



RESEARCH ARTICLE

ELUCIDATING HOW LEISURE EXPERIENCE FACILITATES WISDOM TRANSFORMATION IN
ELDERLY ADULTS

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ABSTRACT

Leisure is the primary lifestyle and center of life for older people. Developing interests and hobbies is particularly crucial for elderly adults. Therefore, this study established a model of wisdom transformation through exploring the process and effectiveness of how elderly adults' leisure experiences enhance their perspectives of wisdom. Initially, a questionnaire survey was administered to preliminarily investigate elderly adults' views of wisdom. Subsequently, adopting a qualitative approach to interpretive phenomenology, this study conducted in-depth interviews on 11 elderly adults to analyze the transformative process of how their leisure experiences shaped their wisdom. The results indicate that wisdom transformation attributed to leisure experience was embodied in the integration, action and practice, and positive effects of cognition, affect, and reflection. Furthermore, wisdom transformation occurred through 4 stages: (a) leisure experience; (b) reflection and development; (c) action and practice; and (d) positive effects.

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INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of wisdom is an ongoing goal for individuals, societies, and cultures. The continuing and rich life experiences of elderly adults energize and support them during the aging process. Psychologists mostly regard wisdom as essential to pursuing healthy living, enhancing life quality, and improving cultures and societies (Holliday and Chandler, 1986). However, wisdom cannot be attained quickly. It is demonstrated in daily life by people that have exerted a considerable amount of effort and faced numerous challenges in their lives; furthermore, it is practiced by applying integrated knowledge to real-world scenarios. Elderly adults have more opportunities to participate in leisure activities after they retire and have more free time. Consequently, how to realize the truth of life and acquire wisdom through participating in leisure activities is crucial for fostering active aging among elderly adults and promoting social progress. According to *Toward the Aged Society: The White Book of Policies for Senior Education* (Ministry of Education, 2006), elderly adults require learning activities that are intellectual, leisurely, and healthy; leisurely learning not only enables elderly adults to serve society, but also enhances their value of life. To elderly adults, leisure is gradually developed in life. Judging from leisure's benefits, functions, and meaning for

elderly adults, leisure significantly influences the psychological, physiological, emotional, and social aspects of elderly adults, and it is a vital factor for maintaining their physical and mental health. The development of wisdom is related to a person's welfare. Through leisure, elderly adults can retrospectively contemplate their interpersonal dependency, care for life, and explore themselves and other people or things related to the four aforementioned aspects to obtain the essential experiences of life to reach a state of ego integrity or despair according to Erikson's stages of psychological development. With rich life experience, elderly adults can offer their experiences, learning, life events, imagination, retrospections, reflections, and actions as the foundation of historical, cultural, and social heritage, thus nurturing their minds into a state of wisdom. Exploring this mechanism may elucidate how elderly adults develop self-awareness, spiritual growth, and wisdom, and may assist in determining the relations between elderly adults' leisure activity experiences and their wisdom. Education institutes for elderly adults can use the results of this study as a reference for strategic planning and arranging learning activities. Moreover, the results can guide elderly adults to focus on leisure planning, value leisure learning, and have an active role in developing wisdom. This study was conducted to investigate the development and implications of elderly adults' wisdom transformation induced by leisure experience, and construct a model of elderly adults' wisdom transformation.

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Development of Wisdom with Age: According to Assmann (1994), Baltes and Smith (1990), and Holliday and Chandler (1986), wisdom is a cognitive ability that continuously develop with age. As the most quintessential product of human mental capacity, acquiring wisdom can facilitate living a good life, reconciling interpersonal conflicts, and enhancing community welfare. Moreover, a person's wisdom can often guide the direction of their life and improve their quality of life (Yang, 2008). According to the balance theory of wisdom (Sternberg, 1998, 2003), wisdom is defined as how people employ practical intelligence and creativity to balance extra personal, interpersonal, and intrapersonal benefits with the aim of achieving a common good. Wisdom refers to a person's ability to apply knowledge and experience to develop a keen and profound understanding of relevant factors in a scenario (including all relevant people and conditions), make timely and optimal judgments for taking action to solve problems in life, or to realize life's ideals. In summary, elderly adults' learning emphasizes empirical knowledge, promoting wisdom through knowledge, the ability to understand the meaning and relations embedded in knowledge so as to recognize scenarios in which it is produced, and the ability to apply knowledge to daily life situations.

Theory and Application of Transformative Learning: Transformative learning is a process through which individuals integrate previous learning experiences as well as new knowledge and perspectives to modify their internal viewpoints and shape or forge new self-views through a series of critical-thinking processes that occur while reflecting on various meaning perspectives such as value of life, beliefs, assumptions, and expectations. According to Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007), the three essential concepts of transformative learning are experience, critical reflection, and development. On the basis of the three concepts, Mezirow (1991) proposed three types of reflection: (a) content reflection, which focuses on experience itself; (b) process reflection, which is directed at the methods of handling experience (i.e., problem-solving strategies); and (c) premise reflection, which refers to the premises, beliefs, and values that societies attach to experience. The perspective of transformation proposed by Mezirow (1991) is central to the process of adult development, in which various ideas and experiences are constructed to promote self-development and effect changes that lead to development. The present study verified the various dimensions of thinking in transformation theory. On the basis of this theory, we reviewed the leisure experiences of elderly adults and reinterpreted the relationship between their transformative experience and wisdom development to elucidate the theoretical developments in this field.

Studies on Elderly Adult Leisure Activities and Wisdom: Aristotle classified leisure into the modes of amusement, recreation, and contemplation. Ibn Khaldun, both a historian and socialist, regarded leisure as one of the five fundamental needs of humans, and placed leisure at the top of the five needs. Godbey (1997) regarded leisure as enjoyable activities that people freely choose to engage in as well as a process of pursuing happiness and exploring the meaning of life. According to the meaning perspective of leisure, leisure is the highest value of life. It describes an ideal state of freedom and the enlightenment of the spirit and intellect. Kelly (1996) emphasized the perception of freedom and argued that freedom is the essence of leisure that includes (practiced) actions in

addition to the three elements of time, activity, and experience. Consequently, participating in leisure activities has positive effects on elderly adults' adjustment to retired life. Regarding leisure's functions for elderly people, Bammel and Burrus-Bammel (1996) indicated that leisure involves multiple effects, and leisure activities are beneficial to human's innate social needs, desire for self-expression, instinctual approach to nature, opportunities for physical exercise, and ability to learn new knowledge and innovation. Furthermore, both the functions and benefits of leisure have a considerable influence on elderly people's physical condition, life, and the society as a whole. For elderly adults, leisure can promote longevity and prevent disease. In terms of daily life, leisure can enhance elderly adults' quality of life and enable them to develop positive social relationships and enrich themselves. At the society level, leisure can facilitate developing social values of lifelong learning and reducing the social cost associated with caring for elderly adults. Pursuing wisdom is a common goal of humans, and the process involves concerns such as investigating the meaning of life and approaches to overcoming life obstacles (Ardelt, 2000). Whether an individual can develop self-reflective ability to obtain wisdom is related to whether that individual can adopt an open attitude to the various knowledge domains, life's issues, and internal and external life experiences (Achenbaum and Orwoll, 1991). Edginton and Chen (2008) regarded leisure as a type of transformation that is facilitated by forming and enhancing the following nine crucial skills, knowledge types, or attitudes: (a) learn to master new technologies; (b) use language skillfully; (c) maintain an active and ambitious attitude; (d) develop a good character; (e) develop the habit of self-reflection; (f) join professional organizations; (g) practice the principle of moderation; (h) learn to think philosophically; and (i) think creatively. Accordingly, the present study investigated the process of wisdom transformation employed by elderly adults and attempted to determine the relationships between leisure and wisdom development among elderly adults.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants: This study recruited 11 elderly adults as its participants, among whom four were men and seven were women.

Questionnaire survey: To understand the participants' opinions and levels of wisdom, this study compiled a wisdom evaluation questionnaire based on several psychological perspectives and wisdom scales.

In-depth interview: Focusing on the influence of the participants' leisure on their wisdom, this study considered the participants' history, the social development contexts in which they grew up, and their physical and mental health conditions. An interview outline was prepared after referring to wisdom-related interview questionnaires.

Content analysis: To clarify the participants' responses to the questions, such as their experiences, views on wisdom, the nature of transformative learning between leisure and wisdom, and the contextual relationships in wisdom development, we conducted a content analysis to collect relevant and objective data, including interview notes, interviewees' blog texts, interview transcripts, third-person interview transcripts, interviewees' secondary data (e.g., videos, paintings, and diaries), as well as the proposed questionnaire, and analyzed them to identify the developmental context of wisdom.

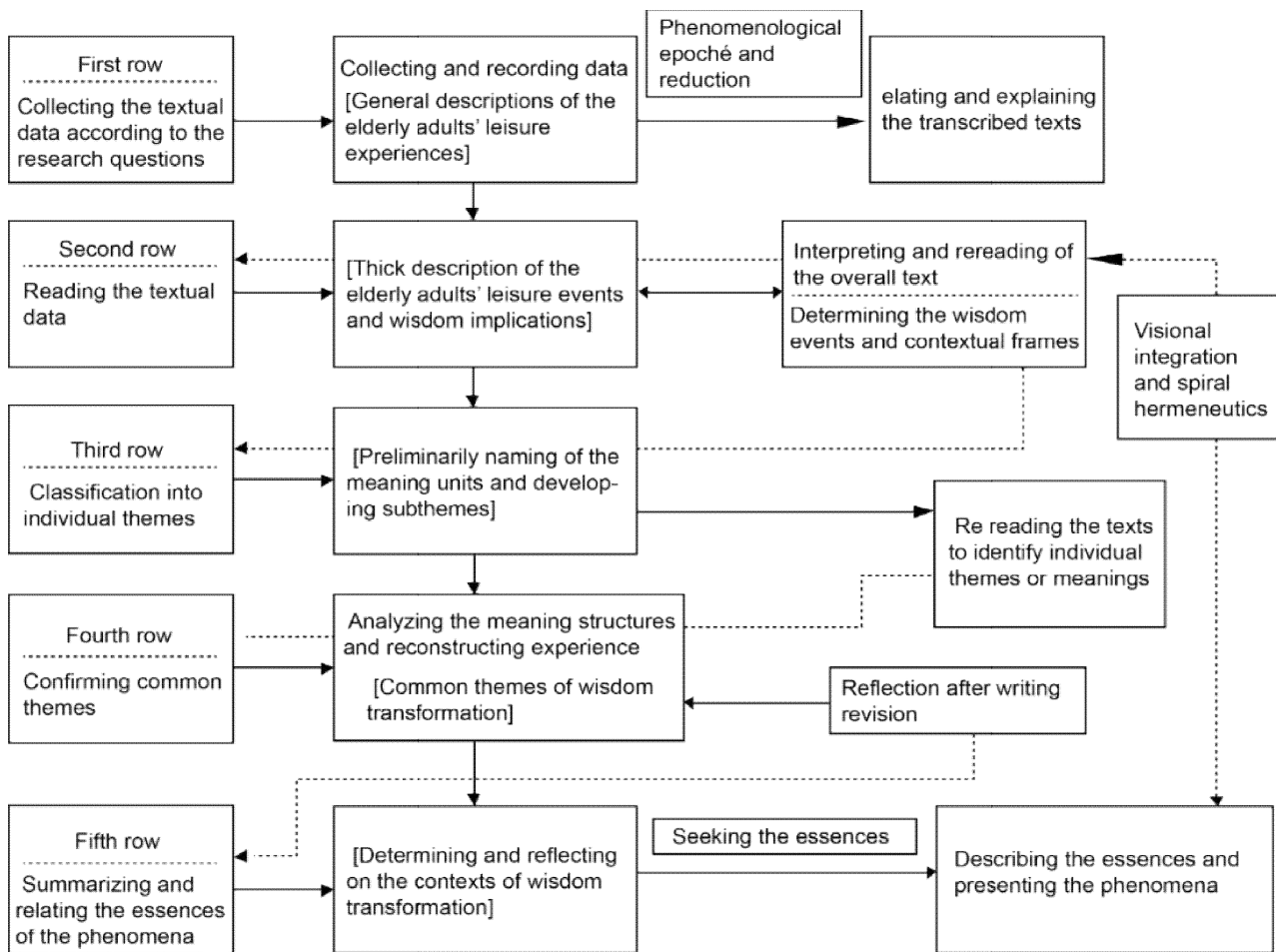


Figure 1. Framework of the qualitative data analysis

Data Analysis: This study conducted a thematic analysis to interpret the interview transcripts, which were analyzed and compiled following a whole-part-whole process, in which textual the data were repeatedly read, and keywords, themes, subthemes, and concepts were clarified. Figure 1 depicts the data analysis process. To reduce the complexity of cross-case meaning units, this study used Microsoft Access to extract units from the textual content and encoded the data according to the required conditions in order to enhance the validity and reliability of the data analysis by repeatedly reviewing and reading the textual data.

RESULTS

Three Aspects of Wisdom: Cognition, Affect, and Reflection: The participants offered numerous and varying descriptions of wisdom, including being a capable leader and dedicated to service; being lively and cheerful; working in search of cultural roots after retirement; being organized, discreet, conscientious, and responsible; talking patiently; being attentive, diligent, and careful; exhibiting the demeanor of a dignified elderly adult; being willing to help; exercising strong leadership; being persistent; not taking things personally or carelessly; being generous, self-sacrificing, and attentive to the general good; being responsible and brave; being amiable; having an ongoing passion for learning even in old age; and being kind, patient, and willing to help others. Overall, the participants mostly described the characteristics and dispositions of a wise person from holistic aspects such as personal traits, social skills and attitudes, and wisdom reflected in actions.

These descriptions are similar to the concepts described by numerous scholars (Baltes and Smith, 1990; Clayton and Birren, 1980; Kramer, 1990; Sternberg, 2001; Yang, 2008).

Stage 1: Experience from Participating in Leisure Activities

A person encounters millions of experiences in life because life is essentially a series of activities, events, and observations, in which experiences are revisited and transported to current moments, engaging in a continuous establishment and correction to a person's life wisdom and self-discovery. Thus, illness makes a person realize the importance of health; failure makes a person seize opportunities for success; being helped makes a person more likely to help others; having positive learning experiences makes a person realize the joy of learning; and being "ordinary" makes a person realize the greatness of being extraordinary. Table 1 presents the 11 participants' experiences of participating in leisure activities. The experiences were categorized under two themes: (a) delightful leisure experience, and (b) reflection and acceptance in adversity. Positive leisure experiences (i.e., delightful leisure tours) comprise eight meaningful and conceptual structures: leisure experience outdoor recreation, leisure experience-craftsmanship, leisure experience knowledge, leisure experience sociability, leisure experience physical exercise, leisure experience entertainment, leisure experience-hobbies, and social leisure with public service. The negative leisure experience (i.e., reflection and acceptance in adversity) also comprise eight meaningful and conceptual structures:

Table 1. Participants' Experience of Participating in Leisure Activities

Type of leisure activities	Leisure activity
Outdoor recreation	Hiking, mountain hiking, visiting hot springs, walking, traveling, and fishing
Physical exercise	Table tennis, dancing, swimming, yoga, biking, and football
Knowledge	Computers, attending workshops, reading, and blogging
Craftsmanship/hobbies	Painting, gardening (flowers), handicrafts, and calligraphy
Entertainment	Singing, watching TV, listening to music, and playing mahjong
Sociability	Gathering with friends, chatting over the telephone, and engaging in volunteer work

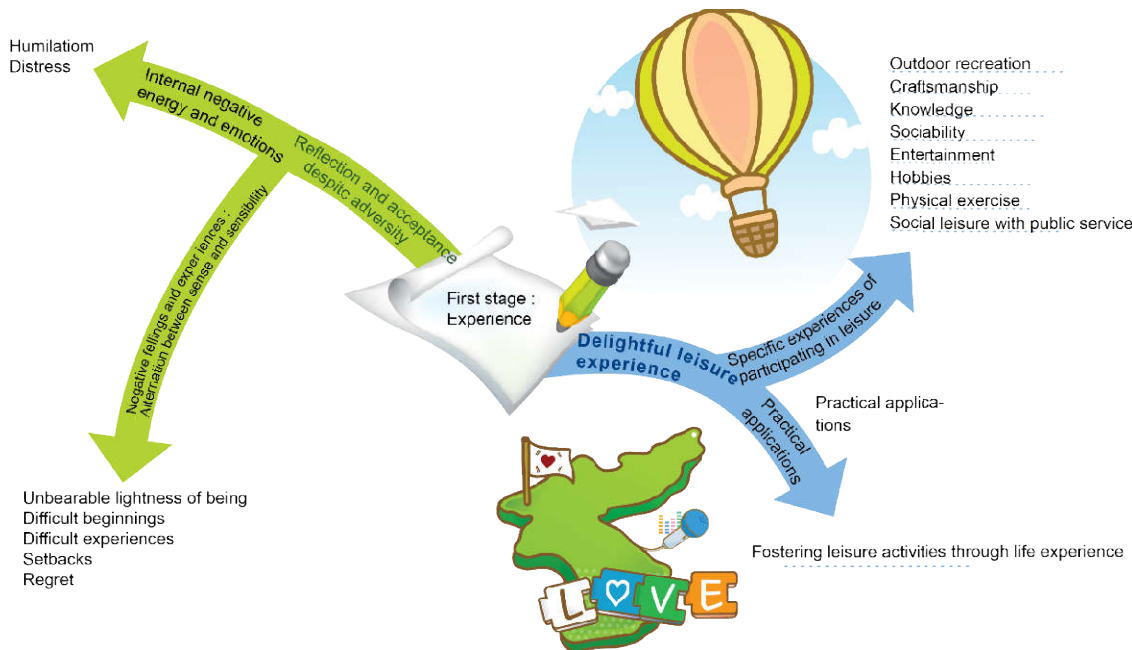


Figure 2. First stage of wisdom transformation. This diagram depicts the concept of leisure experience

humiliation, distress, unbearable lightness of being, difficult experiences, difficult beginnings, frustrating processes, setbacks, and regret.

Stage 2: Reflection and Development

After experience initiates transformative learning, reflection and development then facilitate transformation. In other words, experience per se cannot lead to transformation (Criticos, 1993). Critical thinking is developed through practice; therefore, people become a superior critic through critical thinking (Merriam *et al.*, 2007). In the present study, the types of reflection elderly adults' experienced include content reflection, critical reflection, process reflection, reflection after action, and reflection for action. Ardel (2000) argued that elderly adults still possess the ability to develop wisdom, and the development and learning of wisdom are the primary goals of elderly adults participating in learning activities. Farquhar (2012) indicated that the acquisition of wisdom can be observed in a person's attitudes and behaviors, and willingness to reflect is particularly beneficial to enhancing wisdom among elderly adults. The present study discussed and explored the internal transformation of the 11 participants following their leisure experiences from the perspective of wisdom development among elderly adults. Subsequently, we summarized the themes, subthemes, and initial meaning units of the participants' internal developments. The seven themes are as follows: (a) expectation and longing; (b) ambivalence and distress; (c) determination; (d) self-awareness and the meaning perspectives of leisure; (e) dispute avoidance and contentment; (f) recognition of self-positioning; and (g) optimism and happiness in life.

Table 2 presents the developmental elements of wisdom that were influenced in the crucial events that led to wisdom-development (hereafter, crucial wisdom events) in the participants' leisure experiences. Table 2 presents the various types of reflection and personal development that the 11 participants in this study underwent after undergoing leisure experiences of various attributes. Most of the participants experienced content and critical reflection as well as development in individual cognition, affect, and reflection. This result corresponded with the balance theory of wisdom proposed by Stenberg (1998) and the concept of integration in the process view of wisdom proposed by Yang (2001). Wisdom development refers to the process through which wisdom elements reach a state of equilibrium, namely individual mental integration, through a series of learning experiences and stimuli.

Stage 3: Action and Practice

The transformative learning process proposed by Mezirow involves the exercise of reflecting on the basis of existential experience and knowledge to achieve critical reflection and ultimately obtain broad and profound knowledge and experience to facilitate action (Merriam *et al.*, 2007). Accordingly, transformative learning must ultimately be put into action, with new perspectives forming the basis for interpreting new experiences and actions associated with other people (Mezirow, 1995; Merriam and Caffarella, 1999; Taylor, 1998). The 11 participants in the present study became engaged in self-reflection and developing personal meaning perspectives immediately after being inspired by their leisure experiences, consequently shaping the development of the seven elements and three aspects of wisdom (Table 3).

Table 2. Developmental Elements of Wisdom that were Influenced in the Crucial Wisdom Events in the Participants' Leisure Experiences

Participant	Crucial wisdom events in leisure experience	Developmental elements of wisdom
Participant A	Falling rocks near the Mazu Cave hot springs	Personal traits Behavioral characteristics Beliefs
	Sharing and promoting ecofriendly backpacks	Behavioral characteristics Ability Knowledge Beliefs
Participant B	Watching the climate documentary± 2° C	Knowledge Beliefs
	Attending a tour to Hehuan Mountain	Behavioral characteristics Ego strength Beliefs
Participant C	Organizing a community Christmas party	Behavioral characteristics Personal traits Beliefs
Participant D	Being interviewed by the Chinese Television System and other media	Behavioral characteristics Personal traits Beliefs
Participant E	Cancer	Personal traits Ego strength Beliefs
Participant F	Being interviewed by the Chinese Television System and other media	Behavioral characteristics Personal traits Beliefs
Participant G	Being interviewed by the Chinese Television System and other media	Behavioral characteristics Personal traits Beliefs
Participant H	Volunteer work	Behavioral characteristics Ability Knowledge Beliefs
Participant I	Organizing a solo painting exhibition	Behavioral characteristics Ability Knowledge Beliefs
Participant J	Performance in Israel	Behavioral characteristics Personal traits Ability Knowledge Beliefs
	Volunteer work at a psychiatric hospital	Behavioral characteristics Personal traits Beliefs
Participant K	Teaching fishing skills	Behavioral characteristics Personal traits Beliefs

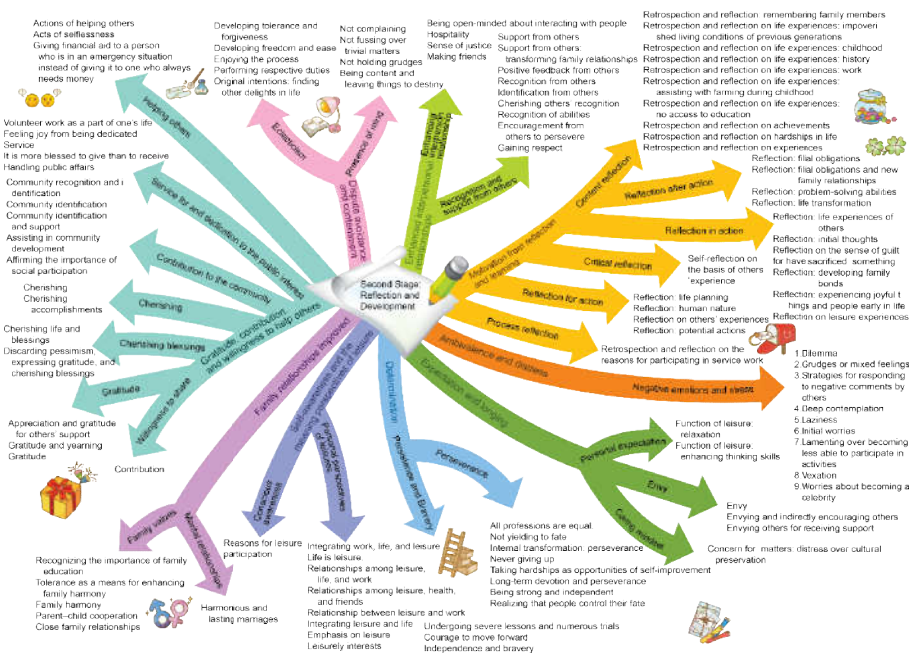


Figure 3. Second stage of wisdom transformation. This diagram depicts the processes of reflection and development

Table 3. Actions and Practices of Wisdom and Types of Transformative Action Among the Participants

Participant	Theme	Action and practice of wisdom	Type of transformative action
Participant A	Helping and sharing with others	Sharing and promoting the making of ecofriendly backpacks	Change
	Extending love through action	Promoting and practicing ecofriendliness	Change
Participant B	Continuous learning after taking action	Planning learning projects independently	Choice, change
	Helping and sharing with others	Sharing knowledge of environmental protection through blogs	Change
Participant C	Extending love through action	Being a corporate energy conservation consultant	Adaptation, change
	Helping and sharing with others	Organizing community activities and recording community stories	Change
Participant D	Continuous learning after taking action	Learning photography skills and organizing related activities	Adaptation, change
	Helping and sharing with others	Complimenting and encouraging friends' paintings	Change
Participant E	Continuous learning after taking action	Visiting painting exhibitions	Change
	Helping and sharing with others	Encouraging neighbors to learn painting together	Choice, change
Participant F	Continuous learning after taking action	Observing and learning from others' paintings	Change
	Helping and sharing with others	Complimenting and encouraging friends' paintings	Change
Participant G	Continuous learning after taking action	Taking outdoor trips to seek inspiration for painting	Change
	Helping and sharing with others	Complimenting and encouraging friends' paintings	Change
Participant H	Helping and sharing with others	Community volunteer work	Change
Participant I	Helping and sharing with others	Organizing solo painting exhibitions	Change
Participant J	Extending love through action	Dedication to painting as a means for recording the history of Taiwan	Change
	Helping and sharing with others	Assisting with establishing the Saisiyat Networking Dance Association	Adaptation, change
Participant K	Continuous learning after taking action	Dance performances	Change
	Helping and sharing with others	Public education films as well as the letters written by and speeches about children receiving early intervention	Change
Participant K	Continuous learning after taking action	Guiding the learning of psychiatric patients	Change
	Helping and sharing with others	Teaching fishing skills	Change

Note. * refers to individual change, rather than change arising from nonsocial action.

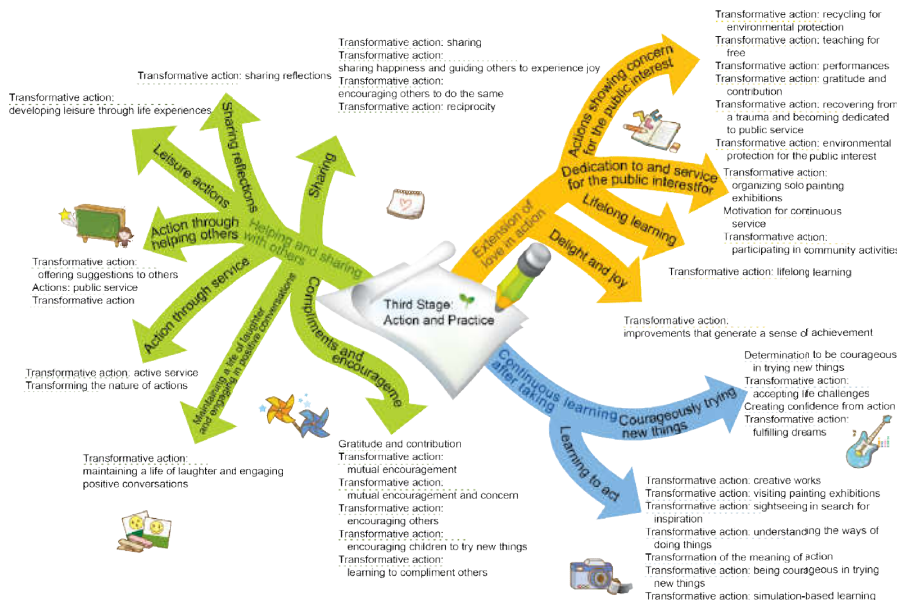


Figure 4. Third stage of wisdom transformation: diagram of action and practice

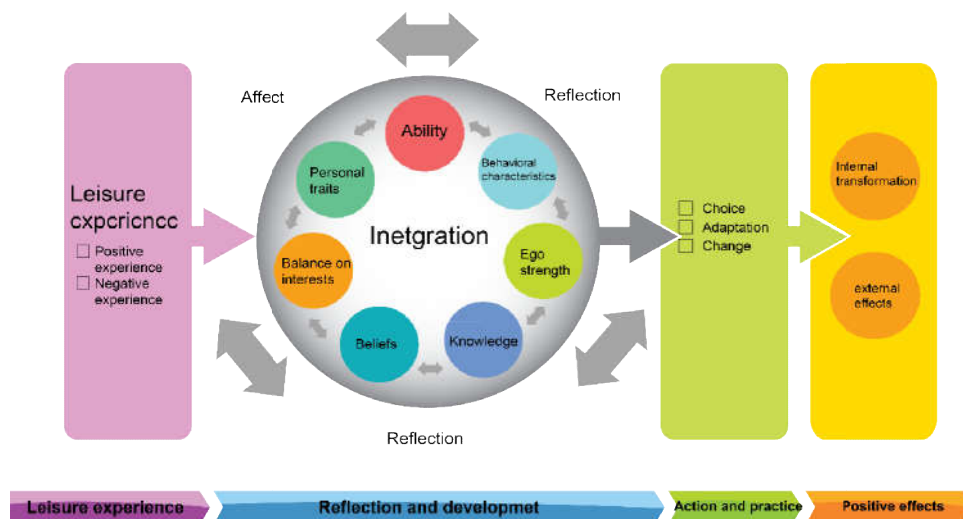


Figure 5. Model of wisdom transformation

After the process of transformative learning, the participants applied their newly acquired perspectives to their lives and services. Figure 3 illustrates the framework of this stage of wisdom transformation.

Stage 4: Positive Effects

Sternberg (2003) regarded wisdom as the attainment of a common good after achieving a balance among extrapersonal, interpersonal, and intrapersonal benefits. Theories of wisdom also emphasize that living a good life is necessarily related to wisdom (Ardelt, 2000; Baltes and Staudinger, 2000; Kramer, 1990). Positive effects mark the final stage of the wisdom process, which can be described from the aspects of the self and others. People apply their wisdom to accomplish life goals or tasks, thus leading the ideal life that they envision. Through this process, people obtain a relatively greater and richer sense of happiness. Regarding the aspect of others, wisdom entails a strong goodwill that usually enhances the welfare of the self and that of others, and positively affects the surrounding community (Yang, 2008). Consequently, the present study discussed the positive effects from internal and external perspectives under the two themes of self-transcendence and external accomplishment.

Model of Wisdom Transformation

In accord with the results of other studies, the present study determined that the experience of participating in leisure activities facilitates positive wisdom transformation that involves the stages of reflection, development, and action. Figure 5 depicts the proposed wisdom transformation model, comprising the four stages of leisure experience, reflection and development, action and practice, and positive effects. The proposed model can serve as a reference for future studies and practical planning related to elderly adult learning.

1. Leisure experiences can be divided into positive and negative experiences.
2. Reflection and development are not only the integration of cognition, affect, and reflection, but also the integration of the seven elements of wisdom (i.e., belief, ability, ego strength, personal traits, behavioral characteristics, balance of interests, and knowledge).
3. Action and practice represent the process of choice, adaptation, and change.

Conclusion

This study determined that wisdom is a multidimensional concept rather than being composed of only one single cognitive dimension. Moreover, when viewed from the perspective of functional theory, wisdom is the ability of knowing when and how to apply intellect, experience, understanding, and common sense, as well as a series of integrated workings of wisdom elements for creating a balanced common good for individuals, organizations, and society. To accomplish the life goal of achieving wisdom, elderly adults can extend their leisure experience, enhance the probability of wisdom transformation, and improve their reflective and developmental capabilities through leisure learning in order to courageously take action and enhance their transformational wisdom. In addition, we recommend that practitioners in this field formulate diverse and interactive leisure learning programs for elderly adults, create innovative

leisure opportunities, establish a leisure resource network, and guide elderly adults through integrating leisure into their lives to facilitate wisdom development and transformation. By continuously accumulating and increasing leisure experience, elderly adults can integrate their life experiences and knowledge to realize the goal of active aging.

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