guides that may go well beyond effective experience-brokering to include fostering personal growth and transformation of visitors and the guides themselves. As noted by Christie and Mason (2003) over a decade ago, the role that training can and does play in helping guides learn to be effective and reflective experience-brokers is very much in need of further research.

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